

100 Sideways Miles Study Guide

100 Sideways Miles by Andrew Smith

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Contents

[100 Sideways Miles Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....3](#)

[Part 1 The Perigee Moon: The Quit Mission, Twenty Miles Per Second, Five Euros in Dollars....4](#)

[Part 1 The Perigee Moon: Shirts, Skins, Frisbees and Flounders; Doors That Open and Open; Space Dogs and Bullfighters.....7](#)

[Part 1 The Perigee Moon: The Politics of Teenage Grudges; My Neighbor Julia; Pizza-Delivery Boy.....9](#)

[Part 1 The Perigee Moon: William Mulholland's Self-Taught Mistake; One Atom At a Time; Blake Grunwald's Shitty Party; The Governor of California.....12](#)

[Part 2 The Perseids: Unlucky Lindy; I Am Not a Cannibal; Sticky Atoms.....14](#)

[Part 2 The Perseids: The Driving Range; I Need An Extra Bag; The Boy in the Book.....17](#)

[Part 2 The Perseids: A Play About the Epileptic Boy and Ants; The Lake That Isn't a Lake; Welcoming the Aliens; Going Home.....19](#)

[Part 3 The Planet of Humans and Dogs: The Slowpoke Moon; The Berlin Wall; True Grits.....21](#)

[Part 3 The Planet of Humans and Dogs: The Boy, The Dog and The Epileptic; The Dog Hospital; A Detour in the Year We Grew Up; The Lazarus Door.....23](#)

[Characters.....26](#)

[Symbols and Symbolism.....29](#)

[Settings.....31](#)

[Themes and Motifs.....32](#)

[Styles.....34](#)

[Quotes.....36](#)



Plot Summary

Finn Easton and his best friend, Cade Hernandez, are juniors in high school in San Francisquito, California. Finn measures time in miles because it takes the earth to travel around the sun at 20 miles per second, so in about four seconds, the earth travels about 100 miles. When he was seven, Finn had been injured and his mother killed when a dead horse falls from a truck driving over a bridge and hits them. In Finn's calculations, in the time it took for the horse to fall on him and his mother, it fell 100 sideways miles.

As a result of the accident, Finn is epileptic and had back surgery which left him with a distinctive pattern of scars on his back. Finn's father is a popular author and included elements about Finn in his book which tells the story of a boy with epilepsy and an obvious scar who longs to be normal in a world where winged aliens invade earth and try to eat people. Even though his father says the boy character is not Finn, Finn can't help but feel that his life is showcased in the book but he doesn't have any idea how it turns out.

Finn's best friend, Cade Hernandez, is a good-looking renegade who antagonizes teachers but he always has Finn's best interests at heart. Finn's father doesn't like Finn hanging out with Cade but Finn loves the adventures he has with his friend and savors the time spent away from his family who tend to be overprotective because of Finn's epilepsy.

Finn falls in love with Julia Bishop, a girl who transfers to his school late in the year because she needs to be away from her Chicago home to recover from her boyfriend's raping her. Finn is heartbroken when Julia decides to return to Chicago a few months later. Finn and Cade's destinies alter when on their way to a college visit in Oklahoma they rescue a boy and an old man from their van trapped in a flooding river. They realize that it is up to them to create their own destinies so they switch gears and head to Chicago to see Julia instead.



Part 1 The Perigee Moon: The Quit Mission, Twenty Miles Per Second, Five Euros in Dollars

Summary

Finn Easton muses that he has come from the pages of a book that his father wrote, and that his life has already been scripted by his father. Finn attends Burnt Mill Creek High School with his friend Cade Hernandez where the teachers are always trying to get the kids to quit something: drinking, driving too fast, etc. The current quit mission is spearheaded by history teacher, Mr. Nossik, who wants the kids to quit saying "fuck." Mr. Nossik likes to dress up to make history lessons more interesting. One day he is dressed like a Nazi officer and Cade relentlessly asks him why Cade gets an erection in his class every day. Mr. Nossik's patience with Cade expires but the class loves Cade for his irreverence. Mr. Nossik orders Cade to leave the room.

In *Twenty Miles Per Second*, Finn outlines his theory that distance is more important than time. He determines that the earth travels twenty miles each second, based on his calculations of earth's distance from the sun, factoring in 365 days. Finn is epileptic and he always knows when an attack is imminent because he smells flowers and then he sees beautiful patterns of atoms in his head. Finn also has heterochromatic eyes, one green, one blue. Finn became epileptic as a result of an accident involving a dead horse that killed his mother.

When Finn was 7 years-old, he and his mother were walking along a creek bed one day when a knackery truck overturned on the bridge above them. A dead horse fell out of the truck and fell onto Finn and his mother, killing her and injuring him severely. Finn feels as if the whole world is filled with knackery which is waste elements that are rendered into other items. Finn determines that the horse fell 100 sideways miles because it took about four seconds for that horse to fall 300 feet, during which time the earth traveled approximately 100 miles. Finn had to have pins put in his back to help his vertebrae heal and is left with scars that look like colons, vertical slash, colons. Finn declares that he is fine now even though people can't see what's going on inside him.

In *Five Euros in Dollars*, Finn tells about his best friend, Cade Hernandez, who devises a plan in which all the students taking a California educational standards test will use a repeating pattern of the initials from his name--C, A, D, E--as their answers to the multiple choice questions on the test. Cade is an excellent baseball player for the high school team but he chews tobacco because the coaches do it and it seems to be a rite of passage. Finn is afraid that Cade will get kicked out of school one day and Finn will no longer have a ride to school.



Cade and Finn look a lot alike and many people think they are brothers. They are both tall and bony with blonde hair. Cade and Finn have been friends since they were 10 years-old. When they were in fifth grade, Finn told Cade about the horse accident and that his stepmother, Tracy, was not his real mother. Cade is intensely curious about the scars on Finn's back and comes up with new names for them all the time. Cade works at Flat Face Pizza so he and Finn eat there a couple times a week because they get free food.

