Charlie Bucktin, the protagonist of *Jasper Jones*, spends most of the novel in a state of fear. He’s afraid that [Eliza Wishart](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jasper-jones/characters/eliza-wishart), his crush, will think he’s awkward, he’s terrified of insects, and he’s frightened by bullies like [Warwick Trent](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jasper-jones/characters/warwick-trent). The event that begins the novel—Charlie’s discovery of [Laura Wishart](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jasper-jones/characters/laura-wishart)’s dead body hanging from a tree—is so frightening and bizarre that it traumatizes Charlie for the remainder of the book, to the point that he can barely move. This behavior contrasts markedly—or at least seems to—with the calm, effortless heroism of [Jasper Jones](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jasper-jones/characters/jasper-jones), the homeless half-Aboriginal boy who befriends Charlie.

Charlie wishes that he could overcome his fears, but he finds it enormously difficult to do so. He also sees adults in his community being paralyzed by their own fears. When racists, angry about news from the Vietnam War, bully the Vietnamese Lu family, for instance, no one steps forward to help them. In part, this is because many of the townspeople are racist as well, but their lack of response also suggests that no one is brave enough to defend the Lus out of fear of being bullied and shunned themselves. Charlie also learns that even those who seem fearless are not usually as brave as they seem—Jasper Jones is no more comfortable dealing with Laura’s death than Charlie is.

Over the course of the book, however, Charlie learns strategies for dealing with his fears. Arguably his most important insight is that one can never escape one’s fears entirely, but must simply live with them. Charlie explains this with an amusing analogy: Batman is the best superhero because he has no superpowers. In other words, he is a mortal, capable of being injured and even killed. Because of this, Batman has to learn to accept his fears and weaknesses, overcoming them to protect other people. In much the same way, Charlie accepts that he’ll always be afraid of the things that frighten him—insects, Laura’s body, etc.—but he also realizes that his fear *allows* him to be brave. It gives him the opportunity for feats of bravery.

Charlie sees other members of his community overcoming their own fears as well. His father, Wesley Bucktin, defends [An Lu](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jasper-jones/characters) from a group of racist bullies even though no one else will. Charlie also discovers that fear can be fought with knowledge and understanding. His lifelong fear of [Mad Jack Lionel](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/jasper-jones/characters/mad-jack-lionel), for instance, evaporates when he visits Jack, speaks to him, and learns that he’s a lonely, harmless old man. In all, Charlie realizes that while it’s impossible to get rid of one’s fears altogether, there are ways of minimizing and overcoming fear. By recognizing that all people feel fear, and that ordinary people are capable of heroism, Charlie trains himself be courageous—to act quickly and intelligently instead of being paralyzed with insecurity.

**Quotes:**

I am dizzy and sick. And it’s as though touching her has sealed my fate. I am in this story. She can’t be ignored. She’s real. I’ve touched her now. I’ve been privy to her last moments of heat, her last wisps of smoke

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Strangely, of all the horrible things I’ve encountered and considered recently, dropping a bomb seems to be the least violent among them, even though it’s clearly the worst. But there’s no evil mug shot, no bloody globe. It’s hard to figure out who to blame. There’s something clean about all that distance. Maybe the further away you are, the less you have to care, the less you’re responsible. But that seems wrong to me. It should be in the news. It’s wrong that they died. But if they weren’t Jeffrey’s family, would I care so much? That’s hard. Probably not, I guess. I mean, if you took every bad event in the world to heart, you’d be a horrible mess.