
A Topic Of Pain In The Novel A Separate Peace By John Knowles

There are people from all over the world who live their life entirely in denial, unable to see what is right in front of them. They try to keep their innocence for their whole lives in order to not see the real world around them. In John Knowles's novel, *A Separate Peace*, one of the main characters, Finny, pursues his life goals and dreams by putting up a curtain for himself, so that it is impossible for him to see the real world. Throughout the book, Knowles shows how people attempt to keep their innocence, in order to evade the pain that might come without it.

First and foremost, Finny is a sensitive person, and he does everything he can to hide things from himself, so he doesn't end up getting hurt. One of these things is the war. WWII is the center of everyone's life at the time, yet Finny is desperate to find a way to avoid uncovering the truth about it. When Finny returns to Devon with a cast and crutches, he says to Gene, "Don't be a sap... there isn't any war" (Knowles 115). He then goes on to explain his conspiracy of the fat old men who are doing this so the younger men don't get too out of hand. Finny has himself convinced that if he just doesn't admit to himself the war is going on, he won't have to leave his place of security, where he can never get hurt. If he ever does let himself realize the things he doesn't want to believe, the pain will be even more unbearable than when he fell from the tree. But this pain is preventable, so he must keep his facade up. The reason he has made this conspiracy about the war is finally revealed to Gene when he says, "Why do you think I kept saying there wasn't any war all winter? I was going to keep on saying it until two seconds after I got a letter from Ottawa or Chungking or some place saying, 'Yes you can enlist with us,'" (Knowles 190). At this moment, Finny is brought harshly back to reality. His innocence is gone now since he is letting himself realize and encounter the pain that comes with letting his front down. He hid the entire war from himself just in case he never got one of those letters back saying he could enlist. Finny's innocence is taken away from him when he is forced to see the cruel reality of the war, and without this innocence he is also forced to endure the pain that comes without having it.

One of the most painful experiences is realizing the betrayal of a friend. This is something Finny had to deal with after shattering his leg. Gene and Finny are inseparable, and losing Gene is so scary to Finny that he shields himself from the fact that Gene played a big part in his injury. Gene is full of guilt, so he admits the truth while visiting Finny by saying, "I deliberately jounced the limb so you would fall off," (Knowles 70). Finny replies to Gene by only saying, "Of course you didn't," (Knowles 70). Even after the blatant comment telling him the truth, Finny can't make himself believe such a thing. If he admits to himself what Gene said is true, he would lose his best friend. With all of the trauma he has had to deal with, Finny doesn't think it's possible for him to lose his friend on top of all that. Other people at the Devon school have seemed to realize how Gene caused Finny to fall off of the tree. Brinker Hadley calls a meeting in the middle of the night, and tries to force Finny to see the truth of the situation. After hearing what Brinker says, Finny replies with, "I just don't care. Never mind," (Knowles 176). Even with multiple people trying to make him see what really happened that day on the tree, Finny is still staying in denial, afraid of what might happen if he believed what everyone around him is saying. It takes him another fall (down the marble staircase this time) to really see the truth. With another fracture in his leg, Gene decides to pay him a visit in the infirmary. When Finny

catches sight of Gene hanging by the window, he yells, “You want to break something else in me! Is that why you’re here!” (Knowles 184) I think this is the point in *A Separate Peace*, where Finny loses the innocence he’s had for the entirety of the book. He isn’t in denial anymore, but he is in shock. The fact that his best friend was capable of doing something like that is really making him question everything. Finny doesn’t know how to handle himself now that he is harshly brought back to reality.

Overall, Finny’s evasion of pain and the truth is very apparent throughout the book, *A Separate Peace*. Since Finny is already in a lot of pain from his past traumas, he decides to hide what is really going on so he won’t have to feel the pain that it will cause. The author, John Knowles, is showing the readers that people tend to feel the need to run from the pain instead of facing it by keeping the innocence they’ve had since childhood.

edubirdie.com