

A Separate Peace

Summer Assignment: For all questions, provide quoted evidence and page numbers. Complete answers on a separate piece of paper. Due the day we return. Expect a test on the facts of the book when we return to school in the fall.

Chapter Questions

Chapter 1

2. When Gene visits the tree, what does it resemble? Evaluate his observation.
3. How does Gene feel about having seen the tree? Why?
4. Describe the relationship between the narrator (Gene) and Phineas (Finny).
5. Gene states that the two places he wants to see at Devon School were “fearful sights.” a Why does he use this term? b What is fearful about marble stairs? c About a tree? d If they are “fearful,” why do you think Gene wants to see them?
6. a Why must Gene, against his better judgment, jump from the tree? b How does this and his later “wrestling match” with Finny affect their relationship? c What does this tell you about the personalities of the two?

Chapter 2

1. a Why does Phineas decide he will wear his pink shirt? b What does this show about him?
2. a What is Gene beginning to realize about Phineas? b Evaluate Gene’s reaction to this realization?
3. a What does Phineas wear as a belt at the traditional tea? b Explain why he does this.
4. a Gene admits that he is envious of Finny, who gets away with anything. He states that there is no harm in envying a best friend a little. b Do you agree with Gene or not? Explain.
5. a When Finny insists they jump from the tree again, why do you think Gene agrees to it, even though he is obviously afraid to do so? b Is Gene’s reaction to “peer pressure” a typical one?

Chapter 3

1. Why does Finny invent “blitzball” and how is it representative of him?
2. After Finny breaks a swimming record, what does he make Gene promise? Why? What does this show about Finny?
3. Explain why Gene is shocked about Finny’s decision about the record. What does it make him feel about Finny?
4. What “courageous” thing does Finny admit to Gene before they got to sleep on the beach? What is Gene’s response? What does this show about each boy?
5. Gene has conflicting emotions about Finny having “practically saved his life” because it was Finny’s fault he had “practically lost” it. Yet Gene continues to go to the nightly meetings and jump from the tree without protest. Why do you think he does this?
6. After Finny states that Gene is his “best pal,” Gene isn’t able to return the compliment. He states that he perhaps was “stopped by that level of feeling, deeper than thought, which contains the truth.” What “truth” do you think Gene is feeling? Why?

Chapter 4

1. What does Finny accuse Gene of striving for? Is he? Is Finny jealous?
2. What does Gene determine that he and Finny are even in? Why?
3. What second realization does Gene have about Finny? Is this correct?
4. Describe the effect Gene's second realization on his efforts as a student.
5. Before they reach the tree, what does Gene realize about the rivalry between him and Finny? How does he feel about this?
6. Finny tells Gene he would be so jealous, if Gene became head of their class, that he'd kill himself out of envy. Gene believes Finny is telling the truth, that Finny's joking manner is a screen. What other reaction could Gene have had? Why do you think he chose to react in this manner?
7. Gene determines that Finny had deliberately set out to wreck Gene's grades with all his diversions. He blames Finny totally. Is Gene being realistic? Does Gene have any responsibility for his own actions? How is Gene's behavior here typical of human nature?
8. After Gene jounces the limb, he hears Finny hit the bank with a thud. Why do you think Gene jounced the limb? Was his action premeditated? What were his thoughts about himself and Finny just prior to the jump? Gene then jumps from the limb for the first time without fear. What explanation can you offer for this?

Chapter 5

1. Gene admits that if anyone had been suspicious of what he had done to Finny he might have developed some defense of himself. What does Gene mean? Why would having been accused have been easier to deal with?
2. Gene wants to tell Finny the truth about what happened and begins to do so. Why is it important for him to tell the truth? Who will it help more, him or Finny? Why?
3. Even when Gene tells Finny the truth, that he caused Finny to fall, Finny is unable to believe it and denies it. Why does he react this way? Why do you think he cannot believe the truth even when he hears it?

Chapter 6

1. Why does Gene hit Quackenbush? What could be the hidden reason?
2. Why does Gene feel his purpose must have been to "become a part of Phineas"? What do you think Gene means by this? Why would he want or need to become a part of Phineas?

Chapter 7

1. Describe how Gene manages to maintain control when he is "accused" in the Butt Room. Why does he react in this way?
2. Why do you think Gene is unable to say he had pushed Finny out of the tree? What had he promised himself he would do when Finny returned to Devon? What effect might his admission to the other boys of what he had done have on the relationship between him and Finny?
3. What does Leper do while the other boys aid in the war effort? What could this show about Leper?
4. What is Gene's reaction to Brinker's announcement that he will enlist the following day? What decision does Gene make? Why?