Cade's nickname is Win-Win which he earned when he allowed a German exchange student named Monica Fassbinder to pay him for the privilege of giving him hand jobs in the custodian's shed. Cade makes about thirty dollars a week and spends the money on tobacco. One day Cade asks Finn about the amount of euros in five dollars because Monica has started to pay him in euros. Finn confirms that Cade is still on the winning side of the deal. Finn is envious because he has never even held a girl's hand before.

Analysis

The author establishes the two main characters in the story: Finn Easton and Cade Hernandez. They are juniors in high school in California and have been friends since they were 10 years-old. Finn and Cade are best friends even though they are almost polar opposites. Finn is more studious and introverted with a poetic view of life while Cade is more outgoing and loves to get attention, even if it is negative. The of their friendship will grow as the story extends.

The author also gives the reason for the title of the book in this section. Finn explains the accident in which a dead horse fell off a bridge and hit him and his mother, killing her and severely injuring him. Finn determines that the horse fell 100 sideways miles because it took about four seconds for that horse to fall 300 feet, during which time the earth traveled approximately 100 miles. Finn is obsessed with distance rather than time and always gives the distance that something could go whenever a time is stated.

The theme of Sex becomes important in this section because Cade is always talking about his erections. Cade measures everything in terms of whether it gives him an erection or not. Cade is light years ahead of Finn in the sex exploration aspect because while Cade is being paid by a German girl to give him hand jobs every day, Finn hasn't even held a girl's hand. As the story continues, sex will be a continuing topic between the two friends.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Finn think it is a negative thing that his father's book seems to characterize Finn?



Discussion Question 2

What is a Quit Mission?

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean when Finn says the horse fell "100 sideways miles"?

Vocabulary

scripted, epileptic, alien, motivational, perseverance, integrity, tectonic, catastrophic, commemorate, atheist, genocidal, lectern, defiance, quavering, reminiscent, chaotic, egotistical, heterochromatic, knackery, barren, orchestrated, skepticism, incisors, emoticon,



Part 1 The Perigee Moon: Shirts, Skins, Frisbees and Flounders; Doors That Open and Open; Space Dogs and Bullfighters

Summary

Finn describes how he feels just prior to an epileptic seizure. He usually smells something sweet like flowers or maple syrup and then he's unable to find the words for anything he sees or is feeling. Overall, Finn loves the feeling. Finn recalls blanking out after taking a hot shower in the boys' locker room after a game one day and being embarrassed because one of the paramedics was a woman who saw him naked. After a seizure, Finn feels exhausted and depressed and he prefers the world where everything is beautiful and soundless during a seizure.

In *Doors That Open and Open*, Finn tells about his author father who wrote the book, *The Lazarus Door*, in which tiny aliens that look like angels arrive from space and take over the world. The visitors, called incomers, like to rape and eat humans. The book created a lot of controversy but was so popular that a movie was made about it. Two years after Finn's mother died, his father married a pediatric nurse named Tracy Snow. Finn also has a 6 year-old half sister named Nadia and they all live in a big house in San Francisquito Canyon, California. Finn meets a beautiful girl named Julia Bishop who transfers to his high school late in the year. He learns that she lives in his neighborhood and he has never been so nervous around a girl before.

In *Space Dogs and Bullfighters*, Finn talks about his dog, Laika, who is named for the Russian dog of the same name which died in a Russian space mission. Laika likes to roll around in dead things so she is kept in a crate outdoors. Finn can't stop thinking about Julia Bishop but doesn't have the nerve to approach her even though they live in the same neighborhood. Finn's actual next door neighbor is Manny Castellan, a 73 year-old man who is a former bullfighter from Mexico. Manny likes Finn and gives him the bullfighter name "Caballito," which means little horse.

Analysis

Finn is an unusual boy in that he actually enjoys the time during an epileptic seizure. He can tell one is coming on by the sweet smell of flowers or maple syrup. Then he loses the ability to remember words and just blanks out to a place where shapes and colors swirl with no sound. Finn hates the aftermath of a seizure because he is exhausted and depressed.



The theme of Love becomes important in this section of the book. Finn talks about how his father fell in love with Tracy Snow and how Finn also loves her and calls her Mom. In a different form of love, Finn is infatuated with the new girl at school, Julia Bishop, but he has never even held hands with a girl before so he is in awe of her and is afraid to approach her.

The author also provides the premise for Finn's father's book which will haunt Finn throughout the story. The main character in the book is named Finn and Finn doesn't like the path of the story about angelic space visitors who come to earth to rape and kill. Finn finds it hard to believe that his father could conceive of such weird ideas but the book has provided a nice living for the family so there's nothing Finn can say about it.

Discussion Question 1

What is it about an epileptic seizure that Finn particularly enjoys?

Discussion Question 2

What is so disturbing to Finn about his father's book, The Lazarus Door?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Finn so hesitant to talk to Julia Bishop even though he likes her?

Vocabulary

grudge, mottled, strategized, simultaneously, microscopic, atomic, calamities, supernova, wondrous, dumbfounded, obsessed, incinerated, rendered



Part 1 The Perigee Moon: The Politics of Teenage Grudges; My Neighbor Julia; Pizza-Delivery Boy

Summary

Cade arrives with a suitcase of clothes at Finn's house because he will be staying with him while Finn's family is out of town for a week. When Finn whines that he never gets to go anywhere, Tracy reminds Finn that he will be going on a college visit with Cade in the summer. If Cade doesn't get drafted to a major league baseball team, he and Finn want to attend Dunston University in Oklahoma because of their great baseball program. The next morning, Finn has his regular Saturday morning coffee on the patio with his father and he tells Finn that it's time he started shaving. Finn's father is always afraid that something will happen to Finn so he warns him to keep his phone charged and not ride in Cade's truck if Cade has been drinking. Finn tells his father about his interactions with Julia Bishop and his father states that Julia is definitely flirting with Finn which pleases him. Before leaving, Finn's father and stepmother issues last minute good behavior warnings to Finn and Cade.

In My Neighbor Julia, Cade and Finn spend the afternoon swimming in Finn's pool and sunning themselves. Cade tells Finn about all the places where Monica has ever given him a hand job. Cade has to go to work at Flat Face Pizza but promises to bring dinner home when he gets off work that night. When Cade is gone, Finn has a seizure walking back into his house from the front yard. Before he goes completely out, Finn sees the image of two little girls standing across the room. Finn wakes and realizes that he has urinated all over himself and the floor and he is lying halfway in the house with the front door open.

