
A Psychological Portrait Of The Main Character In The Novel A Separate Peace By John Knowles

Author John Knowles uses the narrator's point of view to describe the way he feels about his friend. The novel by John Knowles *A Separate Peace* shows the readers a complicated relationship between two friends and how their relationship is affected due to envy. By applying psychological criticism to *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles, the reader can understand the theme of jealousy that is faced between friends and how it can lead to bad decisions in life. It tells about the way behavior influences our minds and made us think in different ways.

This novel was written in 1959 about two young friends growing up during World War Two. This novel takes place in Devon, a boarding school in New Hampshire, in which narrator Gene Forrester is the main character and his best friend is Phineas (Finny). The story starts as Gene being an adult and visiting Devon as an adult and he goes around the campus on significant landmarks that reflect the things that happened 15 years earlier. His flashback begins in 1942 when he came to attend a summer school at the age of sixteen and his roommate was Finny who was an extraordinary person full of energy. Finny invented many new games to keep them all busy because they were too young to be drafted in the war so they made a secret society known as the Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session. To be accepted into that society they have to climb up a tree near the cliff and jump into the ocean far enough to safely land in the water. Gene maintained the appearance of a friend when the hatred was growing inside him.

Finny kept Gene busy with these activities and he started to feel as if Finny was trying to sabotage him and want him to get bad grades as he states: "Finny had deliberately set out to wreck my studies." (Knowles) But soon he realized that he was wrong and this hatred is one-sided so he accompanied Finny to the tree for their jumping ritual. They both climb the tree and Gene's knee got bent that moved the branch and Finny fell off and nobody blamed Gene for anything. Finny's athletic career was over and Gene felt the guilt and on holidays went to see him at his house to admit his fault. Finny never thought that Gene could do anything to hurt him so he did not accept the fact he did it and forgets everything. Some students are planning to be drafted while Finny is preparing Gene for the Olympics of 1944 in his place, Leper their friend is mentally damaged due to taking part in the war. Brinker, their other classmate, meets up with everyone, including two of them to talk about his suspicion on Finny's fall and gets to know that Gene did it on purpose he goes out in anger and falls again and damaged his leg again but this time when he goes for surgery he dies.

Using the psychological theory on *A Separate Peace* reveals many aspects of the book that describes the different states of minds, emotions and the psychology of the characters. The readers came to know about the psychological state of Gene and the internal conflict going on inside his mind that made him violent towards everyone and most of the time he uses violence to solve his problems. Gene could've handled the hatred inside him easily but he couldn't control the anger and hatred inside him that by shaking the tree caused Phineas to lose his career as an athlete as Gene explains him falling: "Holding firmly to the trunk, I took a step toward him, and then my knees bent and I jounced the limb. Finny, his balance gone, swung his head around to look at me for an instant with extreme interest, and then he tumbled sideways,

broke through the little branches below and hit the bank with a sickening, unnatural thud.” This shows that Gene had difficulty in controlling his emotions and feelings to such an extent that he can hurt someone. According to psychoanalysis, people have an unconscious part that holds all the negative emotions and the things that they never know they can do until they unconsciously do it.

The psychological lens portrays the process of self-discovery in which a person goes through a change or mend his path towards a single way. Similar to the other adolescents Gene went through his stages of consciousness and then gets control of his freedom as the ego inside, he moves out of his unconsciousness and he can do whatever he desires. A lot of teens spend their summer relaxed with no stress, but he faced the tension of war surrounding him and his friends and everyone going away to fight while he stayed behind hoping for them to return the same way they were. Psychology plays an important role in shaping a character and everyone is different in their own way.

Leper was Gene's friend and he went through World War two terrors because he took part in it and saw horrific deaths and faced all the terrible events of the war. As stated by Gene: “ ‘I escaped!’ the word surging out in a voice and intensity that was not Leper’s. His face was furious, but his eyes denied the fury; instead, they saw it before them. They were filled with terror.” (Knowles) Leper couldn’t stay there and he escaped from the army because his head started to hurt and he felt as if he was still at war even after he went home. He went into a state of shock and it was hard for him to recover.

Phineas himself went through a hard time when he falls down the tree and felt as if everything inside him was broken and he cannot be himself again and felt as if he would never be able to walk and wondered why this all happened to him. How suddenly life changes his ego always made him a person who always felt like he had all and acted as a master even though he did not want to be one, but everyone looked up to him and listened to him because he was good with words. He never thought that the person he considers his best friend will be his murderer covering himself to hide his identity which will come in front of him, but he will deny it many times as he does not want to think that Gene would do something like that to him. He wants to search good in people, but sometimes the closest ones are the enemies waiting for the right opportunity to break him in pieces from which he could not recover. He trusted Gene to the extent that when Gene went to confess his fault he did not believe him. Finny never wanted anyone to suffer and he was always trying to make the environment less tense by making new games for the students and trying to make everyone happy.

The Id, Ego, and Superego are the three components of the human personality and psyche. These three components are critical in this novel and the key concepts of primal fear and repression in the text are a part of the psychological lens. According to Freud, the id is the component that includes the human psyche in control of an entirely unconscious state of mind and is not affected by reality, logic and everyday life. The id is driven by the principle of pleasure. It also contains the biological components present at birth. It does not change with experience or time as it is not in touch with the external world. The ego is “that part of the id that which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world.” (Freud) It is the decision-making component of personality and develops with time and experience that we face in our life. The ego works according to reality by satisfying the demand of id and compromising with the society and taking the decision according to the situation. The ego also looks for pleasure but comes with solutions to obtain it realistic without getting hurt in the process. The superego

incorporates all the morals and values of society and absorbs what we see our elders doing and came to know about different traditions. The superego contains two systems: the conscience and the ideal self. The conscience can punish the ego by the feelings of guilt and the ideal self is an imaginary picture of how you ought to be and how to treat others.

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