

**Reflections:**

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *A Separate Peace*

*by John Knowles*

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## **CHAPTER 1**

1. As in this novel, many writers frequently use weather to set a mood. Imagine the hallway of your school just before or after the first bell rings on a winter morning. Try to describe the scene and, in so doing, try to convey a mood. Include sounds and smells in your description, as well as visual images.
2. As the story opens, we meet a man who is visiting his old high school after an absence of 15 years. He has pointed out to us the marble stairs in the First Academy Building and the large tree by the river, which at one time had been of great importance to him. In his mind, the tree has diminished in size, and he says, “Nothing endures, not a tree, not love, not even death by violence.” Based on what he has said so far, what do you think this story will be about?
3. Speaking of Gene’s jump from the tree, Finny says, “You were very good once I shamed you into it.” Although Gene denies that he was shamed into jumping, he knows that was the case. Were you ever shamed into doing something that you didn’t really want to do? Have you ever seen that happen to anyone else?
4. As the author has described the school so far, does it sound like a school you’d like or dislike attending? Give some reasons for your decision.

## **CHAPTER 2**

5. Because of his personal charm, Finny can get away with things that cause other people to get into trouble. Did you ever know anyone like that? How did you feel about that person?
  
6. Gene says that he envied his friend a little, but that was perfectly normal. Offer arguments in which you agree or disagree with that statement.
  
7. Imagine you attended this school and had just met Gene and Finny. Write a letter to a friend back home and tell him or her about Gene and Finny.
  
8. Write the conversation that might have taken place if on the way back to the campus, Finny had said to Gene:

**Finny:** Well, I saved your life that time.

**Gene:**

## CHAPTER 3

9. The day they invented blitzball, did you notice Gene's feelings about always being the one to get the ball? Imagine he's on the telephone that evening with a friend from school who is not attending summer school.

**Gene:** Oh, we invented a game today that we call blitzball.

**Friend:**

10. At the end of the first part of Chapter Three, Gene says that because Finny made up all the rules for blitzball, he (Finny) was very good at the game. He adds, "I didn't really think about it myself. What difference did it make? It was just a game. It was good that Finny could shine at it. He could also shine at many other things, with people for instance, the others in our dormitory, the faculty; in fact, if you stopped to think about it, Finny could shine with everyone, he attracted everyone he met. I was glad of that too. Naturally. He was my roommate and my best friend." If it were you, do you think you would feel as Gene feels? How does Gene feel, in reality?
11. In a letter to a friend, tell about Finny's breaking the swimming record held by A. Hopkins Parker and relate Gene's and Finny's feelings about it.
12. How much do you think you are like Finny? If you find him a likable person, what is it you like about him? If you find him unlikable, what is it you don't like about him?

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*Response Journal*

13. At the end of Chapter Three, Gene says that something held him back from telling Finny that he was his best friend. “Perhaps,” Gene said, “I was stopped by that level of feeling deeper than thought, which contains the truth.” What do you suppose he means by that?
  
14. Several times in the novel Gene says that sarcasm is the weapon of the weak. To what extent do you think this is an accurate observation?

## **CHAPTER 4**

15. Gene has come to believe that Finny resents his academic success in the same way that Gene resents Finny’s athletic success. Do you think that two high school juniors, who are said to be friends, would actually feel this way? Why?
  
16. Gene admits that, on a number of occasions, he envies Finny and resents all his successes. If you were Gene, and Finny was your friend, do you think you would feel the same as Gene or differently from the way Gene feels?
  
17. If you can, explain to a classmate who doesn’t get it, why Gene says, “I was not of the same quality as he.”

## CHAPTER 5

18. Gene is feeling both regret and dread as this chapter begins. What Gene dreads is that Finny will reveal that he, Gene, caused the accident. Have you ever experienced this kind of dread? If you can, describe the anxiety and tell what you think is the best way to deal with it.
19. If you had been in Gene's position in this chapter, how do you think you would have handled the situation?

## CHAPTER 6

20. Gene takes the job as assistant manager of the crew team which is really a thankless job. It is all the more thankless because the manager, Quackenbush, is an absolutely unlikable person. How would you respond if a friend said the following—
- Friend:** I can't believe Gene took the position of assistant crew manager.
- You:**
21. When Mr. Ludsberry says that Gene and the other older boys took advantage of his absence during the summer, Gene thinks, "I stood there shaking in my wet sneakers. If only I had truly taken advantage of the situation, seized and held and prized the multitudes of advantages the summer offered me; if only I had." To a friend who doesn't get the point, relate what Gene meant by that statement.