

Name:

Date:

Class:

*A Separate Peace*  
by John Knowles

Before Reading:

Think-Pair-Share

With a classmate, list some of the pros and cons of competition. Considering your list, do you think competition is healthy or unhealthy?

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Shifting backward in time is a literary device called a **flashback**. Writers use flashbacks to achieve different purposes. For example, an author might flash back to a character's past in order to provide background information or to help readers see the connection between a character's past experiences and current thoughts, feelings, and behavior. As you read *A Separate Peace*, think about the functions of the flashback in the story.

Getting to Know Characters

*A Separate Peace* has a \_\_\_\_\_—one who is a character in the novel as well as the storyteller, or “voice” that describes what happens. In general, this narrative point of view shortens the psychological distance between the storyteller and readers, creating the illusion that the narrator is speaking directly to them, friend to friends. Like real human beings, first-person narrators may be subject to errors in judgment. They may misinterpret the meaning of events, misunderstand other characters' motivations, and lack the self-insight necessary to understand their own motivations. When you read a first-person narrative, be alert to the narrator's limitations. Verify the accuracy of the narrator's judgments by paying close attention to how the characters interact with the narrator and each other, to what the characters say about the narrator and each other, and to what the characters do.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

anarchy *n.* disorder; absence of rules

enfeebled *adj.* weakened; depleted

indulgent *adj.* permissive

inure *v.* to become used to something unpleasant

inveigle *v.* to entice; to trick into something

nondescript *adj.* uninteresting; drab

sedate *adj.* calm; serene

tacit *adj.* unspoken

extrovert *n.* outgoing person who enjoys the company of other people

funereal *adj.* solemn as befitting a funeral

gullible *adj.* easily tricked; naive

idiosyncratic *adj.* peculiar; eccentric

implausibility *n.* unlikeliness; unbelievability

sinecure *n.* position, usually salaried, that requires little or no work

sultriness *n.* humidity; heat

forlornly *adv.* miserably; desolately

impervious *adj.* resistant; inaccessible

incarnate *adj.* in the flesh

incomprehensible *adj.* not understandable; mysterious

incongruity *n.* inconsistency; disharmony

latent *adj.* potential; inactive

timbre *n.* the quality of a sound; tone

Name:

Date:

Class:

## *A Separate Peace*: Chapters 1-3 Guided Reading Questions

### Chapter One

1. How long has it been since Gene last visited Devon?
2. Why were the grounds deserted in the early afternoon?
3. What is another name for the field house?
4. Whose idea was it to climb the tree?
5. Who was known as the best athlete in the school?
6. Why were the boys absent from dinner?
7. Based on what you've read so far, who would you consider to be the protagonist?

### Chapter Two

1. Who is Mr. Patch-Withers?
2. What does Mrs. Patch-Withers spot on Finny that is so alarming?
3. Why is the bombing in Central Europe so unreal to the boys?
4. Who is afraid to jump out of the tree?
5. What is the membership requirement for the suicide society?
6. What do the five S's symbolize?
7. What happens to Gene at the end of the chapter?
8. Based on what you've read so far, how do you feel about Finny? Who do you feel about Gene?

Name:

Date:

Class:

## *A Separate Peace*: Chapter Three and Chapter Four Guided Reading Questions

### Chapter Three

1. How often does the club meet?
2. How does every meeting begin?
3. What two things rule Finny's life?
4. Finny wants to get out of which sport?
5. What does Finny believe is needed for sports?
6. True or False. Finny removes ticks from a dog.
7. Explain the game blitzball.
8. Explain Gene's views of America.
9. What record does Finny break? To whom did the record belong?
10. Explain Finny's reactions to breaking the record. What do you make of this?

### Chapter Four

1. In which subject is Gene having trouble? Why do you think he is having these troubles?
2. Why might Finny have jealous envy toward Gene?
3. What truth does Gene stumble upon that gives him solace (comfort)?
4. What is the second realization Gene has?
5. What is Finny's scholastic downfall?

Name:

Date:

Class:

6. Explain Finny's discipline to study. Explain Gene's discipline to study.
7. Explain the events surrounding the end of chapter four.

### *A Separate Peace*: Chapter Five Guided Reading Questions

#### Chapter Five

1. What does the reader find out about Finny's condition?
2. Describe Finny's response to his injury. Is his response believable? Is it consistent with Finny's attitude and behavior from previous chapters? Use examples from the book to show support.
3. Why doesn't anyone suspect Gene?
4. What odd thing does Gene do while getting dressed for dinner?
5. According to the doctor, what can Finny never do again?
6. Why is Gene looking so shocked while talking to Finny in the infirmary?
7. What stops Gene from telling the truth about the accident?
8. Create a Venn diagram noting similarities and differences in Finny and Gene. Be sure to list their attitude towards sports, academics, life, their background, etc.,
9. What revelation does Gene have during his visit with Finny? What do you think about this? Is this consistent with Gene's attitude in previous chapters? Use examples from the book to show support.
10. When will Finny come back to Devon?

