

In A Separate Peace by John Knowles Leper states, “Everything has to evolve or it perishes” (125). This illustrates that everything must go through a transition period in order to survive and grow both mentally and physically. Knowles illustrates this is true as Phineas fails to complete his transition into adulthood, and as a result ‘perishes.’

Finny’s disregard for the rules illustrates his childlike innocence. When Phineas is wearing his bright pink ‘emblem’ sweater, Mr. Patch-Withers asks about it and Finny politely explains the meaning of his shirt. Gene observes how easily Finny explains this and comes to a realization, “I was beginning to see that Phineas would get away with anything” (25). Phineas is characterized as having a childlike innocence and purity about him because of his ease, carelessness, and ability to ‘charm’ his way out of any awkward situation or consequences. He simply explains the meaning of the sweater from his point of view, and how events and objects relate to it. What Finny says conveys truth and genuineness to it, as if he did not know the consequences of his actions.

Phineas’ attempt at a transition into his adolescence is illustrated when Finny jumps off the tree with Gene and breaks his leg. A few days after Gene comes to visit Finny in the infirmary and notices, “His eyes studied me as though I were the patient. They no longer had their sharp good humor, but had become clouded and visionary” (65). Finny is not quite sure of what to do in his predicament, so his eyes are ‘clouded’ and not clear. The obvious answer that Gene has jostled the limb is not plausible to Finny so he doubts the clarity and recollection of the events. He is not quite sure if he is ready to face the conflict between him and Gene. Finny cannot accept that a best friend would want to hurt him. Finny has already disregarded the rules before, but continues to ignore them. He realizes that jumping from the tree and sneaking out after supper is forbidden but he continues to do it. This time though, Finny’s actions do not go

unpunished. This time Phinny suffers. His broken leg is a natural consequence and result of his disregard for the rules.

The final attempt for Finny's transition to adulthood occurs when Gene and Finny are put on 'trial' by Brinker and their friends, "The words shocked Finny into awareness. He whirled as though being attacked from behind. 'You get the rest of the facts, Brinker!' he cried. 'You get all your facts!' I had never seen Finny crying, 'You collecting every f---ing fact there is in the world!' He plunged out the doors" (177). The 'trial' forces Finny to face conflict directly, and be 'thrown' into his transition which he is not ready for. The words that shocked Finny were the 'facts' that Brinker was pointing out, which caused him to come to a realization that he was unprepared for, he was shocked by the words once he grasped what they meant and proved which was that Gene jostled the limb. Since Finny was forced to see this conflict, he faces an aggressive transition and yet still refuses to accept the conflict because he wants to hold on to his childlike innocence. The trial represents how Finny's reluctance to obey by the rules caught up with him.

In A Separate Peace by John Knowles, Phineas fails to complete his transition into adulthood because he comes to a realization with conflict too late and fails to evolve. The consequence of this is Finny dying. According to Lepers quote, "Everything has to evolve or it perishes" (125). Phineas dies because he was forced to see conflict, and pushed into his transition when he was not ready. He did not 'evolve' or grow fast enough on a mental and physical level to become an adult, and as a result, perished.