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# Sample

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## Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



*A Separate Peace*  
John Knowles

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## *Response Journal*

### **To The Student**

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

## **CHAPTER 1**

1. As in this novel, many writers frequently use weather to set a mood. Imagine the hallway of your school just before or after the first bell rings on a winter morning. Try to describe the scene and, in so doing, try to convey a mood. Include sounds and smells in your description, as well as visual images.
2. As the story opens, we meet a man who is visiting his old high school after an absence of 15 years. He has pointed out to us the marble stairs in the First Academy Building and the large tree by the river, which at one time had been of great importance to him. In his mind, the tree has diminished in size, and he says, “Nothing endures, not a tree, not love, not even death by violence.” Based on what he has said so far, what do you think this story will be about?
3. Speaking of Gene’s jump from the tree, Finny says, “You were very good once I shamed you into it.” Although Gene denies that he was shamed into jumping, he knows that was the case. Were you ever shamed into doing something that you didn’t really want to do? Have you ever seen that happen to anyone else?
4. As the author has described the school so far, does it sound like a school you’d like or dislike attending? Give some reasons for your decision.



## CHAPTER 3

9. The day they invented blitzball, did you notice Gene's feelings about always being the one to get the ball? Imagine he's on the telephone that evening with a friend from school who is not attending summer school.

**Gene:** Oh, we invented a game today that we call blitzball.

**Friend:**

10. At the end of the first part of Chapter Three, Gene says that because Finny made up all the rules for blitzball, he (Finny) was very good at the game. He adds, "I didn't really think about it myself. What difference did it make? It was just a game. It was good that Finny could shine at it. He could also shine at many other things, with people for instance, the others in our dormitory, the faculty; in fact, if you stopped to think about it, Finny could shine with everyone, he attracted everyone he met. I was glad of that too. Naturally. He was my roommate and my best friend." If it were you, do you think you would feel as Gene feels? How does Gene feel, in reality?
11. In a letter to a friend, tell about Finny's breaking the swimming record held by A. Hopkins Parker and relate Gene's and Finny's feelings about it.
12. How much do you think you are like Finny? If you find him a likable person, what is it you like about him? If you find him unlikable, what is it you don't like about him?

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27. At the end of this chapter, Gene sees a light under the door in his room. After opening his door, describe what you think he might have felt. To do so, try to put yourself in his place.

## **CHAPTER 8**

28. Gene says, “I had welcomed each new day as though it were a new life, where all past failures and problems were erased, and all future possibilities and joys open and available to be achieved.” This would be a great way to live if you could do it, but do you suppose anyone can really be like that? How?
29. In a moment of lost control, Finny says, “Because I’ve suffered...” Gene then says Phineas had been startled “to discover this bitterness in himself.” Has this ever happened to you, or have you seen it happen to someone else when some deep emotion comes out quite unexpectedly?
30. Gene goes on to say that neither of us “ever mentioned it again, and neither of us ever forgot that it was there.” How would you describe the friendship of Gene and Finny at this point? Is it the kind of friendship most people would envy or reject?

## CHAPTER 11

38. The next morning, describe to a friend who had not been present at “The Trial” what happened last evening.

**You:** You missed all the excitement last night!

**Friend:**

39. What is your opinion of Brinker at this point? If you had been present at “The Trial,” is there anything you would have liked to have said to Gene or Brinker?
40. Brinker says that because Gene and the others pity Finny, no one ever mentions Finny’s bad leg but himself. He also says, “What’s everybody beating around the bush for? He’s crippled and that’s that. He’s got to accept it and unless we start acting perfectly natural about it, and even kid him about it once in a while, he never will.” Gene disagrees with this. What’s your opinion? In this situation, is it better to ignore a friend’s disability or mention it?
41. At one point Gene, as narrator, says, “If when Brinker had said ‘Let us pray,’ I had said ‘Go to Hell,’ everything might have been saved.” The advantage of having an adult narrator relate an event that took place 15 years earlier is that the narrator can make judgments that were not made at the time. Looking back on an earlier event in your life, relate an incident from your present perspective and include some understanding that time has given you.