Chapter 8

1. When Gene realizes Finny is returning, about what does Gene change his mind? How would you interpret this change of mind?
2. What are the conclusions Finny has about war? Why do you think he says this?
3. Finny tells Gene that “when you really love something, then it loves you back, in whatever way it has to love.” Gene doesn’t think this is true. Analyze this conversation and their differing views.
4. What is the plan Finny develops for Gene. Why does Finny develop a plan and why does Gene agree to it? What could this show about the mental state of each boy?
5. What are both Gene and Finny startled by? What do the boys do about this discovery?
6. Describe the plan Finny announces he has for Gene. Why does he develop this plan?
7. Before Finny’s return to Devon, Gene had looked forward to enlisting and making a clean start. When he realizes that Finny needs him, even though he has been untrustworthy, Gene decides to stay at Devon. Why do you think he makes this decision? What motivates him to give up his plan to make a clean start? Do you think Finny needs Gene? If so, why?

Chapter 9: Write brilliantly about the characters, events and themes as they occur in this chapter. Use quotations and cite pages.

Chapter 10

1. What conclusion does Gene come to about Leper’s “escape”?
2. Why does Gene react with fear to Leper’s use of the word psycho? Explain why Leper thinks maybe it is the army that is psycho. Analyze his conclusion.
3. When Leper accuses Gene of being a “savage underneath,” what example does he use to make his point?
4. Before Gene reaches Leper’s house, he is encouraged by his fantasy that Leper had escaped from the spies, that “this wasn’t going to be such a bad war,” after all. What do you think he means? Why would he want to believe this?
5. By the end of lunch, Gene is certain that Leper’s mother is convinced Gene is “a good boy underneath.” Gene states that Leper was “closer to the truth” (when he said Gene was a “savage underneath”). What is your opinion of Gene? Is he a “good boy” or is he a “savage”?
6. Gene tells Leper that he doesn’t care what happened to him because it has nothing to do with him. Why do you think Gene reacts so violently to what Leper is relating to him? Do you think he really doesn’t care? Does it really have nothing to do with him?

Chapter 11

1. Why does Brinker believe Gene has put off enlisting? How does Brinker say Finny should be treated? Why?
2. When Gene and Finny are discussing Caesar, Finny tells Gene he doesn’t believe books and teachers but that he does believe Gene, and that he knows Gene better than anybody. Why does Finny need to believe Gene? Does he really know Gene?
3. Brinker tells the group that for both Finny and Gene’s good, the matter of Finny’s accident should be brought out into the open. He then tells Finny they aren’t trying to make him feel bad. What do you think is Brinker’s motivation for

imagining himself, as Gen puts it, “Justice incarnate”? Why is he so determined to force the issue? Isn’t it likely that Finny will be made to feel bad, considering the subject of discussion? Is Brinker, in your opinion, trying to help anyone? If so, whom?

4. At the end of Leper’s testimony, Finny calls out, “I just don’t care. Never mind.” What do you think he means? If he doesn’t care about the investigation or getting to the “truth,” why do you think he mentioned that Leper was at Devon?

Chapter 12

1. When Gene takes Finny’s suitcase to the Infirmary, what does Finny admit he has been doing all winter? What has been the result? Analyze Finny’s behavior.

2. As Gene watches Finny being carried out in the chair, he states that he again had the feeling “of having all along ignored what was finest” in Finny. What do you think Gene was referring to? What, in your opinion, was “finest” in Finny?

3. Gene tells Finny that what he did to him wasn’t “anything personal,” that it was just “some ignorance inside” him, “something blind.” Is Gene telling Finny the truth? Recall Gene’s realization right before the jump that there hadn’t, after all, been any rivalry between him and Finny.

4. Gene the adult states that he had never cried about Finny, that at Finny’s funeral he had a feeling it had been his own. What do you think Gene means? Recall his earlier remark that his purpose had been to become part of Finny.

Chapter 13

1. Why does Gene conclude that none of the Devon boys ever accused him of being responsible for what had happened to Finny?

2. Restate and evaluate the conclusion Gene comes to about the cause of wars.

3. Who constructed lines against their enemies, and at what cost? What does Gene wonder about “this enemy”?

4. Mr. Hadley tells Gene and Brinker that one’s greatest moment, greatest privilege, is to serve one’s country. He goes on to say that the “old guys” like him are proud of the young ones going off to war, and jealous of them, too. Brinker then angrily tells Gene that the “old guys” are responsible for the war but that the young ones will have to fight it. Comment on these two divergent opinions about war. Do you think they are typical of all the older and younger generations?

5. Gene states that everyone he ever knew, except for Finny, found themselves “pitted violently against something in the world around them,” and that this “hostile thing” broke “the simplicity and unity of their character.” What kinds of “hostile things” do people find themselves pitted against? Is Gene just referring to such things as war, or is he perhaps referring to other types of conflict that cause people to change?

6. Gene comments that he was ready for the war since he no longer had any hatred to contribute to it. What does he mean by this?

7. From Gene’s experience with his own “enemy,” what conclusions does he come to about enemies in general? What do you think Gene is suggesting about human nature in the last paragraph of the novel.