
Adolescent Ego in A Separate Peace: Character Development of Gene

"This time he wasn't going to get away with it. I could feel myself becoming unexpectedly excited at that' (Knowles 27). Gene lacks self-confidence and is an introvert and a follower. He does not have his best friend Phineas' witty personality, athleticism, and leadership traits. Researching adolescent ego is important to the character development of Gene, a character in A Separate Peace. In Knowles' novel A Separate Peace understanding Gene's adolescent ego, his friendships, and environment are important to the growth and maturity of his character.

During adolescent development, people grow more independent. In an article about the link between academic social environments and ego-identity formation a psychologist, Kroger, states that 'Young people experience periods of exploration where they must choose for themselves--in accordance with their own interests, goals, talents, and the standards of their social milieu--the childhood identifications they wish to adopt and those they prefer to discard'(qtd. in Kroger 5). In A Separate Peace, Gene is 16 years old and is going through a period of exploration. From the beginning of the novel, the reader can infer that Gene is experiencing self-worth issues and feels inferior to his best friend, Phineas. In an article from The Journal of Humanistic Counseling Vernon states that ' During adolescence, teenagers develop emotional independence and are working at achieving socially responsible behavior' (qtd. in Vernon 6). Gene grows as a character throughout the novel and experiences pain when his best friend Finny dies. Gene is overcome with guilt, and by the end of the story feels responsible for Finny's death and blames himself. Finny's forgiveness and Gene's apology to Finny makes it possible for Gene to grow and come to the realization that he was self-centered and caused pain to his best friend.

When maturing from a teenager to an adult, there are changes in relationships with family, friends, and classmates. As Gene and Finny are maturing, their relationship is continuously evolving. Gene is constantly with his best friend Finny and feels obligated to do the things Finny wants to do. For instance, Gene jumps out of the tree even though he does not want to. It is important for teenagers to have individual goals and supportive people during this period of constant change. Gerald R. Adams talking about ego-identity and academic success states that 'It is imperative for adolescents to be surrounded by individuals who offer support for their process of exploration and affirmation for their chosen identity commitments' (qtd. In Matheis, Adams 7). In the novel Brinker Hadley, one of Finny and Gene's classmates is constantly manipulating Finny of Gene's loyalty and puts him on trial late at night in the Assembly Room. The trial in the assembly room becomes so infuriating to Finny it leads to him falling down the stairs and ultimately to his death. Gene does not have supportive relationships at Devon. Brinker is eager to find out about what happened the night Finny broke his leg, Leper testifies against Gene in the assembly room, and Gene feels so guilty in his relationship with Finny. The friendship between Gene and Phineas has life long effects.

Erik Erikson was a German-American developmental Psychologist that stated: 'A socially supportive environment is the basis for success and happiness' (qtd. in Erikson 6). Devon School is an elite boy's prep school where wealthy families send their kids to get the best education. At Devon, the boys are all in the same social class and are sheltered from what is

going on in the war. A socially supportive school atmosphere will promote positive academic and social outcomes in young people. In an article about Adolescent Psychology, the author William A. Darity states that “Cognitive abilities are enhanced in settings in which they feel comfortable in performing cognitive tasks” (Darity 13). At Devon, the boys are well disciplined limiting shortened attention spans and increased focus. In an article about Adolescent Academic Achievement the authors state “With increasing ego development, adolescents demonstrated increased internal academic locus of control” (Bursik Krisanne Martin 1). At Devon, Gene is not worried about being drafted for the war allowing him to focus on his academics. Finny was Gene's biggest supporter even after his accident. Finny pushed Gene to the height of his athleticism and never stopped believing in him. It took Gene time to mature in order to appreciate how Devon formed him and made him a well-rounded person.

Understanding Gene's adolescent ego, his friendships, and his environment are important to the maturity of his character. In *A Separate Peace*, Gene is going through a period of exploration. The people Gene surrounds himself with influences his actions and decisions. At the end of the novel, Gene comes to terms with his actions and is no longer an adolescent but an adult. The environment at Devon also impacts Gene. By the end of the book, Gene matures and appreciates Phineas and Devon's influence.

edubirdie.com