A Separate Peace Is A ‘Story Of War’ Theme Essay, Research Paper

“A Separate Peace” takes places in the middle of World War II in the town of Devon, New Hampshire in1942. Throughout the story Gene is constantly in conflict with someone. He always stands up for his friends, but also goes against what he knows is right to prove himself to Finny. The story “A Separate Peace” by John Knowles is a story of war symbolized by Gene Forrester’s conflicts and rivalries with the peoplehe interacts with especially Finny, a major character, and Cliff Quakenbush. Leper Lepellier, and Brinker Hadley, minor characters.

The tree represented the war for Gene and Finny, and also was the cause of their first real conflict. They saw all the seniors going off to war and they thought of the war as something dangerous. They also saw jumping from the tree as something dangerous. “Finny knew, if he stopped to think, that jumping out of the tree was even more forbidden than missing a meal. ‘We had to do it naturally,’ he went on, ‘because we’re all getting ready for the war.’” (Knowles 15)

Then Finny came up with the Super Suicide Society of the Summer Session where he and Gene had to jump from the tree every night. Gene was always the academically inclines of the two friends and it never occurred to him that he could do anything so perilous. In Gene’s own way he was fighting his own war because he had to build up all his courage in order to jump from the tree. If Gene had not jumped then he would be inferior to Finny.

In Gene’s mind Finny was his enemy because Finny always shined at sports. Gene was always jealous. Gene might never have known he was feeling jealous but somewhere deep down in Gene this jealousy grew over time. Eventually this lead Gene to Gene causing Finny to fall from the tree. Just as if two countries had hated each other for a long time and all the anger grew and burst into war. The action of Gene making Finny fall from the tree was the war.

All the major conflicts between Gene and Finny usually involved life or death just like war. For example, when Gene was about to jump from the tree but was distracted by Finny and almost fell; Finny grabbed his hand and helped him regain his balance. Gene’s anger could be sensed when he made this comment, “Yes, he had practically saved my life. He had also practically lost it for me. I wouldn’t have been on that damn limb if it wasn’t for him. I wouldn’t have truned around and so lost my balance, if he hadn’t been there. I didn’t need to feel any tremendous rush of gratitude towards Finny.” (Knowles 25) If Gene had fallen out of that tree he could have died.

The next incident that occurred in the tree between Finny and Gene was when Gene shook the branch to make Finny fall. This was an act of war on Gene’s part. Gene saw Finny as his enemy. His jealousy, competition, and anger combined and Gene bounced on the tree branch subconsciously while Finny was about to jump. Finny fell to the ground breaking his leg in several places. Therefore, making Finny fall from the limb eliminated Gene’s competition or disabled his enemy.

Finny ran out of the room when an argument about the incident at the tree came up because he did not want to hear the truth about what really happened. He fell down a flight of stairs and later died. Gene never wanted Finny to die but always felt conflicted over what happened. War betwen friends and war between enemies is never safe and someone always ends up getting hurt, and in this case it was Finny.

Gene’s war with Quakenbush did not even start until the day he became assistant crew manager for the crew team. Gene said,”…it wasn’t the words he said which angered me. It was only he was so ignorant…” (Knowles 71) Gene goes on to reminisce on all the good things that happened between him and Finny. Quakenbush’s ignorant remarks lead up to Gene punching him in the face. They fall in the water and Gene is told never to come back to crew practice. Ignorance in any situation always leads to war.

Elwin “Leper” Lepellier began his conflict with Gene towards the end of the story after Leper goes AWOL from the army after enlisting. Gene dexcribes his relationship with Leper as “always a fight, a hard fight to win when you’re seventeen years old and lived in a keyed up, competing school, to avoid making fun of him. But as I had gotten to know him better this fight had been easier to win.” (Knowles 87)

They sat down to have a nice conversation and ended up fighting the hwole way through. “You always were a savage underneath, like that time you pushed Finny out of the tree. Like that time you crippled him for life!” (Knowles 137) Gene had felt bead enough about the incident already; he did not need to hear it from Leper even though he knew it was the truth. So Gene jumped out of his chair and yelled, “You stupid, crazy bastard-.” (Knowles 137) Then Gene kicked out the chair from under Leper. Leper just lied there on the floor laughing and crying at the same time. Gene got mad because Leper was the only one who knew the whole truth about what really happened at the tree that day. That’s why Gene tried to hurt Leper because he did not want anyone to know or release his secret.

Brinker and Gene’s war did not start until Brinker came into Gene’s dormitory after everyone had found out about Finny falling from the tree. Brinker’s first words were, “I’ll bet you knew all the time Finny wouldn’t be back this fall. That’s why you picked him for a roommate right?” (Knowles 79) Brinker was inciting a war before he knew all the facts about what happened. In the dormitory Gene said that Brinker put his hand on his shoulder and said, “Rest assured of that my son. In our free democracy, even fighting for its life, the truth will out.” (Knowles 80) Gene related the “truth” coming out to the values that were being fought for in World War II.

The summer beagn peacefully. And as the war became bigger in Europe so did Gene’s conflict with Finny and all his friends. Gene expresses his feelings towards the war by saying,”Why go through the motions of education and watch the war slowly chip away at the one thing I had loved here, the peace, the measureless, careless peace of the Devon summer?” (Knowles93) While Gene was in the Navy “he never killed anybody and never developed an intense level of hatred for the enemy. Because his war ended before he ever put on a uniform; he was on active duty all his time at school; he killed his enemy there.” (Knowles 196) This proves “A Spearate Peace” is a story of war because all of the death, hate, jealousy, and ignorance that go into the story are what the story is based on.

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