

According to Leper Lepellier, “Everything has to evolve or else it perishes” (117). This suggests that one must adapt to one’s surroundings or else one will be destroyed. This is true because, in *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles, the course of Gene and Phineas’ friendship, as represented by the imagery of the broken bone, fails to adapt and therefore shatters.

Gene’s denial of the extent of Phineas’ injury represents his refusal to accept that the friendship is ruined. While Phineas resides in the infirmary, Dr. Stanpole tells Gene that Finny is recovering and will be able to walk again. Shocked by the degree of Phineas’ injury, Gene questions, “...if his leg’s still there... then if it isn’t amputated and the bones are still there, then it must come back the way it was, why wouldn’t it? Of course it will” (63). Gene upset because he finds that Finny will no longer be able to participate in sports. Gene feels guilty that he deprives Finny of sports, an activity that Finny truly enjoys. Symbolically, the broken bone represents the first fault in the friendship. Gene, still having a childlike innocence, fails to see the conflict that he has created between himself and Finny and therefore refuses to believe that their relationship is damaged.

Gene continues to deny the seriousness of Finny’s injury in the hopes of saving their friendship from destruction. After a snowball fight in the Fields Beyond, Gene cautions Finny about the dangers of hurting his leg again. Finny responds, “No, of course I won’t break it again. Isn’t the bone supposed to be stronger when it grows together over a place where it’s been broken once?” (155). Gene and Finny both hope that Finny’s leg is growing stronger. Figuratively, the recovery of the bone represents a stronger friendship. In this moment, Finny forgives Gene. He attempts to convince Gene

that his leg is truly becoming stronger, in order to convince himself that their friendship will survive. Neither Gene nor Phineas is prepared to acknowledge the conflict between themselves, so they refer to the broken bone instead. Because the boys fail to evolve to face conflict, their friendship is struggling to survive.

Because Gene still holds on to innocence, he refuses to believe the friendship is broken until he is forced to see conflict. After Phineas' surgery, Dr. Stanpole painfully relates to Gene that the surgery was not successful. He says, "As I was moving the bone some of the marrow must have escaped into his bloodstream and gone directly to his heart and stopped it" (193). Finny dies during the operation. Symbolically, Finny's death shows that the conflict he is forced to recognize breaks his heart. Finny cannot bear to live in a world where one's friend is disloyal. Therefore, he perishes.

Because Gene and Finny both share childlike innocence, neither is prepared to face the destruction of their friendship. This is represented through the imagery of the bone, as it is broken and as it is in the process of recovery. Gene and Finny fail to evolve to face conflict and therefore their friendship perishes.