

An analysis of the dissimilarity between phineas and brinker



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While World War II rages in Europe, a different type of struggle affects the young students at an all-boys private boarding school. "A Separate Peace", by John Knowles, outlines the emotional struggle at Devon during the 1942 summer and winter sessions. This conflict is best illustrated by Knowles's use of varying personalities in two of the primary characters, Phineas and Brinker Hadley. Although the same age, the boys exhibit different personalities that correspond to the differing moods at Devon during the summer and winter sessions. The laid-back anti-war personality of Phineas reflects the mood during the summer session, while the orderly pro-war attitude found at Devon during the winter term corresponds to the personality of Brinker. Brinker and Phineas's views on war, as well as their reactions to Phineas's fall, are shaped by their respective personalities. The author uses Brinker and Phineas to represent the contrasting attitudes at Devon during the summer and winter sessions. The winter session is characterized by the conservatism and pro-war attitude of the faculty and students. The pro-war attitude is demonstrated throughout the year by the curriculum's emphasis on physical preparedness and mental agility for use in war. Brinker thrives in the orderly, militaristic setting of the winter session. "I liked Brinker in spite of his Winter Session efficiency; almost everyone liked Brinker." Knowles uses the character of Brinker to exemplify the efficiency of Devon's operation. Brinker's serious attitude mirrors the somber formality the war creates at Devon. In vivid contrast to the winter session, the summer session lacks structure and order. Phineas's attitude parallels the carefree days of the summer session. The "gypsy days" of summer are laid-back and far less stressful than the regular school year. While reminiscing over his summer at Devon at the beginning of the winter term, Gene states: The traditions had <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-the-dissimilarity-between-phineas-and-brinker/>

been broken, the standards let down, all rules forgotten= 2E In those bright days of truancy we had never thought of What We Owed Devon, as the sermon this opening day exhorted us to do. The summer session is untouched by the war, and is not tainted by preparations for the inevitable. The winter session transforms Devon into a strict, institutional school that prepares students like Brinker for military service, while the summer brings the carefree innocence of students like Phineas to the school. Brinker and Phineas's contrasting views on the war in Europe reveal their personality differences. Brinker begins the school year believing that military service is both necessary and enjoyable. He encourages other students to enlist, and often makes reference to his own plans to join the military. It is his persuasive skills that almost convince Gene, Phineas's closest friend, to enlist during the beginning of his senior year. Brinker's views on military service and bravery are made evident in the following moment: "Everybody in this place is either a draft-dodging Kraut or a...a..." the scornful force of his tone turned the word into a curse, "a nat-u-ral-ist!" He grabbed my arm agitatedly. "I'm giving it up, I'm going to enlist. Tomorrow." However, Brinker does not enlist during his senior year, but chooses to join the Coast Guard after his graduation. For the majority of the school year, Phineas believes that old men "cooked up this fake war" to control the young adult population. Phineas's disbelief in the war is further demonstrated by his goal to train Gene for the 1944 Olympic Games. Ironically, the views of Phineas and Brinker each evolve completely during the winter session. As his enlistment date nears, Brinker begins to see war as a matter that should not be supported or avoided without great thought. Before his death, Phineas reveals his desire to participate in the war, in spite of his injured leg. The <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-the-dissimilarity-between-phineas-and-brinker/>

opinions of Brinker and Phineas on the war and military service display the distinct beliefs of the two young adults. The reaction of the two men to Phineas's fall from the tree exposes the contrast between their respective personalities. Although Phineas is the most physically affected by the fall, he does not attempt to place blame. He maturely accepts the situation because he recognizes that pointing fingers will not speed his recovery or have positive results. Phineas expresses his disinterest in the accident when he attempts to prevent Brinker's investigation. After Brinker begins to question Leper about the accident: Phineas [got up] unnoticed from his chair. "I don't care," he interrupted in an even voice, so full of richness that it overrode all the others. "I don't care." Phineas's decision to continue his life even after his terrible fall demonstrates his mature, yet almost naive, attitude. However, Brinker is unwilling to allow the issue to be simply forgotten. Instead, he constantly pesters Gene about the accident, eventually culminating with a nighttime escapade to hold a mock trial. By hanging onto his notion about Gene's involvement in the fall, Brinker reveals his own insecurities. By attempting to destroy his closest academic rival's reputation, Brinker is really augmenting his own achievement and prestige. Because Brinker lacks self-esteem, he takes pleasure in creating uncomfortable situations for Gene and Phineas. Phineas's choice to move on with his life contrasts sharply with Brinker's decision to prolong the investigation into the crime. The contrasting personalities of Brinker Hadley and Phineas in "A Separate Peace" are a source of significant conflict during the 1942 summer and winter sessions at Devon. Although they are the same age, Brinker's aggressive, manipulative attitude differs greatly from Phineas's honest, spontaneous personality. These differences are easily seen <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-the-dissimilarity-between-phineas-and-brinker/>

through the two boys' perspectives on the war, as well in as their reactions to Phineas's fall. Phineas' laid-back, anti-war personality recalls the general feeling of the summer session at Devon, while Brinker's orderly, pro-war character expresses the sentiment of the winter session. In their own ways, Brinker and Phineas each represent the views of many people during the 1940's.