Finn then hears a voice asking if he is okay and he soon learns that it is Julia Bishop who had been out walking and saw that the door was open. Finn want to die from embarrassment because he is practically naked, lying in his own urine with a big erection. Finn is able to get up, cover himself and run upstairs to the shower while Julia waits downstairs.

In Pizza-Delivery Boy, Finn sits in the bathroom after his shower because he is depressed, his head hurts and he really wants to sleep. He finally exits the room and calls down to apologize to Julia for his rude behavior. Finn is horrified when Julia tells him that she cleaned up the mess at the front door. Suddenly, Cade enters with Monica, carrying two large pizzas and is in shock to see such a beautiful girl like Julia with Finn. Cade is drunk and his behavior embarrasses Finn who goes to his room to think.



Analysis

The theme of Friendship is important in this section. When Finn's parents have to go out of town for a week, Cade stays with Finn just in case he has a seizure and needs help. They don't really discuss what Cade is doing or why he is doing it; Cade just knows that Finn is vulnerable and he wants Finn to be safe. Finn's father is not crazy about Cade because he thinks he is too wild but he is Finn's best friend and he honors that. Finn and Cade even plan to attend the same college—Dunston University in Oklahoma—if Cade is not called up to the major leagues.

The author uses some foreshadowing when mentioning the planned university visit Finn and Cade will make in the summer. What happens on that trip will be dramatic and for the first time, Finn and Cade will realize that they are the ones in control of their destinies.

There is also some foreshadowing in the mention of the two little girls that Finn sees as he is having a seizure. Their identity will be revealed later in the book as it relates to a natural disaster that occurred in the area many years ago.

Finn finally gets some alone time with Julia Bishop but under the most embarrassing of circumstances. Luckily for Finn, Julia just happens to be passing by when she sees the front door of Finn's house standing wide open. Finn had had a seizure and hadn't made it completely inside. Not only is Finn humiliated by his physical state, but he is always angry and rude after a seizure and he can't seem to help himself from being abrupt with Julia because she has tried to help him. When Cade returns, he can't believe that Finn would have someone as beautiful as Julia Bishop in the house and jumps to the conclusion that she and Finn have had sex, embarrassing Finn even more.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Cade staying with Finn while Finn's parents are out of town?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Finn especially embarrassed that Julia Bishop has discovered him after he had a seizure?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Cade so shocked to see Julia Bishop in Finn's house?



Vocabulary

countered, autopilot, conjure, intent, clenched, puberty, vagueness, chromosomes, admonitions, perigee, reclaimed, dejected, pivoted, ridiculous, seizure, hurtling, contemplate, ruination, wheezing



Part 1 The Perigee Moon: William Mulholland's Self-Taught Mistake; One Atom At a Time; Blake Grunwald's Shitty Party; The Governor of California

Summary

Cade convinces Finn to join the others downstairs where they ate pizza and Cade drank more beer and chewed tobacco. Cade announces that they're all going to a party at Blake Grunwald's house because they have beer and girls. Since Cade is drunk Julia offers to drive but they have to walk to her house to get her car. On the walk, Finn tells Julia about William Mulholland who built a concrete dam in San Francisquito Canyon in 1926 which filled the canyon with a huge reservoir. The dam collapsed, however, and 12 billion gallons of water were released into the canyon. Hundreds of people died and bodies were washed away as far as Mexico.

In One Atom at a Time, Finn asks Julia where she came from and she tells him she came through a Lazarus Door. Julia had noticed the scar pattern on Finn's back earlier that night as well as the color of his eyes and makes the connection with the book. Julia drives the group to the party after they stop at Finn's house to make sure Laika is okay.

In Blake Grunwald's Shitty Party, Cade is really drunk so Finn finds Cade a bedroom at Blake's house so he can lie down. When Finn returns to the party, he notices that Julia and Monica are gone and he finds them outside talking by Julia's car. Monica wants to go home so Julia offers to drive her and Finn rides along and they return to Blake's house to get Cade. Finn learns that Julia had come to San Francisquito from Chicago because she needed to get away for awhile and her parents sent her to live with her aunt and uncle for awhile. Julia is reluctant to tell Finn why she had to get away but does say that her parents were afraid of her boyfriend who was a hockey player. As they talk, Finn leans in to kiss Julia and they are suddenly interrupted by Cade who is anxious to leave because he has vomited all over Blake's house.

In The Governor of California, Julia takes Finn and Cade to Finn's house. The next day, they swim again and Cade recovers from a hangover. At school on Monday, the governor arrives to commend the junior class because they all scored an advanced rating on the state achievement test. Later that day, the students are treated to ice cream and Sacramento Tourism bags filled with toiletries and new underwear from a recently closed disaster relief warehouse.



Analysis

The author provides some historical background on the San Francisquito canyon flood in 1928 which will become important as the story extends. The town is built around a canyon which renders the area inhabitable when it rains hard still to this day. People on one side of the canyon often host people on the other side of the canyon when they can't get to their homes due to flooding. Finn attributes this situation to the fact that the man who designed the original dam was a self taught civil engineer.

Finn is both pleased and amazed that Julia has taken note of his idiosyncracies such as the scars on his back and the two colors of his eyes. Finn is getting bolder with Julia Bishop and he tries to learn more about her past and why she would transfer to a new school so late in the year. Julia is vague with Finn but he feels closer to her and soon takes a risk and kisses her. Finn is over the moon with excitement and can't believe his good luck to be near someone so wonderful as Julia.

The author uses a lot of humor in the book and the situation of the governor's visit is very funny. The governor has come to the high school to commend the students for their high scores on the state achievement tests. No one but the students who took the test know that it was all a game; that they had simply used Cade's initials—C, A, D, E—to answer the multiple choice questions. Amazingly, the answers were correct and everyone in the class thinks that Cade is a genius.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Finn be so interested in the flood disaster of 1928?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Finn react the way he does when Julia says she has come through a Lazarus Door?

Discussion Question 3

Why is the governor's visit to the high school so funny to the students?

