

PINE VIEW SCHOOL SUMMER READING – 2014-2015
STUDENTS ENTERING GRADE 8
A Separate Peace by John Knowles

Students enrolled in Language Arts III Advanced (8th grade) are required to read *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles and complete the following reading assignment prior to the start of the coming school year. Teachers of eighth-grade language arts will collect the assignment during the first week of the course, so detail your thoughts carefully. Please read this entire assignment before starting your reading.

*Summer Reading Assignment: Before, During, and After
Developing Your Reading Comprehension and Analysis Skills*

Directions: As you read, annotate the novel by making brief notes on post-it notes or highlighting/underlining weighty quotes, characters, settings, themes, symbols, figurative language as well as any places where you have questions or are confused. Even if you read the book early in the summer, you will have some material to review before the test and/or essay on the book when you return in August. **It is your responsibility to prepare for class discussion on this novel by responding to the following questions/prompts in complete sentences and providing text support when appropriate. You are required to type your responses. Use a clean font (i.e., Times New Roman or Arial) and double space your work on white bond paper. Font size must be 12 point.**

BEFORE READING:

First complete the following *WebQuest*, and then answer the pre-reading question.

Introduction: The year is 1942. You are a student in a very prestigious New England prep school. This is supposed to be one of the best years of your life: you are young, healthy, and full of potential. You have plans for college and a lucrative career. Many things are changing, however, both all around you and within you. A war looms on the horizon, and you may be drafted. These possibilities frighten and disturb you. You continue your life of classes, football, and social life, but there is always a dread in your heart and a fear of what may lie ahead. How are you going to handle this sudden loss of innocence?

The young characters in John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* experience these exact feelings in their own lives at Devon School during World War II. Largely inspired by actual events from John Knowles' life, the novel deals with the loss of innocence--the realization that life may not be as safe, pleasant, or agreeable as it had once seemed. As a boarding-school alumnus himself, Knowles tells this story from the perspective of characters that face difficulties created not in the strict boarding-school system but within their own hearts. Therefore, it is easy for all readers to relate to the characters and events in *A Separate Peace*.

The purpose of this *WebQuest* is to give you some background on the Second World War and a sense of what going to school at Devon might have been like. You will explore *Wikipedia* and

Phillips Exeter Academy sites. You will view photos of the campus, bulletins from Exeter in the 1940s, and essays by John Knowles.

Type or click on the following address http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II.

1. What were two major causes of World War II?
2. How did the United States become involved in World War II?
3. To what does the term *home front* refer? What is happening on the American home front?

Type or click on the following address http://www.exeter.edu/libraries/553_4390.aspx.
Click on Photo Essay.

4. Peruse the photos and read the accompanying text. Describe the campus and students.

Go back to the main page and click on Exeter Bulletin Articles.
Click on The Academy in Wartime.

Read the bulletin and answer the questions:

5. How did the schools/Army/Navy feel about ROTC and SATC programs?
6. What two courses were being emphasized to better prepare students?
7. What did the war and Navy Departments recommend in terms of sports?

Click on Return to Exeter Bulletin Articles.
Click on Labor Enters Curriculum.

Read the bulletin and answer the questions:

8. How was the time period of the 1940s different from the Depression in terms of the way youth looked at their futures?
 9. What are three types of work for which boys could volunteer?
 10. Explain at least two reasons that the school participated in these work programs.
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Click on [Perspectives on the movie filmed at Exeter](#).

Click on [John Knowles on *A Separate Peace*](#).

11. Why did Finny, Gene, and the other boys develop such an intensely close relationship?
 12. Who is the character Brinker based on?
 13. Who is the model for Phineas?
 14. Who was the boy that died while Knowles was there? How does he die?
 15. What does Knowles say about the character Leper?
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Back to top

Click on [Life in the Forties](#).

16. Why were there so many substitutes at Exeter?
17. Why would boys take summer courses?
18. How did the academy attempt to keep a normal program at school?
19. Think about the title of the novel. Make a prediction about the content of the novel based on its title.

DURING READING

After the first chapter...

20. In the beginning, the adult Gene says that he can now see the great fear that he lived in while at Devon. What does he mean? What was the "convalescence" to which he referred in the beginning (page 3)?

After you have completed Chapter 9...

21. This is a story about a rather elite boarding school, set during the 1940s—not the typical experience of a teenager today. Do you find that you can “relate” to the story anyway? If so, to what aspects? If not, why?
22. Who is your favorite character or with which character can you mostly identify? What has happened to that character so far in the novel?
23. What in the novel caused you confusion (even if the confusion was only temporary)? What

strategies did you and/or will you use to eliminate this confusion?

24. Make three predictions about future events in the novel. What do you think will happen?

AFTER READING

25. Before reading you made predictions about the meaning of the title. Reread your predictions. Now that you have completed the novel, why do you think John Knowles chose this title? What multiple meanings does it have?

26. During your reading you identified your favorite or most relatable character. How did the novel end for that character?

27. During your reading you made three predictions about future events in the novel. Were you correct about any of these predictions? Were you surprised by any events in the last part of the novel? Explain.

28. In your mind, what is the theme (central message or insight into life revealed by a literary work) of the novel? Explain. (Note: *Theme* is not a single word or phrase, like “war” or “loss of innocence,” but a generalization or statement about people or life that the novel appears to communicate.)

29. Knowles manages to inject humor into a tragic story. Do you find this effective or disconcerting? Why?

30. How do you feel at the end of this novel? Is the narrator optimistic or pessimistic? Explain.