

Essay summary of a separate peace

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In "A Separate Peace", John Knowles uses the characters to come to understand the difference between fantasy and reality, innocence and experience, and sympathy and hatred. Phineas uses denial to protect himself against the reality of war. One person can need protection to hide from an experience that's been haunting their lives like a death in the family. They need this protection to help them move on in life and find peace within themselves again.

Some need protection from war in the thought of death during battle. This kind of protection is more physical than emotional in that it's asking for protection that would shield any bullet that could enter the body. Others need an emotional type of protection from jealousy and hatred and to escape their fears and from truth. This could be needed to help one get through the day and live without having to hide from other people's jealousy and hatred. In "A Separate Peace" by John Knowles, Phineas needs protection from the truth and reality. With this, John Knowles compares reality and the truth by exhibiting the cast as a barrier that protects Phineas from the world around him, as well as the things of craziness and reality, of innocence and knowledge, and of love and disgust. Phineas' defensive attitude towards the war and life in general is a result of his anxious character not wanting to accept the changes around him, leading him into denial for his friendship with Gene and the world outside the Devon school.

When Phineas hears about the war, he puts himself into complete denial as he tells Gene, "Don't be a sap," he gazed with cool self-possession at me, "there isn't any war... that's what this whole war story is a horrible drug" (107). Phineas doesn't believe that there is a war going on. This is one of the

things that Phineas hides and can't face. Towards the end, Phineas tells Gene that the one thing Phineas is mad about is not being able to do anything once he breaks his leg again, is that he can't go away to war.

This shows that Phineas probably told Gene that he didn't believe in war to hide his real emotions. When Phineas shows that he is in denial about reality and can't handle the truth, Gene states, "To begin joking, would have been a hypocritical denial, of what had happened, and Phineas was not capable of that" (109). Gene doesn't think that Phineas can take the truth and won't accept reality. This shows the way Gene sees Phineas as a person, who can't handle reality and who is living his life in denial. Phineas was in such a mind state that he couldn't even be joked around with as a result of his unbearable attitude towards his leg situation. As the fact of reality, when Phineas was pushed from the tree by Gene, he started to be seen before him, Phineas cries, "I don't care," Phineas interrupted in an even voice, so full of richness that it overrode all the others. I don't care" (168) Instead of facing the fact that he was pushed out of the tree and move on to other things, he dwelled on the past, not believing anything.

This shows the way Phineas views his life and his attitude towards the world, which was that he spends his time successively from the truth about how he fell from the tree and that there isn't a war occurring around him. Phineas lives his life by hiding from the truth, the cast acting like a barrier keeping him away from accepting the differences, both emotional and physical, that result from his broken leg. The cast represents his deception of Gene, reality, and what makes him realize that he will never be able to play the

sports that play a key part in his life. When Phineas is notified that he will never be able to play sports again, all he wants is someone to carry his sportsmanship for him, and that is when he tells Gene, " Listen, pal, if I can't play sports; you're going to play them for me,' and I lost apart of myself to him then and a soaring sense of freedom, revealed that this might have been my purpose from the first; to become a part of Phineas" (77). Phineas loses the ability to play sports and wants Gene to do that for him, but Phineas also loses his innocence.. He feels as if his whole purpose after Phineas' accident was to become a part of him and do what he no longer will be able to do.

It suddenly occurs to Gene that Phineas may never be able to walk again, let alone play sports, and this is when he states, " Then my eyes fell on the bound cast white mass pointing at me, and as it was always to do, it brought me down out of Finny's world of creation, down again as I had fell after awakening that morning, down to reality, to the facts" (107 and 108). Gene didn't realize the outcome of his actions toward Phineas until Gene saw Phineas' side. Finny had a world of creation where he wouldn't face the truth and the cast acted like a barrier that sustains Phineas from facing the truth. When Phineas tells Gene his feelings of hatred towards him, Gene's description of Phineas is, " He struggled clumsily for such a length of time that even my mind, slowed and shocked as if it had been, was able to formulate two realizations: that his leg was bound... nd that he was struggling to unleash his hate against me" (176).

Gene knows about Phineas' feelings of hatred towards him and how Phineas feels about the whole accident. The act wasn't only a barrier for the truth, but a wall that was trying to unleash his hate for Gene and for what he did to Phineas' wonderful life.