Vocabulary

pathetic, complex, multitasking, trudges, lingering, reservoir, corpses, mangled, fetid, carcass, contrition, stranded, devise, aroused, startlingly, particles, cannibal, churning, gaited, flustered, exasperating, unblemished, wobbling, inane, ambidextrous, mascot, insignificant



Part 2 The Perseids: Unlucky Lindy; I Am Not a Cannibal; Sticky Atoms

Summary

Mr. Nossik dresses like Charles Lindbergh to bring history to life again. Finn notices that he looks bloated and uncomfortable in his get-up and warns Cade to go easy on him. Mr. Nossik immediately sends Cade to the back of the room to avoid any outbursts from him. Cade makes the mistake of asking if Lindbergh had masturbated during his long flight and that the NASA astronauts do it on space flights and that sends Mr. Nossik over the edge and he orders Cade out of the room. Mr. Nossik then turns red, slumps over his desk and dies the next day from a brain aneurysm. Nobody ever messed with Cade after that.

In *I Am Not a Cannibal*, Finn realizes that he is in love with Julia Bishop. One day she drives them into the canyon to explore the dam. Finn is nervous because he has never been alone with a beautiful girl before. Julia then tells Finn the real reason why she came to San Francisquito. Her boyfriend back home in Chicago had raped her and her parents wanted her to get away from all the notoriety at her old school.

In *Sticky Atoms*, Charlie Mahan, Julia's Chicago boyfriend was sentenced to Pontiac Correctional Center for the rape and he was beaten to death three months after his arrival there.

Julia and Finn eat lunch at the old dam and talk about sticky atoms which Finn says are caused by love, fear or hate. As an example, he says that ghosts are leftover sticky atoms; they're stubborn and don't want to stop holding on to one another. They also visit a museum dedicated to the dam where Finn sees an old photo of three children, two of whom were the two little girls that Finn saw when he started to have a seizure at his house that day. Their names were Marjorie and Mazie. Julia suggests that the little ghosts felt sorry for Finn and were just looking in on him to make sure he was going to be okay.

Julia tells Finn that she has a surprise for him for his birthday. He is to come over at midnight the night before and stand near her bedroom windows so that he will have his surprise as early as possible on his birthday. Finn's thoughts turn to sex and how he is not really prepared for it and how Julia seems so mature that she is probably more experienced than he is. Finn thinks that he can get some condoms from Cade so he'll be saved from the embarrassment of asking for them at the store. When Julia takes Finn home later, his mother asks Julia if she would like to come to Finn's birthday and she happily accepts.



Analysis

Cade continues to behave disrespectfully in Mr. Nossik's class to get attention. Mr. Nossik's frustration and irritation are almost palpable and he slumps over with a brain aneurysm. Not to say that Cade caused his death but Cade's aura with the other students is ratcheted up because they think he is that powerful.

Julia finally tells Finn the reason why she has come to San Francisco to live. Her being raped by her boyfriend in Chicago makes Finn look at her in a different way. Julia has had so much more experience than he has and he views her with awe. Finn is also hurt because when someone you love has been hurt like that it's natural to feel the same things. All Finn can do is protect her and be sensitive to her feelings.

The theme of Sex continues to be important in this section. Cade talks about Charles Lindbergh and the NASA astronauts masturbating during their missions which sets Mr. Nossik nerves on edge. Cade's thoughts are consumed by sex and he's not embarrassed by talking about it. Likewise, when Julia tells Finn that she has a birthday surprise for him at midnight, his first thought is that she wants to have sex with him. He immediately launches into imaginary scenarios of how he will obtain the necessary condoms before he even knows the real nature of the surprise.

The mystery of the two little blonde girls is partially solved when Finn and Julia see them in a photo at the flood museum. They had been killed in the flood with their father while their mother and baby brother survived. The ability to see ghosts aligns with Finn's seizure activity and inquisitive nature about things that other people don't talk about.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Cade persist in tormenting Mr. Nossik when it is clear that Mr. Nossik doesn't like him?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Julia finally tell Finn about why she has come to San Francisco to live?

Discussion Question 3

Why isn't Finn freaked out when he sees the two little blonde girls in a photo at the dam museum?

Vocabulary

essence, aviator, rendezvous, knickers, seducer, enslave, flustered, spontaneously, ovulate, occurrence, prowess, supremacy, totalitarianism, deploy, aneurysms, lethal, catastrophe, meandered, nautilus, calamitous, incarcerated, eclectic, kinship



Part 2 The Perseids: The Driving Range; I Need An Extra Bag; The Boy in the Book

Summary

While hitting gold balls at the driving range one day, Finn lets Cade know that he needs some condoms and wants some advice on buying them. Cade is surprised and envious that Finn is going to have sex with Julia Bishop. Finn tells him about Julia's promise of a special surprise at midnight for his birthday and Cade loses his concentration on the golf balls but tells Finn he has some condoms he can have.

In *I Need An Extra Bag*, Cade retrieves some condoms from his glove compartment but Finn is worried because he has always heard that you shouldn't store condoms there. Finn returns the condoms because he sees that they have expired so they drive to the 7-Eleven to buy some. One of their former classmates, Markie Rodriguez, is working at the counter and Finn wants to leave but Cade forces him to stay to buy the condoms. Finn is embarrassed as a line of customers grows behind him as he tries to make a selection. Finally Finn makes a choice and Cade adds some tobacco and a box of condoms to the order before they leave.

In *The Boy in the Book*, it is July 15, the day before Finn's birthday, and he is nervous about what will happen tonight at Julia's house at midnight. Finn has morning coffee with his father and Finn asks him how old he was when he first had sex. Finn's father tells Finn that most guys brag about being sexually active when they're really not and he shouldn't let anyone pressure him into feeling like he's not normal because he's not having sex.

That night, Finn reads the instructions in the condom box, showers, dresses and leaves for Julia's house but doesn't take any condoms with him. Finn is nervous as he walks to Julia's but he waits until midnight when he sees shadows move across her bedroom window screen. The first image is a full moon then a figure of a boy walks across the screen and Finn knows that the boy represents him. Suddenly a tiger figure pounces onto the screen and then morphs into a man pointing a finger at the boy. The man then points at the moon and a book shape flutters downward and the boy disappears into the book. Then the window screen goes black. The light flashes again with a birthday message from Julia saying that she loves him. Finn climbs up and whispers to Julia that that's the best birthday wish he ever got and she closes the window. On the walk home, Finn has a seizure and sees Marjorie and Mazie standing nearby.



