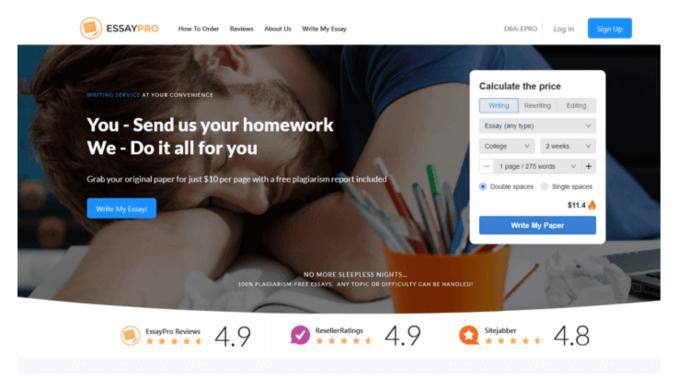
Separate Peace Essay: Self-Examination in A Separate Peace



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Self-Examination

A Separate Peace opens as Gene Forrester returns to Devon School, a New England prep school, about fifteen years after he was in attendance there. World War II had just begun then and he remembers the Summer Suicide Society--an organization founded by his best friend, Finny, which devotes itself to initiating members by having them jump from the tree into the river. Gene and Finny always had to take the first jump from the tree. As time goes on, Gene begins to resent Finny because of his athletic talents and on one occasion, he jounces the limb so that Finny will fall. Finny's leg is shattered, preventing him from playing any sports, but Finny refuses to believe that Gene could have done this, even though Gene confesses. When Finny returns to school, he wants to develop Gene into a good athlete for the 1944 Olympics. As one of the many examples of opposing elements contrasted with each other, Gene tells Finny that sports are not important because of the war, which Finny refuses to believe. A while later, some boys from the prep school take Gene and Finny to a big assembly room, where they want to clear up the matter of Finny's broken leg. Gene realizes that he is being put on trial, Finny refuses to answer any

questions because he trusts his friend, Finny leaves the room agitated, slips on the stairs, and breaks the same leg again. At the hospital, Finny has a changed attitude and asks Gene why he pushed him out of the tree. Gene says the act was a blind impulse. Later that day, Finny dies when some Q~i~ bone marrow gets into his bloodstream. Looking back on the experience, Gene believes that he was never very interested in the war because he was waging his own personal war between the acceptance of the clearly defined prep school values and Finny's laid-back values. He had killed his enemy at school.

Knowles' book focuses on the adolescent period of life. Adolescence is a very confusing time of life, primarily because a person fluctuates from wanting to be a child and being innocent to wanting to be an adult and questioning life. Knowles emphasizes that both worlds of adolescent and adult life share many similarities and overlap often--they are not separate entities. Even in the green, neatly kept paradise of Devon School, there existed some areas of uncontrolled wilderness.

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