

In the novel A Separate Peace by John Knowles, Leper says “Everything has to evolve or else it perishes” (117). Knowles illustrates the idea that, in life, people must mature and adapt to their surroundings in order to survive the adult world and the harsh realities it entails. The river motifs illustrate Gene’s ability to evolve, or mature throughout the novel A Separate Peace by John Knowles.

The Devon River is symbolic of Gene’s childhood innocence. While Gene is on his way to the Crew House, he stops and looks back at the Devon River. He describes the river’s course as, “determined by some familiar hills a little inland; it rose among highland farms and forests which we knew” (76). Gene looks back at the Devon’s course and realizes that he is familiar with the course of the river and all the features enclosing it. Gene still possesses his childhood innocence because of his familiarity with his old ways of life. The Devon River represents Gene before his transformation from childhood to adulthood.

The Naguamsett River is symbolic of maturity and the unfamiliarity of adulthood. When Gene is walking towards the Crew House, he sees the Naguamsett River on his way. Gene describes the journey of the Naguamsett River, and that “A few miles away it was joined to the ocean, so that its movements were governed by unimaginable factors like the Gulf stream, the Polar Ice Cap, and the moon” (76). Gene does not know the Naguamsett River well because he has not spent any time in it during the summer session. The Naguamsett River is unfamiliar to Gene because it goes along a different route than the Devon River and it is controlled by factors that Gene does not quite understand yet, like the Gulf stream and the moon. The Naguamsett River represents

adulthood because it is unclear, unfamiliar and controlled by many different factors that Gene is not quite comfortable with yet. Like adulthood, Gene does not understand the Naguamsett River either. The Naguamsett River represents Gene's fear of his ability to adapt and mature in order to survive the adult world.

The waterfall and diving dam are symbolic of Gene's rough transition from childhood to adulthood. When Gene is walking towards the Crew House, he notices the end of the Devon River's course. He realizes that the Devon River "passed at the end of its course through the school grounds, and then threw itself with little spectacle over a small waterfall beside the diving dam and into the turbid Naguamsett" (76). The Devon River ends with a rough transition and continues flowing into the unfamiliar Naguamsett River. Similar to the Devon's transition into the Naguamsett, Gene's childhood ends with a rough transition from childhood into the unfamiliar world of adulthood. Gene must overcome a rough and difficult transition in order to survive and evolve properly into the harsh adult world.

Gene's ability to evolve and make a rough but steady transition to adulthood throughout the novel illustrates the idea that in life people must be able to mature and adapt to their surroundings in order to survive the harsh adult world. Leper was right that, "Everything has to evolve or else it perishes" (117).