Analysis

The author uses humor throughout the book and one of the funniest scenes is when Finn goes to the 7-Eleven store to buy condoms. Not only is a former classmate the cashier behind the counter, but a policeman is behind him in line which makes him especially nervous. Then two girls from school come into the store and the reader can almost feel Finn panic with humiliation. Of course, Cade is not embarrassed and he cavalierly adds a box of condoms to the order for good measure.

The theme of Coming of Age is important in this section for a couple reasons. Finn has a discussion about sex with his father regarding what is normal for a boy his age. Finn is concerned that he is behind all the other guys in school who claim to be sexually active. However, Finn's father tells him that most of those boys are just bragging because they aren't really having sex at their age. He also advises Finn not to feel weird because he's not normal and shouldn't let other people pressure him about it. Finn also acts maturely when he decides not to take condoms to Julia's house at midnight. He has made some assumptions about why she wants him to come over and he honestly feels that he's not ready to have sex. Finn is actually relieved when Julia performs the puppet show for him and he realizes that she had not intended for them to have sex that night. Finn knows that he can't use Cade as a measuring stick for appropriate sexual behavior but Cade is really all he has known to gauge himself by up until this point.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Cade be jealous of Finn when Finn asks for his help to get some condoms?

Discussion Question 2

What does Finn's father tell him about having sex that makes Finn really appreciate him?

Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't Finn take any condoms to Julia's house after he has made a big deal about buying some?

Vocabulary

outrage, theoretical, cannibalistic, hovered, edgier, careening, quivering, equestrian, expiration, extinction, doorjamb, seizure, unflinching, provocatively, dilemma, spermicidal, perigee, circuitous, exploratory, pharmaceutical



Part 2 The Perseids: A Play About the Epileptic Boy and Ants; The Lake That Isn't a Lake; Welcoming the Aliens; Going Home

Summary

The next morning, Finn awakens with fire ants crawling all over him so he gets up as soon as he can and strips his clothes off, jumping around trying to get relief from the insects. When Finn arrives home, he tells his parents the truth about where he was last night and where he has been all night. His parents are furious and his stepmother makes him soak in a bath and gives him antihistamines that make him sleep all day. That evening, Finn's father wakes him to see how he is feeling and how the ant bites are. Finn's father tells him that he is sorry for all the things Finn has to go through and wishes he could take them all away. Finn is grateful and says that he'll get cleaned up and come down to his birthday party.

In *The Lake That Isn't A Lake*, Cade, Julia and Finn go on an overnight camping trip in the desert. They end up in a deserted plot of land that had been originally planned as a subdivision called Lake Aberdeen. The trio gets into their sleeping bags to watch the stars and soon Julia crawls into Finn's sleeping bag and they begin kissing. Cade wants to know if they have had sex yet and Finn replies that they haven't. Cade talks about his visit to a sperm bank to make money and how he had had sex with a substitute teacher who took over when Mr. Nossik died.

In *Welcoming the Aliens*, Cade, Julia and Finn break into the abandoned Aberdeen Lake State Penitentiary which was shut down in 1981 after three weeks of riots. As they explore the cell blocks and common areas, Julia snaps pictures and comments that the place is probably haunted. As they walk through the decayed remains of the institution, Finn has a seizure and sees Marjorie and Mazie again.

In *Going Home*, Finn comes to after being blanked out for 70 minutes. Julia and Cade tend to Finn because he had cut his head when he fell to the ground. They tear Cade's t-shirt to stop the cut from bleeding and begin the slow walk back to their camping area. Cade then drives them toward home and Julia tells them that she is moving back to Chicago because she misses her parents and she'll be leaving in a few days.

Analysis

Finn's parents are angry with him when he returns home on the morning of his birthday, not because he had a seizure but because he had sneaked out of the house to go to



Julia's house the night before. His stepmother kicks into nurse mode and takes care of his bites and puts him to bed but it is his father who most sympathizes with Finn because he, too, had once been a teenage boy with all the angst that Finn experiences. Finn's father does tell him, though, that he is sorry for all the things that Finn has to deal with and if he could give him the best present, he would remove all those things from his life.

The theme of Sex continues in the book. Cade is consumed with thinking and talking about sex and he informs Finn and Julia about his sperm bank experience and his tryst with a substitute teacher. Cade is also very interested in whether Finn and Julia have had sex yet and it is always on his mind.

The idea of ghosts is prevalent again when Finn, Cade and Julia break into the abandoned prison. It is eerily quiet and littered with remnants of life that no longer exists. It is interesting to note, too, that Finn again sees the ghostly figures of Marjorie and Mazie when he has a seizure in the prison.

There is a turning point in the story when Julia announces that she is moving back to Chicago. Finn has just found love and now it is going away. How he manages the dilemma at the end of the story will show that Finn will finally know that it's okay to be who he is and that he can make the decisions for his own life.

Discussion Question 1

What are the things that Finn's father wishes he could take away from Finn's life as a gift for him?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the ghosts of Marjorie and Mazie keep appearing when Finn has an epileptic seizure?

Discussion Question 3

How will Julia's decision to return home affect Finn?

Vocabulary

pounce, wakefulness, congealed, mandibles, bipedal, antihistamine, toxic, inscription, disintegration, torrents, potential, recklessness, assumptions, inevitable, spittoon, towline, contented, trifecta, stillborn, turret, atrium



Part 3 The Planet of Humans and Dogs: The Slowpoke Moon; The Berlin Wall; True Grits

Summary

Finn walks to Julia's aunt and uncle's house to say goodbye to her on the morning she leaves for Chicago. Finn tells her she is beautiful and they take a brief walk and Finn kisses her and they agree that they'll see each other again. Finn asks her if he'll ever get out of the book and she tells him that it's up to him to write the ending. Finn then walks home and shuts himself in his room for a couple days, not even pretending to be okay anymore. Then one morning, Finn's father wakes him because he doesn't want Finn to mope anymore. Plus, Finn and Cade are leaving tomorrow for their college visit trip in Oklahoma and he has to get his things together.

