

# **Student Essay on Gene's Biggest Enemy In A Separate Peace: Himself**

**Gene's Biggest Enemy In A Separate Peace: Himself  
by John Knowles**

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## Essay

The novel, *A Separate Peace*, revolves around one character more than any other. The name of this complex character is Gene. John Knowles presents these complexities many times throughout this great piece of literature. Gene is the narrator. He is however very unreliable regarding insights into his own reasoning and motivations. Gene is a disturbed young man, who has failed to change during his adolescence and not even when we are confronted with his later self. He constantly is fighting his own private war.

Gene is constantly confronted with WW2. Throughout the story however, we realize that Gene is going through his own little private war, and that the boarding school is his battle ground. This war is fought on two fronts, his mind and his social life. In his mind he suspects his best friend, Finny, of conspiring against him. He believes that Finny is holding him back from studying, and thus doesn't want him to become head of his class (Valedictorian), thinking that Finny feels superior in their relationship and wants to keep it that way. After reading the novel however, you realize that this is all in his mind.

The other front, his social life, is being fought every day. It's typical boarding-school life. People fight for popularity and are competitive in academics and athletics. Finny is more popular and more athletic than Gene. Gene solves this problem by causing Finny to fall off the tree. At this time us readers don't now for sure if it was deliberate or not, and neither do Gene or Finny. Eventually we find out that it was deliberate, but that maybe he did it subconsciously. We are confronted with this Idea when Finny says, "It was just some kind of blind impulse, you didn't know what you were doing...."p. 191, and Gene confirms that.

But was it really just a blind impulse? Or was it Gene going through an emotional phase, confronted with feelings like jealousy and hate, and very unsure about his relationship with Finny. We will never now for sure. "He had never been jealous of me for a second. Now I knew that there never was and never could have been any rivalry between us." This is when Gene realizes that doubting their friendship was simple paranoia, that the only enemy is himself