A Separate Peace – Comprehension Questions Chapters 1 & 2

1. Who is Phineas (Finny)? Describe him based on physical, emotional, and personality-specific character traits.

2. Who is Gene? What has he done in the story so far?

3. Explain how WWII was affecting the Devon School.

4. Who said, 
   *Because, unfamiliar with the absence of fear and what that was like, I had not been able to identify its presence.*
   What does this quotation mean, and what is the significance of it?

5. What’s the deal with the tree? Why does Gene want to return to it? Also, explain  
   *Nothing endures, not a tree, not love, not even a death by violence.* What does it mean at this point in the novel? Do you think it’s a foreshadowing statement?

6. How does Finny change the attitudes of the Masters, and what is the other reason Gene thinks the Masters have been less strict on the guys?

7. What is Finny’s “emblem,” and why does he wear it?

8. What did Finny do that just *appalled* Mrs. Patch-Withers at the tea, and how did he talk himself out of it?

9. What is sarcasm, according to Gene?
10. What is the *Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session*, and how does Finny save Gene’s life?

**A Separate Peace – Comprehension Questions Chapters 3 & 4**

1. What does the Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session do at their meetings, and how does Gene really feel about this club? Why does he attend?

2. What are Finny’s three “rules” that he lives by?

3. What is blitzball? Why was it invented and how is it played?

4. Gene says,

   *The world, through his unleashed emotions, imprinted itself upon him, and he carries the stamp of that passing moment forever.*

   Explain.

5. Describe, in detail, life in America during WWII as recalled by Gene.

6. Why do you think Finny wanted to remain silent about his swimming feat?
7. What did Finny say at the beach that makes Gene comment, 
   *Exposing a sincere emotion nakedly like that at the Devon School was the next thing to suicide.*
   How did Gene respond to Finny?

---

8. To what discussion does Finny reply, 
   *I’d kill myself out of jealous envy?*
   How does Gene feel about this?

---

9. What two realizations does Gene have in Chapter 4?

---

10. What is Gene talking about when he says, 
    *The Suicide Society continued to meet every evening, and I continued to attend, because I didn’t want Finny to understand me as I understood him.*
    Explain.

---

11. What tragedy occurred at the end of Chapter 4, how did it happen, and how did Gene respond?
A Separate Peace — Comprehension Questions Chapters 5 & 6

1. What was Gene’s “first idea with any energy behind it?”

2. How is Finny’s reaction different than Gene expected?

3. What did Gene want to tell Finny, but was unable?

4. After traveling to his house in Boston, Gene confronts Finny. What happens?

5. What does Gene say was the biggest lie he told Finny?

1. Who’s Quackenbush? What’s his job?

2. How does Quackenbush enrage Gene, and how does Gene respond?

3. When Finny calls he tells Gene that he WILL play sports. Why, and how does this “reveal (his) purpose from the first?”
4. For what reasons did Gene not want to play sports anyway?

A Separate Peace – Comprehension Questions Chapters 7 & 8

1. Describe Brinker Hadley. What does he accuse Gene of when he comes to visit?

2. In what activities do the Devon boys participate as a result of the war? Be specific about their responsibilities.

3. What have we learned about Leper Lepellier? Describe his physical, emotional, and personality traits.

4. Explain this quote:
   Stranded in this mill town railroad yard while the whole world was converging elsewhere, we seemed to be nothing but children playing among heroic men.

5. What decision does Brinker announce that Gene is intrigued by?

6. After he “bounced zestfully up the dormitory stairs,” what surprise is awaiting Gene at the end of Chapter 7?
1. Even though Gene describes himself as “the least trustworthy person (Phineas) had ever met,” how does Finny clearly feel about Gene?

2. How did Brinker get nicknamed the “Yellow Peril”?

3. What does this mean:
   
   *I did not stop to think that one wave is inevitably followed by another even larger and more powerful, when the tide is coming in.*

4. Finny believes a “fat old men” conspiracy about the war. What is it?

5. *His face froze. “Because I’ve suffered,” he burst out...Phineas I know had been even more startled than I to discover this bitterness in himself.* Explain.

6. What was Finny’s goal that he now plans on experiencing vicariously though Gene? How are they working towards that goal?

7. Why does Finny think Mr. Ludsbury doesn’t buy into the war conspiracy theory?
A Separate Peace – Comprehension Questions Chapters 9 & 10

1. Who, surprisingly, enlists in the war, and why? How do the other boys react to this decision?

2. What does Phineas invent to combat the late winter blues? Explain.

3. In what athletic activity did Phineas participate?

4. What telegram arrives and changes the mood of the awards ceremony?

1. Identify and explain the following quotation: "You didn’t ‘escape’ from the army, so he must have escaped from something else." Who said it, and in what context?

2. Where is Leper, and why is he there?

3. What is Gene talking about here: “I gathered what the word meant. I hated the sound of it at once. It opened up a world I had not known existed – ‘mad’ or ‘crazy’ or ‘a screw loose,’ those were the familiar words.”
4. What does Leper say that frustrates Gene to the point of kicking over his chair?

5. How does Gene semi-redeem himself with Leper’s mother?

6. During their walk, Leper reveals to Gene the incidents that got him labeled as “psycho.” What happened?

7. How did Gene respond to Leper’s story?

A Separate Peace – Comprehension Questions Chapter Chapter 11

1. Who did Gene want to see upon returning from Vermont?

2. What is the “only conflict (Finny) ever believed in?”

3. Who said this? To what is he referring? Explain. “But by now I no longer needed this vivid false identity; now I was acquiring, I felt, a sense of my own real authority and worth, I had had many new experiences and I was growing up.”
4. While Brinker says Finny is “sidelined for the duration” and Gene says the war is fake, Finny: “brought his wide-eyes up, his grin flashed and faded, and then he murmured, ‘Sure. There isn’t any war.’” How does this ironic comment show a change in Finny?

5. Who is “us” and who is “them”? What’s this quotation talking about? “There was no latent snobbery in us; we didn’t find any in them. It was only that we could feel a deep and sincere difference between us and them, a difference which everyone struggled with awkward fortitude to bridge.”

6. “You’re so wrong I can’t even – I can’t even hear you, you’re so wrong.” Who is talking? To whom is he talking? And why the frustration?

7. When and why did Finny start believing wars were real? Then what happened that made him confirm his belief?

8. What pretend situations did Gene and Finny like better than war? (Hint: Finny congratulates Gene on something, and Gene returns a complement...)

9. Explain, in detail, Brinker’s stunt that started with a knock on Gene’s door at 10:05 p.m.

10. What unfortunate event occurs at the end of Chapter 11?
A Separate Peace – Comprehension Questions Chapters 12 & 13

1. Why didn’t Gene do anything to help with Phineas after his second accident?

2. Why did Gene sneak into the infirmary?

3. Gene told Phineas, “You wouldn’t be any good in the war, even if nothing had happened to your leg.” What did he mean?

4. What finally happened to Phineas?

5. What was ironic about Gene’s part in the war?