Finn is flip to his parents and his father threatens to cancel the school visit trip because they don't think it's a good time for Finn to go. Finn tells him that he is tired of being the broken epileptic boy and there's nothing anybody can do about it. Finn apologizes for being rude and tells his father that he's just sad right now and he needs to go on the college visit trip. So Finn and Cade leave the next morning and Finn is happy to cross the state line into Arizona because he's never been out of California before.

In The Berlin Wall, Finn and Cade drive on toward Oklahoma while Finn answers repeated texts from his father. Cade then throws Finn's phone out the window because he doesn't want Finn's father making them crazy for the whole trip. Cade has purposely left his phone at home. Finn and Cade spend their first night on the road in a cheap hotel near Gallup, New Mexico. Finn constructs what he calls The Berlin Wall consisting of pillows and cushions dividing the bed so that he and Cade won't touch during the night. Cade goes out to buy beer and he gets drunk but Finn only has two. While Finn tries to fall asleep he can hear Cade turning pages of a book and turns to see that it is The Lazarus Door. Cade tells Finn that he can see Finn in the book and Finn is not happy but there's nothing he can do.

In True Grits, the next morning Finn calls his father to tell him that he lost his cell phone somewhere in Arizona. His father makes him promise to call that night when they reach Oklahoma. Finn and Cade go out for breakfast where they eat grits for the first time and then get on their way. When Finn and Cade are about an hour away from the college, it starts to rain and begins flooding at an alarmingly fast rate. The markings on the road disappear and Cade has a hard time driving. Cade had seen a car ahead of them but suddenly the car's tail lights disappear and the boys know that it has gone off the road. They sit in Cade's truck for a couple minutes and decide that they should go see what happened to that other car.



Analysis

The theme of Love continues in this section. Being in love can be painful sometimes as Finn discovers when Julia leaves to return to Chicago. He loves her and wishes she didn't have to go but she misses her home and family and the life she used to live. They agree to see each other again but neither one is sure that that will ever happen. Finn spends a couple days alone in his room as he grieves the loss of Julia's presence in his everyday life.

The theme of Friendship is also important. Finn and Cade plan to attend the same university in Oklahoma if Cade is not picked up by a professional baseball team. Their trip to attend a college visit binds their friendship even more when Finn finds Cade reading *The Lazarus Door* in order to learn more about Finn. Also, Finn can't drive because of being epileptic so Cade does all the driving wherever they go, even on this road trip to Oklahoma and he is happy to do it.

The rain that begins to fall on Cade's truck as he and Finn travel to Oklahoma symbolizes a baptism into a new life which will become evident very soon as the boys are put to a life and death challenge which will alter them forever.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Julia move back to Chicago when it's clear that she still loves Finn?

Discussion Question 2

What does Finn mean when he doesn't even pretend to be okay anymore after Julia is gone?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Finn so surprised that Cade is reading *The Lazarus Door*?

Vocabulary

abutment, freeloaders, absurd, pretense, pathetic, muted, undulating, instinctive, sloshing, reunification, lingcod, fishmonger, hominy, leered, traversed, desolate



Part 3 The Planet of Humans and Dogs: The Boy, The Dog and The Epileptic; The Dog Hospital; A Detour in the Year We Grew Up; The Lazarus Door

Summary

Finn and Cade exit the truck dressed only in T-shirts and basketball shorts and are immediately drenched. Cade spots muddy tire tracks headed off the highway and into a river so the boys begin trudging into the muck to find the car. The rain does not relent but Cade and Finn finally spot the top of a van which is partially submerged. Suddenly Finn sees a small white hand beating against the van's window from the inside. The brush is too thick for the boys to get to the van so Finn runs around to reach the bridge overhead and dives into the river. The rain and the wind seem to increase and Finn sees the van sinking lower and lower. Finn looks back to see Cade jumping into the river too.

Finn finds it very difficult to fight the raging current but he finally reaches the van and beats on the top of it. Someone from inside beats in response and Finn goes underwater to open the van's door. Finn finds an older man, motionless and still belted into the driver's seat and then spots a little boy shaking with cold and fear. The van begins to slip and Finn and the boy have to fight to find the air pocket inside. Finn then tells the boy that he has to hold his breath because he's going to get him out of the van and up above the water.

The narrative transitions to the story of Marjorie and Mazie Curtis who died along with their father, Lyman, in the St. Francis dam break in 1928. Their mother, Lillian, and brother, Danny, survived the flood. Finn knows that he saw the two little girls on the night he had a seizure at the front door of his house and he wonders if he's been on the planet longer than his 17 years.

Finn struggles with rescuing the little boy because he is terrified and resists the help. Finally they surface and Finn sees Cade struggling in the current. Finn tells him that there's another person trapped inside the van and then Finn and the boy are pulled into the deep center of the river. After being pushed along for a distance, Finn is able to reach the shore and drags the boy with him. Falling down, exhausted, Finn smells the sweet scent of flowers and begins another seizure.

In The Dog Hospital, Finn wakes up naked on an exam table in a veterinarian's clinic. The veterinarian calls him Cade because the authorities had found Cade's wallet in the truck and assume that it belongs to Finn. It finally occurs to Finn that Cade must still be out in the river somewhere but he can't get the vet to understand what he's saying. The



vet had brought Cade's truck to the clinic so Finn bolts from the office, jumps in the truck and speeds off to try to find Cade.

In *A Detour in the Year We Grew Up*, Finn thinks he is being pursued by police cars but when he slows down they pass him and he follows them to the river. When Finn arrives, he sees a gurney transporting the old man from the van to an emergency vehicle. Cade surprises Finn when he shows up wearing a paper jumpsuit provided by the emergency team. Finn and Cade jump into Cade's truck and drive away from the scene. As they ride, Cade tells Finn how he rescued the old man from the van. When they reach a roadside rest, they pull in and change into dry clothes. The boys spend the night sleeping in Cade's truck at a state park and they decide that visiting the college doesn't seem important after what they had just been through. Cade tells Finn that not going to the college would be a way for Finn to write the ending to his own story. Cade tells Finn that they could be in Chicago in about eight hours and they decide to drive there the next day to see Julia.

