

Sample essay on gene, phineas and the limb

[Science](#), [Genetics](#)



A Separate Peace is Gene's story to tell, of course. The entire plot is a flashback, as he waxes eloquent about his time at the Devon School. When the novel first opens, he appears as an alumnus coming back to the site of his adolescence. This gives the reader the sense that the narrator has some greater wisdom along with a healthy perspective about his time at the school. However, from the beginning, it is clear that Gene seems just as insecure as an adult as he was as an adolescent. Indeed, his main concern is that nothing may have changed at all since he was a teenager, whether it's the ivy-garnished buildings at the school or his own personality. After this brief opening, the reader enters that summer before his senior year, particularly his friendship with Phineas - Finny. However, what Gene remembers as an idyllic friendship turns out to have been anything but, and it is clear that Gene's overt memories have little to do with the actual events of the story. For example, Gene claims that Finny is bitter about Gene's academic prowess. However, it is Gene who is bitter; in fact, the lack of bitterness that Finny feels toward him makes Gene all the angrier. It is Finny's fall that stands as the story's climax. After this, Gene's resentment turns into solicitude, because once Finny is handicapped, he and Gene are at the same level. The question as to whether Gene shakes the branch on purpose, sending Finny intentionally into the fall that would cripple him, is a valid one. At least on an unconscious level, it is fairly clear that Gene had some intention to make Finny just as stilted as he is.

When the boys are in the tree, Gene is upset with Finny, because he believes that his friend wants to control him. Gene has talked himself into believing that Finny wants to hurt his scholastic chances. When Finny invites him up

for a dual jump, Gene realizes that he now has an opportunity to make Finny feel vulnerable. Aware that Finny has no way to support himself, Gene ends up bouncing the limb, sending Finny to the ground with a “ sickening, unnatural thud” (Knowles p. 60). This horrifying sound does not bother Gene in the least. Instead, he simply saunters out on to the limb and makes his very first fearless jump. It is not until later that guilt enters the situation. Once Finny’s condition becomes public knowledge, Gene worries that Finny will hate him for having knocked him to the ground, and he even worries that people will know that he has tried to murder his very best friend. His primary concern is that Finny will remember everything about the attempt and use that memory to get Gene in trouble.

The only reason that Gene feels this way is that he has assumed that Finny has it in for him. However, Finny has no such animus toward Gene. When Gene dons Finny’s clothing, he creates a complicated scene. When the reader sees Gene’s satisfaction looking in the mirror, it appears clear that Gene hates himself and wants to blur his identity by joining another. Wearing Finny’s clothes allows him to become Finny, at least in his own mind. It is unfortunate that the only way Gene can realize his love for Finny is to cripple him and then to put on his clothes; this psychotic behavior shows the breadth of Gene’s small sense of self and his insecurities. Once Finny is handicapped, Gene can allow his love to pour forth, because what was a mixture of infatuation and bitterness is now a sea of devotion.

Taking the argument further to call this a conscious act, tough, is more of a reach. It is one thing to claim that, somewhere in Gene’s unconscious, an impulse triggered the movement that ended up with Finny falling to the

ground. There is no way that Gene knows that the fall will ultimately lead to Finny's death, and there is nothing to suggest that Gene is, at least on a conscious level, such a horrible person. There is quite a difference, after all, between being insecure and being a psychopath.

In the final analysis, it is clear that Gene would not be happy until he had merged his personality with Finny's in some way. The mores of the time made it all but impossible for Gene to declare his love for Finny, or even for Gene to acknowledge the true nature of his feelings. However, as Gene stands on the limb with Finny, it is clear that there was much chaos running through his mind, and it is not beyond the realm of possibility to suggest that the chaos made its way into his muscular system, influencing the movement of his foot. While it is not tenable to refer to Gene as a murderer, Gene realizes, on some level, that he can never possess Finny as he would like to, whether sexually or relationally. By handicapping him, he gives himself at least a subconscious chance at holding on to his love. The tragedy, of course, is that by trying to keep his love, he ends up killing him.

Works Cited

Knowles, John. *A Separate Peace*. New York: Scribner, c2003.