

# A separate peace: coming-of-age novel essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

A Separate Peace is a coming-of-age novel about two boys at boarding school and their friendship during World War II. There are three significant scenes of violence that occur in the novel; however, the core of the plot is based upon one. The first and most poignant is the incident where Gene, the narrator, jiggles the tree branch while he and Phineas, his best friend, are preparing to jump, causing Phineas to fall and break his leg. The next scene of violence is when Quackenbush calls Gene a lame and Gene pushes him into the water.

Lastly, Gene pushes Leper out of his chair while visiting him after he is accused of causing Phineas' injury. All of these occurrences contribute to the overall meaning of the work. One of the climaxes of A Separate Peace happens at the first scene of violence. Until this scene, the reader is unaware of Gene's "evil side". He is so overtaken by his jealousy and rage toward Phineas that he succumbs to his emotions and causes Finny to fall off of the tree branch. This shows the immature, childish side of the characters.

Not only are they climbing trees, which is a behavior commonly practiced among children, but children also do not know how to handle feelings and emotions, and commonly react with violence. Gene then proceeds to dive off of the branch like nothing happened, apparently satisfied with his "achievement"; showing the reader that, like a child, there is little or no remorse for one's actions. The next scene of violence, in which Gene reacts to Quackenbush, is caused by Quackenbush's referral to Gene as "a lame" for deciding to be a crew manager instead of going out for a sport. This is after Phineas' "accident", which Gene feels responsible for; and he takes the insult personally. Gene's reaction to the insult shows the reader the actual

closeness between Gene and Phineas. By taking the insult to such a personal level, the reader is able to understand how Gene and Finny have become almost as one person.

Gene feels as though he is crippled himself because of the tightness of the bond between them, and the guilt he feels for Finny's injury. The theme of maturation also becomes clear, as Gene feels heavy-laden with guilt and responsibility for the decision he made to jounce the branch. The last violent scene also depicts Gene's struggle between maturity and immaturity. He causes Leper's chair to fall over when accused of making Finny fall from the tree.

On one hand, the child-like trait of resorting to violence when confronted with anger and embarrassment is shown. He is aware Leper knows the truth, but is unwilling to face it. However, on the other hand, by becoming angry and defensive in the first place, Gene shows he is remorseful and responsible for his actions. Violence in some form is a part of most every man's youth, and it can even be paralleled to the fighting occurring in Europe at that time. Though the violent scenes in *A Separate Peace* are few, they contain great purpose and are significant contributors to the novel as a whole.

Each event is symbolic to the rite of passage traveled by Gene and his peers, not only becoming men fighting for a peace within, but soldiers fighting for a peace of nations.