

Baptism by t.c.
boyle's "greasy lake"



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In T. C. Boyle's transcendent short story "Greasy Lake," the eponymous lake reflects the evolution of the boys from naïve greasers to enlightened, mature teenagers. At the start of the story, the boys relish their bad boy image as they drive up to greasy lake to drink gin and smoke reefer. As the story progresses, however, and they find themselves in the lake, hiding from those they perceive to be sinister people, the boys are baptized and ultimately changed as a result of their misadventure.

Early on, the boys drive to the lake, wanting to smoke and drink and act like the bad guys they think they are. They're all college students who believe that they're bad boys because they're exceptionally immature: "We wore torn-up leather jackets," the narrator says, "slouched around with toothpicks in our mouths, sniffed glue and ether" (Para. 3). One of the boys, Digby, "allows" his father to pay for his tuition at Cornell (Paragraph 3). The other, Jeff, thought of quitting school so that he could pursue a career as a "painter/musician/head-shop proprietor" (Para. 3). In other words, he wants to pursue a career that involves little money and nothing good. Most importantly, though, Jeff's desired career path reflects both his own immaturity and his idealistic, dreamy, even naive attitude. In other words, Jeff's desired career path is symbolic of his lifestyle: immature, reckless, care-free, and ignorant. At this point, the boys haven't stepped into the lake and have yet to be baptized. In other words, they're stuck in their old fake ways and have no reason to change, because why fix something that (supposedly) isn't broken?

Nevertheless, they arrive at the lake and see who they think is their friend "Tony Lovett's car" (para. 6). They flash their lights at the car, and a truly bad

character and his girlfriend step out; the group of boys get into a fight with the bad character. Ultimately, they knock him out with a tire iron and nearly rape the girl he was with. After this, the boys go from faux greasers to actual scoundrels. Instead of pretending to be criminals, they become criminals. This change represents another step in the journey that these characters take to the lake, and in their overall change from faux greasers to enlightened, mature teenagers.

The final stop on the journey of the boys from false tough guys to more mature young men comes after a car drives up on the group as the boys are assaulting the man and nearly raping the girl. The boys flee because they think that the cops are after them. They were frantic because they didn't know where to go when they decided to venture into the depths of the murky lake. Before they make it to the lake, however, they come across a dead biker. Although they don't know it, the people who pulled up on them were looking for the aforementioned dead person. Nevertheless, the boys wait in the water until dawn, scared half to death, until they get out of the water, baptized and changed. This alteration is shown after the boys leave the lake and are confronted by a group of girls who hold "out a handful of tablets in glassine wrappers" and ask the boys to "do some of these with [her] and Sarah (para. 44). The boys decline, saying "No thanks" and "Some other time" (para. 44). Prior to their experience at the lake, the boys would have undoubtedly partaken in the drugs; however, after their baptism and subsequent change (the narrator mentions that he'd like to "go home to my parents' house and crawl into bed" like a baby, suggesting that he realized the artificiality of his earlier persona) they decline, suggesting that

they are disgusted by their past actions and starkly illuminating that one night (and one setting) can profoundly change a person's life and perspectives.

Without the lake, the boys wouldn't have changed, and the story wouldn't have the same effect. In the span of several hours in one setting, the boys go from faux greasers, to criminals, to enlightened, changed, more mature teenagers whose perspectives on life are completely enhanced. Without the greasy lake, the boys would have continued their care-free, immature lifestyle with grave consequences. Likely, they would have either killed someone or would have been killed themselves. Ultimately, though, after being baptized by the dastardly Greasy Lake and through their equally terrible experiences, the boys were fundamentally changed for the better. They were reborn.