Gene’s Maturation Essay, Research Paper

Gene Forrester’s difficult journey towards maturity and the adult world is a main focus of the novel, A Separate Peace, by John Knowles. Gene’s maturation starts with the destruction of Phineas and the process continues until he revisits the tree that the boys jumped off of. Throughout this time, Gene must face reality, the future, become self-aware, and confront his problems, as well as forgive and accept the person that he, himself, is. When he jounced the limb, Gene realized his problems and the true person he was inside. Fifteen years later, when he revisited the tree, he finally accepted and forgave himself. This is a long and painful journey. At the end of this long journey, Gene becomes a mature adult.

Gene jounces the limb and causes Phineas fall and at that moment becomes somewhat aware of his true feelings. This revelation comes to him back in his room before he and Phineas leaves for the tree. It surrounds him with the shock of his true self until he finally reacts by jouncing the limb. Up in the tree, before the two friends are about to make their jump together, Gene sees Phineas in a new light. He realizes that Phineas does not feel the same way he feels. Gene realizes that Phineas is not jealous of how smart he is and becomes aware that only he is the jealous one. He learns of his hostility and that he really is a “savage underneath”. Over a long period of time, Gene had been denying his feelings of hatred towards Phineas, saying that it was normal for him to feel this way because that was the way that friends were. The realization that these feelings are one-sided causes Gene to fall dramatically in comparison to Phineas (he paints himself black for these feelings and because Phineas doesn’t share them, he puts a halo around Phineas head), concludes with the necessity for Phineas to be brought down to his level, and results with Gene jouncing the limb.

After the realization of the person he truly is, in his room and up in the tree, Gene must now confront his problems, face reality, and deal with the future. He must learn that communication is very important in a relationship and that he must express himself instead of keeping his feelings inside, as he had always done with Phineas. He must learn to listen to himself rather than to others. These were just a few of the many problems there were in his relationship with Phineas. He must face reality and acknowledge the fact that he isn’t as great as Phineas, that he is his own individual person, and that Phineas isn’t as perfect as he thought. Gene must accept the guilt for Phineas difficulties after his injury and must help Phineas as an act of repentance for his deed. Gene does this by letting Phineas train him for the olympics. This is significant because it is like Phineas is living through Gene. Gene “becomes” Phineas when it comes to sports, likewise with Phineas becoming Gene. Although the above are all of great importance, the greatest hurdle Gene must overcome is learning to live with what he has done. This painful step is the one that will allow him to completely mature.

The final phase of Gene’s maturation is his self-acceptance and self-forgiveness. He has to accept that he is not perfect and that he, like any other normal being, has faults. Accepting that his innocence has been lost helps Gene move on into another part of his life and realize that he can never return to the days of his innocent youth again. He can now become a man, enter the war and adult world and leave his youth behind. Forgiving himself is the step which allows Gene to lead a normal life and enter society. He must finally forgive himself completely for his blind act and allow himself to “come in out of the rain”. By accepting as well as forgiving the person that he is, Gene enables himself to move on and join the adult world.

Gene s maturation is a difficult process that reveals a darker side of Gene that he does not necessarily wish to see. However painful, Gene is made a better person during his maturation through Phineas suffering. Through his pain and awful revelations about himself, Gene matures from an insecure boy to a self-knowledgeable man.