In *The Lazarus Door*, the veterinarian has called Cade's parents to tell them that their son had saved a boy in a flooding river. They soon realize that he is talking about Finn. In the meantime, a deputy calls Finn's parents to tell them that their son had been found naked saving an elderly man in a flooded river. Finn's parents tell the deputy that their son had been headed to a college. A few minutes later Cade's parents show up at Finn's house to talk about what has happened.

The next morning, Finn calls his father to tell him that he's in Illinois and on his way to see Julia. He also tells his father about the accident and saving the people in the van. Cade makes a big cardboard copy of *The Lazarus Door* to put on Julia's front lawn and when she comes to the door, Finn steps out of it and embraces Julia.

When school starts in the fall, the governor comes to award Finn and Cade for their bravery and rescuing the boy and old man from the flooded van in Oklahoma. Finn and Julia have seen each other a few times and promise to stay in touch. Finn's father agrees to write another book and promises that Finn won't be mentioned in it at all.

Analysis

The theme of Friendship continues through the end of the story with Finn and Cade. They're united in their goal to drive to Oklahoma for the college visit and agree to rescue the people trapped in the submerged van. In spite of their visible differences, they have the same code of behavior and what is important to them. They don't even have to think about whether they want to, or whether they should, try to rescue the van's occupants. They know it's the right thing to do and they do it. At the end of the story, they decide that going on the college visit is not nearly as important as they had once thought given the emergency situation they just lived through. There are things that are critically important to make life worthwhile and Cade knows that seeing Julia is more important for Finn than visiting the college so they make the decision to drive to Chicago.



The theme of Love is also important in this section. Finn and Julia are still in love and the distance between them has not altered how they feel about each other. They agree to stay in touch and the author ends the book on a hopeful note that they will stay connected.

The theme of Finding Your Way comes to a conclusion at the end of the story. Finn and Cade have had several adventures but really only come to realize who they are and what is important to them after the emergency situation in the flooded river. Finn knows now that it is okay to write the ending of his own story and not wait to find out what his father writes for him.

Discussion Question 1

How does the author change the course of the story by having Finn and Cade rescue the people from the flooded van as opposed to the people who died in the St. Francis dam flood in 1928?

Discussion Question 2

How does the life and death situation of rescuing the people from the flooded van change Finn and Cade's perspective on life?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Finn's father agree to not mention him in his new book?

Vocabulary

improbable, skeletal, slackened, submerged, demolition, scuffed, lexicon, agonizingly, gurney, diverse, pathogens, unruly, masonry, calamities, inconsequential



Characters

Finn Easton

Finn is a junior at Burnt Mill Creek High School in San Francisquito, California. He has epilepsy and has seizures at very inopportune times. The epilepsy makes him vulnerable and his father doesn't want him to ever leave home. Finn was injured in a freak accident when a dead horse falls from a bridge and hits his mother and him. Finn needed back surgery and the scar on his back is unique and causes lots of interest and conversation. Finn's mother died in the accident and his father married a pediatric nurse whom Finn has grown to love. Finn sees everything in terms of miles instead of minutes. Finn also has a more artistic view of life than other boys his age. Finn also thinks he may have been on the planet longer than his 16 years because he understands things that others don't and he has other worldly experiences such as seeing the ghosts of two little girls who died in a local flood in 1928. Finn is very close to his father and they have a great relationship in which they can talk freely and openly. Finn's best friend is Cade Hernandez who is a bit of a rebel and risk taker and a good counterpoint for Finn's more conservative personality.

Cade Hernandez

Cade Hernandez is a 16-year-old junior at Burnt Mill Creek High School in San Francisquito, California. Cade is the best friend of Finn Easton and they are almost inseparable. Cade drives everywhere he and Finn go because Finn is epileptic and can't drive. Cade is a very good looking young man who has almost magical powers over girls and women. Cade is a rebel and likes attention and it doesn't matter to him if he gets good or bad attention. Cade is also a highly sexual person who thinks and talks about sex a lot, even in class where it always gets him in trouble. Cade is lucky with women and he even has a foreign exchange student pay him for the privilege of giving him hand jobs in the janitor's shed every day. Cade is also a good baseball player on the high school team and hopes to be called up to a professional baseball team after graduation. If Cade doesn't end up playing baseball professionally, he and Finn plan to attend college in Oklahoma together. Cade does the outrageous things in school that other kids are afraid to do but they think he is their hero for some of the stunts he pulls on the teachers. Cade is more sensitive than others might think, though, and he admits that it hurts his feelings when Mr. Nossik ostracizes him in the back of the classroom during history class.

Mike Easton

Mike Easton is Finn's father. Mike is a writer who sometimes published under the name Easton Michaels. He wrote a very popular book called "The Lazarus Door" which was made into a movie. The book is a science fiction book about alien creatures with wings



that invade earth to consume humans and are ultimately destroyed with the exception of a young alien named Finn who has a unique scar and wants more than anything to be a normal boy.

Tracy Easton

Tracy Easton is Finn's stepmother. Tracy married Finn's father after the death of Finn's biological mother. Tracy is a pediatric nurse. Tracy's name before marrying Mike was Tracy Snow and Finn thought she was like Snow White and he liked to call her that.

Nadia Snow

Nadia is Finn's 6 year-old half sister. Nadia is treated like a little princess in the family and sometimes Finn resents that but most of the time he thinks she is fine. But most of the time, Nadia is not relevant in Finn's life.

Julia Bishop

Julia Bishop is a beautiful girl who transfers to Finn's school in May of their junior year which Finn thinks is odd. Julia has moved to California from Chicago because she was raped by her boyfriend and her parents send her to live with an aunt and uncle for awhile until the notoriety dies down. Julia is very sensitive and insightful and supportive of Finn's emotional issues. Julia and Finn fall in love and determine to stay connected even after Julia moves back to Chicago.