**Additional Assignment (In-Class Literature Group):** Was jouncing the limb a planned, conscious decision on Gene's part or an impulsive act? In your group, examine the dialogue and the events that occur just before and after the fall. After examining this information, debate Finny's accident. Why might Gene have wanted to see Finny fall? How does Gene feel immediately afterward, and why might he feel this way? Why does Gene later wear Finny's clothing? Use details from the novel to support your conclusions.

Name:

Date:

Class:

### Learning for Life

The novel provides Gene's perspective on characters and events. To understand what other characters think, observe what they say and do. Imagine that Finny has been asked by school officials to help them write an accident report about his fall. Write the report based on Finny's perceptions of what happened. How would he explain his reason for being in the tree? how and why he fell?

### *A Separate Peace*: Chapter Six Guided Reading Questions

#### BACKGROUND—read first

##### Did You Know?

The Olympics are intended to provide a way for athletes of all countries to come together peacefully and demonstrate their skills. The modern Olympic games were first held in 1896 and every four years subsequently for a time, except in 1916, during World War I, and 1940 and 1944, during World War II. More recently, the games have been held every two years, with the summer Olympics and the winter Olympics alternating.

##### The Home Front

Although the battles of World War II were fought overseas, the war touched the lives of Americans "back home" in the states. To ensure that the armed forces had adequate supplies of fuel, food, and clothing, the government instituted a rationing system that limited civilian access to gasoline, meat, shoes, cotton clothing, and other goods. To urge Americans to conserve, radio personalities repeated slogans such as "Use it up! Wear it out! Make it do!" In special movie ads, film stars reminded Americans to do their part and invest in war bonds—interest-bearing loans to the government that helped pay for the war. Women dropped off used hosiery in collection boxes labeled "Uncle Sam needs your discarded silk and nylon stockings for gun powder bags. Please launder and leave here." Children collected scrap metal, rubber, and newspapers, donating them to "the national defense." Many Americans had a family member, classmate, sweetheart, or neighbor serving in the armed forces, and the reality that loved ones might be killed in battle united Americans in a common cause.

#### Chapter Six

1. How many Winter sessions have passed at Devon so far?
2. Where were the five missing teachers?
3. What was meant by continuity in the sermon? (What should be continued?)
4. How does Gene feel about the traditions at Devon?
5. Describe Leper.
6. Use three adjectives to describe Cliff Quackenbush, and explain why you chose those adjectives.

Name:

Date:

Class:

7. What were Gene's duties as assistant to the crew? Do you think this is good job for Gene? Why or why not?
8. Describe Gene's battle with Quackenbush.
9. Who is Mr. Ludsbury? What is his purpose in this chapter?
10. How will Finny continue to be involved in sports? What does this say about his will?

### Chapter Seven

1. Why is Gene washing the river's sticky salt from his body?
2. Describe Brinker Hadley. What physical feature stands out the most in Gene's eyes?
3. What does Brinker accuse Gene of doing? Are his accusations correct? Is he right to accuse Gene? Explain your answer.
4. Describe the Butt Room. Does the description fit your expectations of this room? Explain.
5. What was the topic of conversation in the Butt Room?
6. What job do the boys take to earn money? Why is this job available?
7. Do you think the boys really understand what is going on in the world? Explain.
8. What are Quackenbush's plans for the army? Does this seem to suit his character? Explain your thoughts.
9. Who decides to enlist in this chapter? Do you think this is wise? Why or why not?
10. Who greets Gene in his room at the end of the chapter? Make a prediction about what will happen in chapter eight.

Name:

Date:

Class:

*A Separate Peace: Chapter Eight Guided Reading Questions*

1. What can be inferred about Finny's life at home? How did you come to this conclusion?
2. What can be inferred about Finny's views on the war?
3. How has Finny become dependent on Gene? Do you think he minds be codependent? Why or why not?
4. Explain Brinker's remark about Gene's failed plan. Is there any truth to Brinker's accusations?
5. Why doesn't Gene enlist with Brinker?
6. Gene says that Finny "needed" him. Do you think Finny really does need Gene, or does Gene need Finny more?
7. What is the nickname given to Brinker?
8. Describe the way Finny once walked according to Gene. How is he currently walking?
9. Is Gene a leader or a follower? Show support from the text to support your claim.
10. What does Finny believe about the war?
11. What even do Gene and Finny decide to start training for?

