

John Knowles



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A major theme in the book "A Separate Peace" by John Knowles is people create conflicts within their own minds, which affect their actions. This happens twice in the novel: when Gene (the main character) creates his own idea of Phineas (Gene's best friend) and him having to be equals, and another when Phineas surmises that the war is a front for adults to control the younger generation. These thoughts not only affected their actions, but had an effect on everything they said and thought.

Phineas, as an example, thought that the war was fake; a big show to control the youth of the country. He went as far as preparing his best friend, Gene, for the 1944 Olympics, which were thought, at the time, not to happen because of the war. This changes the characters, making them withdrawn and unrealistic. It seems that if a conflict within the mind of a character becomes too prominent, it becomes complete and focuses the character's attention all on that matter. The major conflict of "A Separate Peace" is a form of man versus self conflict.

The whole contention occurs within the main character Gene; consisting of his extreme jealousy he has towards his closest friend Phineas. While Phineas is beyond gifted as an athlete and smooth talker, Gene is an outstanding student with only one A throughout his high school career. Gene somehow conjures up his own world in which Phineas's goal is to distract Gene from his studies and compromise his grades. This, in consequence, would make Phineas better than Gene. What Gene cannot come to see is that Phineas's is not doing this for some competition, but likes to involve Gene in what he does around the school.

Although this conflict is kept within his own mind and his own thoughts, this inward jealousy affects his actions toward his friend Phineas. Gene's actions are what resolved this conflict; jolting a branch the two were standing on and breaking Phineas's leg, ending his athletic ability. Gene's jealousy diminished, but was not extinguished until Phineas died of bone marrow entering his heart. Gene's jealousy died with him. The most significant part of the novel is when Phineas decides that they will do a double jump for the club meeting.

It is not thoroughly described in the book but as they are standing on the branch preparing for the jump, Gene takes a step toward Phineas, who is farther out on the branch, jolting the wooden limb and causing Phineas to fall. Phineas shatters his leg on the impact with the ground. This is important because it was caused by the conflict within Gene. His jealousy for his best friend grew so strong that one of his actions even permanently changed his friend's life. This also turned the plot into a completely different direction, its significance put to rest Gene's inner conflict and turned his outlook on his injured friend around. Nothing endures, not a tree, not love, not even death by violence. "

The author is not saying that things die and wither away, he is telling us that things change. There is no way to stop it. This tree he is speaking of is the physical thing that brings him back to the fear and the jealousy and the sadness he felt 15 years before. This is significant because it is leading him, Gene, back to that conflict he had within himself those many years before. " I laughed along with Finny, my best friend, and also unique, able to get away

with anything at all. And not because he was a conniver either; I was sure of that.

He got away with everything because of the extraordinary kind of person he was. It was quite a compliment to me, as a matter of fact, to have such a person choose me for his best friend. " This statement is very significant to Gene. It is planting the seed in this character that will become the war within him; the jealousy that gets his friend ultimately killed. Trying to understand where and when Gene suddenly turns that admiration into jealousy isn't possible. It was a slow change, occurring over time. It just shows, once again, how impossible it is for things to not change. Yes.

" The doctor didn't look at me, and barely changed his tone of voice. " Sports are finished for him, after an accident like that. Of course. " People create conflicts within their own minds, which affect their actions. This statement is just taking this theme a step further and realizing that there are consequences to those influenced actions. This changes Gene's attitude completely, so much that he regrets even thinking they were competing for some mythical title. His actions were affected by his inner conflict, and that, in turn, affected his ally and friend