

Literary analysis of a separate peace english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



The title is *A Separate Peace*. The author is John Knowles. The genre of this book is fiction. The narrative point of view in *A Separate Peace* is first person. The book begins in 1958 at Devon School, an all-boys school in New Hampshire. A. The author's use of time and place is confusing at first, but once the setting goes back in time the reader is thankful an explanation of the school grounds is provided at the beginning. B. The narrator doesn't particularly have to be at Devon School while he explains the campus, but it does help to keep the same time because the reader feels the older Gene is more insightful. C. The setting changes within the first chapter from 1958 to 1942, where the rest of the story is a flashback of 1942-1943 at Devon. D. The reason for the change is so Gene can talk in first person so everything that happens in the story is present tense. The novel begins when Gene comes back to Devon to relive his experiences during the summer session. The first time the reader discovers some jealousy Gene feels toward Finny is when they go to have tea with Mr. and Mrs. Patch-Withers. Finny wears a Devon tie as a belt and a pink shirt and Gene concludes that Finny is the only person who can "get away" with an outfit like that. Shortly after, the boys "form a suicide society, and the membership requirement is one jump" out of a tree over the water. After losing his balance, Gene feels that Finny saves his life by grabbing him. During the rest of the novel, Gene's jealousy toward Finny becomes stronger, such as during the game of Blitzball, where Finny is able to make up his own rules for a game he invents and "naturally" be best at it. During a different jump, Finny becomes unsteady because of Gene's movements. Finny reaches out for Gene's hand, but he lets him fall anyway and Finny receives a shattered leg as a result of the incident. Gene becomes

increasingly guilty that he had a chance to save Finny but did not, while Finny is not able to comprehend that Gene is the reason he fell out of the tree. However, at the end of the novel, Finny becomes increasingly aware of the truth because of Brinker's questioning. Finny tries to run from his problem, and the sounds of his first steps along with his cane collide " into the general tumult of his body falling clumsily down the white marble stairs." During the operation at the hospital, he dies because some bone marrow enters his bloodstream.

A. In the opening scene, Gene describes how the school does not look like it had fifteen years before. Gene continues to walk around the campus and notices similarities and differences compared to when he was a student.

B. The most important parts of the opening scene are when Gene comes across a set of marble stairs and a grove of trees near the river.

C. The most important parts of the opening scene are important because they foreshadow into the rest of the novel. The marble stairs are the stairs that Finny falls down, and the tree is identified as the tree he is looking for " by means of certain small scars rising along its trunk, and by a limb extending over the river, and another thinner limb growing near it." This tree is obviously the tree Gene knocked Finny out of.

A. The closing scene begins as Gene is walking to the tune of the P. T. instructor's voice. Gene begins reasoning with himself that he " never killed anybody" and that he " never developed an intense level of hatred for the enemy." He believes this because his war ends before he puts on a uniform, while he is in school, where he kills his enemy. Then he begins to question if Phineas is actually his enemy, since he never attacks Gene.

B. The most important part of the closing scene is when he quotes what other people have said or done in an

attempt to apply this to his own problem and get over it. C. This applies to one of the themes, insecurities, which Gene has. He first begins to believe he has not killed anyone and that Phineas was an enemy. Then, he begins to quote others and ultimately turns into realizing that Phineas never attacked him, and he questions if Phineas is "indeed the enemy." This is an example of Gene's constant doubting of his reasoning. A. The main characters are Gene Forester and Phineas, usually called Finny. Gene is more of an observer than a doer, not liking to do anything that other people would not do. However, he is willing to jump out of a tree in order to become a member of the "Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session." Phineas is more outgoing and likes school policies and tradition, such as being late to dinner, wearing a pink shirt and a school tie as a belt to a formal event, and starting the "Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session." B. These characters are believable because they represent the stereotypical "best friend scenario" in that their opposite traits attract to form a great union, even though each one is envious of each other for something they wish they could do/have. C. Important minor characters are Brinker Hadley and Leper Lepellier. Brinker is important for highlighting Gene's intellectual talents as being his rival for best grades in class. Brinker is also the one who questions Gene in regards to the accident in the tree. Leper Lepellier is important because the Blitzball rule "Lepellier's Refusal" is named after him and it is Leper's outburst toward Brinker that causes Finny to leave hastily and ultimately fall down the steps. A. The basic conflict of the work is Gene's jealousy toward Finny. Gene is jealous that Finny can get away with bending the rules of Devon and his athleticism. B. This conflict is internal until Finny is knocked out of the tree,

which is when it becomes external because he takes out his frustration on Finny. C. Other conflicts of the novel include Finny's resistance to connecting sports and the war (an internal conflict, although expressed in Blitzball), Gene's guilt from knocking Finny out of the tree after Finny saved him from falling (a reoccurring thought throughout the novel), Finny's broken leg (a struggle to overcome), etc. The theme of the work is jealousy and denial. A. Major symbols of the work are World War II and sports. B. Both of these symbols are expressed in the game of Blitzball, where every kid playing has already connected the war and sports into the game (hence the name of the game) except for Finny. The constant visible effects of the war remind the kids that they are also expected to go to war when they become eligible to be drafted. Sports symbolize both Gene's envy of Finny's ability to play but also what Finny has not been able to connect with the war and vice-versa. A. The title represents Finny's his world of sports that is kept separate from the impending world of war that he did not want to recognize because he is not accepted into any of the armed forces. B. The clues given in the title are that something will separate peacefully. C. The title can be related to the plot of the story, in that Finny and Gene's worlds separated peacefully until Finny's death. A. The tone of the work is dark throughout the novel. From the beginning, Gene's description of Devon School is bleak (most likely because of the tragedy that occurs there) and during his flashback the tone remains the same because of the back-and-forth emotions that Gene has toward Finny. C. The dark tone is evident from the beginning of the novel: " I didn't entirely like this glossy new surface, because it made the school look like a museum, and that's exactly what it was to me, and what I did not want it to

be. In the deep, tacit way in which feeling becomes stronger than thought, I had always felt that the Devon School came into existence the day I entered it, was vibrantly real while I was a student there, and then blinked out like a candle the day I left." The dark tone is also evident toward the end of the novel: " Phineas alone had escaped this. He possessed an extra vigor, a heightened confidence in himself, a serene capacity for affection which saved him. Nothing as he was growing up at home, nothing at Devon, nothing even about the war had broken his harmonious and natural unity. So at last I had." The time in this novel is flash-back. The beginning of the novel is in 1958, but quickly flashes back to 1942-1943 for the rest of the novel. The author uses fairly varied sentence lengths in the novel. Imagery is used in the beginning to describe the campus of Devon and continually throughout the more important parts of the story, but during the other parts imagery is not a priority. The author's dialect seems very proper, but nothing distinct that says he speaks or tries to write in a different form of English. The author kept the first-person point of view constant in the novel; Gene was the only one that says " I" in the story. Sometimes the reader wishes Gene would know more about the thoughts of other characters. A. The author wrote this work to depict a story of jealousy and trying to overcome the feeling to remain friends. B. The ultimate purpose the author hoped to accomplish was to write a novel related to his experience at Exeter, with a few twists to have a main conflict to make the story interesting and teach the reader about the dark side of jealousy.