*A Separate Peace: Chapter Nine Guided Reading Questions*

1. Why does Leper decide to enlist?
2. What division does Leper join?
3. Which day of the week was the most depressing to Gene? Why?
4. Explain the events included in the Winter Carnival. Why was this carnival suggested? Who suggests it?
5. Why is Brinker so withdrawn?
6. Describe Chet Douglass.
7. What happens at the end of this chapter?

Name:

Date:

Class:

### *A Separate Peace*: Chapter Ten Guided Reading Questions

1. Which branch of the military does Gene join?
2. What became a part of Gene's "chief war memory"?
3. Where is the Christmas location?
4. What three things does Gene think Leper has escaped from?
5. Who does Gene assume to be Leper's enemies?
6. What does a gold star in a window symbolize?
7. According to Gene, what made Leper psycho? Why is Gene now afraid?
8. What is a Section Eight discharge?
9. Why does Gene attack Leper?
10. Give three examples of Leper's behavior that could be considered "psycho."

#### In-Class Activity: Literature Groups

Finny organizes his own version of the Olympic games as part of his Devon Winter Carnival. After finishing a decathlon, Gene says, "It wasn't the cider which made me surpass myself, it was this liberation we had torn from the gray encroachments of 1943, the escape we had concocted, this afternoon of momentary, illusory, special and separate peace." In your group discuss what Gene means in this passage. What is the "separate peace" that Gene is describing, and how do the students achieve it on this day? At this point, what does the phrase "a separate peace" mean to you and to the novel? Share your opinions with others in your class.

### *A Separate Peace*: Discussion Questions Chapter 11-13

#### Background (Read First):

##### Did You Know?

Finny complains about world leaders, saying that they are trying to deceive the public. Two of the "fat old men" Finny complains about are President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Great Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Although Finny pokes fun at the president, Roosevelt was, in reality, one of the nation's most popular presidents. In fact, he was elected four times. First taking office during the Great Depression of the 1930s, Roosevelt proposed the creation of many government agencies and programs that we take for granted today. These include social security and unemployment benefits. His regular radio messages to the American people, called "fireside chats," lifted spirits throughout World War

Name:

Date:

Class:

II. Similarly, Winston Churchill's speeches inspired Britain during the darkest days of the war. Churchill's constant appeals to the United States to join the war influenced U.S. policy.

### Climax and Resolution

In a novel or short story, the \_\_\_\_\_ is the turning point, the point at which the central conflict comes to a head. Most of the events in a story lead to the climax. A \_\_\_\_\_ is the point at which the central conflict is resolved. As you read Chapters 11 through 13, look for the climax, which will suddenly change the course of events for the main characters. Then look for a resolution. Remember that characters do not necessarily find the answers to all of their problems in the resolution. As you read, look for the climax and try to predict what the resolution might be.

1. How do you feel about what happens to Finny?
2. In your opinion, why is Brinker so determined to investigate the accident?
3. What is Leper's description of the accident? Why is his testimony so upsetting to Finny?
4. What does Gene mean when he says, "Phineas, you wouldn't be any good in the war, even if nothing had happened to your leg." What qualities make Finny a poor candidate for military service?
5. Do you think the mock trial was a good idea? Why or why not?
6. What understanding do Finny and Gene reach about the incident in the tree? Does their explanation of what happened satisfy you? Why or why not?
7. Do you blame Gene for Finny's death? Why or why not?
8. What is the point of chapter thirteen? Why is this chapter needed?
9. In your opinion, what lessons are to be learned from this novel?

Additional Assignment: Choose one of the two below

#### **(1) Medical Science**

Write a detailed explanation of how Finny probably died by documenting what you learn about setting broken bones, bone marrow, the heart, and the blood stream in a paper or documentary. Investigate the methods doctors use to keep such

Name:

Date:

Class:

deaths at a minimum. What has changed in this medical procedure since the time of the book's publication? Cite your sources.

**(2) History Connection**

Many scholars believe the treaty that ended World War I sowed the seeds for World War II.

Consult books or on-line resources to learn more about the Treaty of Versailles. Find out what the terms of the peace agreement were and why they might have sparked more conflict. To perform your search, use key words and phrases such as Versailles Treaty, World War I, and League of Nations. Present a brief report to the class in which you answer the following question: Is Brinker's claim that his father's generation caused the war justified?

**Literature Groups—In-Class Activity**

With a small group of classmates, review the opening scene of the novel, in which Gene, now an adult, visits Devon. What places does he most want to see again? Why? After reading the novel, what do you think the real purpose of the visit is? Does Gene's visit support the idea that he has found inner peace or contradict it? Write your response on a separate sheet of paper.

\*information garnered from Glencoe Literature and Grayson High School