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# Relationships Between Finny and Gene in a Separate Peace Novel

## Finny and Gene: First Friends, Then Rivals

Good friends trust in and live close to one another, but when one begins to compete fiercely to be better than the other, then the resulting conflict is often monumentally harmful to the state of their friendship. Rather than directing their powers of disagreement and enmity towards one another, friends should constantly watch over each other so that he/she may be successful in all of his/her pursuits. In some scenarios, the relationships between friends go terribly wrong. In Knowles's *A Separate Peace*, the friendship between Finny and Gene is shattered because of Gene's competitive actions, coupled with the emotional pressure World War II puts on both of them during the course of their time at Devon.

Sometimes the failure of a friendship is the result of one of the friend's faults, rather than caused by the general disagreement and bickering between the two of them. During their summer semester at Devon, Gene and Finny have a wonderful time together, from beginning the Suicide Society, to playing Blitzball, to taking a secret outing to the beach. Though they do have the time of their lives in some respect, Gene begins to pay the price for letting his academic obligations fall by the wayside. The day they return from the beach, Gene flunks his trigonometry test. Later, he reflects on what it would mean for him to come out on top of his class and for Finny to be the star athlete at school: "If I was head of the class on Graduation Day and made a speech and won the Ne Plus Ultra Scholastic Achievement Citation, then we would both have come out on top, we would be even, that was all. We would be even..."(52). At this moment, Gene realizes that his ultimate goal for the summer semester is solely to become even with Finny. For some reason, he feels it necessary to compete with this best friend. In fact, Gene goes so far as to assume that Finny has this goal already in mind and is, as he realizes this, already working to cut him down from achieving this "getting even" or better, achieving superiority. Gene believes that Finny procured these elaborate diversions simply to derail his attempts at success. The reality is, Finny, in no way, would ever work to undermine the achievement of his friend. Gene is truly at fault here. While he obsesses over his studies and being better overall than his friend, letting jealousy get the best of him, Finny goes on happily with his life, carefree and blissfully ignorant of what enmity is brewing within his friend. When Finny finally realizes what has been concerning Gene all of this time, that he, like anyone else needs to study, Finny reacts like a true, good friend should: "He looked at me with an interested, surprised expression. 'You want to study?'

I began to feel a little uneasy at this mildness of his, so I sighed heavily. 'Never mind, forget it. I know, I joined the club, I'm going. What else can I do?'

'Don't go.' He said it very simply and casually, as though he were saying, "nice day." 'Don't go. What the hell, it's only a game' " (57).

After Gene hears this, his defenses lower. After all, with such a nonchalant, innocent reply, it is impossible to detect any hint of ill intentions at all. Finny wants Gene to do well and always has. Later, Finny claims that he never knew that Gene had to study. Gene never really accepts

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Finny's innocence, though, because he ends up going along with him to the tree later. One of the most pivotal events of the book occurs shortly after the confrontation when Gene "jounces" the tree limb, knocking Finny off the tree and maiming him. It is evident, therefore, that the fiercely competitive attitude Gene adopts in an attempt to be superior to Finny fails, in that he ultimately becomes a detriment to their friendship as a whole.

World War II, though it is a background theme, also influences the relationship between Gene and Finny. The two of them are emotionally uptight with the looming future of the draft. Gene contemplates what it will mean for him to enlist and leave the "separate peace" of the Devon School. He claims that he "owed no one anything" (102) and, therefore should be able to make whatever choice he pleases. By saying this, though, he entirely ignores Finny. To enlist would mean that Gene leaves everyone close to him behind, and his friendship with Finny would be destroyed once and for all. Though we are never sure whether he actually does enlist, the mere idea of it troubles Finny. When Gene breaks the news to him, it is evident that he does not like the idea of it. Though he doesn't say it outright, Fin's expressions and feelings express his opposition to this idea. More and more, it becomes evident that Gene and Finny do not exist on the same plane of thought, which eventually brings their friendship apart.

Throughout the book, Finny has little or no problems getting along with Gene, whereas Gene comes to ruin their friendship entirely. It began with the jouncing of the limb when he managed to take away one of Finny's greatest strengths: athleticism. One thing Gene never could strip Finny of was his goodness. Even after the incident, Finny continued to deny the fact that his best friend was responsible for crippling him and went on with life as if he was never injured. Finny always gave Gene a second chance, but Gene just did not see it.