Monica Fassbinder

Monica Fassbinder is a foreign exchange student and classmate of Finn and Nate's. She pays Nate so that she can perform oral sex on him. Monica is quiet, brooding and dissatisfied and wears black all the time. Monica always acts bored and interacts more with her cell phone than she does with other people.

Mr. Nossick

Mr. Nossick is Finn and Nate's history teacher. He dresses up like famous people from history such as Charles Lindbergh in order to help his students learn. Mr. Nossick and Nate have an especially difficult relationship because Nate does outrageous things in class and refuses to behave.



Manny Castellan

Manny Castellan is Finn's next door neighbor. Manny had been a bull fighter in his younger days and Finn loves to hear the stories about his adventures. Manny likes Finn and gives him a bull fighter name.

Marjorie and Mazie Curtis

Marjorie and Mazie Curtis were two little sisters who died in the St. Francis dam flood in 1928. Finn sees them throughout the story, especially when he is about to have an epileptic seizure.



Symbols and Symbolism

Sideways miles

Finn measures everything in terms of miles instead of minutes. Finn talks about sideways miles when referring to the dead horse that fell on him and his mother, killing her. Finn thinks that it took about four seconds for that horse to fall from the bridge 300 hundred feet overhead. During that time, the earth moved almost 100 miles. And if a person were to walk a straight line for 100 miles and drop 300 feet, he wouldn't even realize he was descending in elevation at all. And that's the logic of sideways miles.

Atoms

Finn sees everything in terms of it being a collection of atoms. Finn himself is a collection of atoms which he feels came from his parents as well as other random events such as explosions and natural disasters whose atoms float around randomly until they land. So, to Finn, everything in life is kind of random just like the patterns of atoms floating in space.

Puncture-ation marks

When Finn was injured in the horse accident that killed his mother, he had to have surgery on his back. The resulting scar looks like a colon, vertical slash and another colon. He calls them puncture-ation marks and emoticon scars. Finn hates the scars because they are mentioned in his father's book related to a space alien creature who just wants to be a normal boy.

Knackery truck

The knackery truck had been hauling the dead horse when it slipped and fell from a bridge onto Finn and his mother. Knackery is rendering of a dead animal so anytime Finn doesn't like something or approve of something, he calls it knackery—it refuses that will be rendered into something else.

Twenty miles

Finn uses this phrase often when something is exciting or interesting. He has come up with it because 20 miles per second is so fast that everything on the planet is traveling at just about the same absolute speed.



"The Lazarus Door"

"The Lazarus Door" is the title of Finn's father's very popular book. It is a science fiction book in which space aliens come to earth via tiny doors called Lazarus doors. There is also a space alien in the book who is named Finn and has all the characteristics Finn has. The character just wants to be a normal boy but his future is never defined. Finn hates that the book sounds too close to him and he never learns what his destiny is supposed to be.

Baseball

Both Finn and Cade play on the baseball team at their high school. Baseball is associated with being an all American pastime and it is especially important to Finn who struggles with his identity because of the persona of him created in his father's science fiction book. Finn wants to be a normal boy so he plays baseball which is what most other boys do too.

Laika

Finn names his dog Laika after the Russian dog that died during an early space flight. The Russian Laika is associated with death and Finn's Laika likes to roll around in dead things so Finn made that association and named his dog appropriately.

Water

Water serves as a symbol of change in the book. The obvious instance of major change associated with water is the flood of 1928 in which hundreds were killed or injured and displaced from their homes. Finn and Cade spend time in Finn's swimming pool when Finn's family is out of town which symbolizes their newfound independence. And at the end of the story, Finn and Cade rescue the little boy and old man from their van in the flooded river. It is this experience that shows them that they have the right to determine their own destinies and the head to Chicago to see Julia instead of continuing on to the college visit.

Road Trip

The road trip that Finn and Cade take to Oklahoma is symbolic of them coming of age. A road trip usually symbolizes adventures and new sources of information and in their case, they rescue two people from a flood and realize that the path that had brought them to Oklahoma no longer works for them and they change direction and vow to make their own choices from now on.



Settings

San Francisquito Canyon

San Francisquito Canyon is where Finn and his family live. It is located in Los Angeles county in California. The majority of the action in the story takes place here.

Burnt Mill Creek High School

Burnt Mill Creek High School is where Finn, Nate, Julia and Monica attend high school. The main events at this location include Mr. Nossik's classes in which Cade is very disruptive.

Finn's house

Much of the story takes place in Finn's house. He has Saturday morning coffee with his father there every week. He has an epileptic seizure in one situation when he and Julia become friends there. He and Cade spend the week there together when Finn's parents go to New York. And Finn goes into hiding when he is sad after Julia moves back to Chicago.

Aberdeen Lake State Penitentiary

Finn, Cade and Julia take a camping trip and decide to visit the abandoned Aberdeen Lake State Penitentiary nearby. They spend a few hours exploring the facility. Finn has a seizure there and hits his head so Cade and Julia wait until he comes to and walk him slowly back to camp and then they drive home.

Oklahoma

Finn and Cade set out on a road trip to go on a college visit in Oklahoma. On the way, they rescue a boy and an old man from a van in a flooding river. The experience makes them change their minds about the college visit and they abandon that plan.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

Coming of Age is an important theme in literature and in the book "100 Sideways Miles." This means the transition period in which a child becomes a young adult. There is no set age for this transition because it is different for each character. Some characters reach young adulthood through the natural progression of age and maturity while some children face traumatic situations which essentially force them to grow up more quickly than their peers.

In literature, Coming of Age usually features a protagonist who struggles with a belief system or other challenge in order to begin to identify as an adult. In "100 Sideways Miles," Finn comes of age as he views his life differently by the end of the story. Finn has been handicapped by being compared to a character in his father's popular science fiction book. Finn just wants to be normal and be okay but the end of the story has not yet been written so he doesn't know how his life is supposed to turn out. As the story begins, Finn has never even held hands with a girl but by the end of the story he is in love with Julia. Also at the beginning of the story, Finn and Cade plan to attend the same college in Oklahoma but when their college visit is interrupted by the emergency of saving two people from a van sinking in a river, they both see their lives differently and know that they are in charge of their destinies. Finn, especially, doesn't have to wait to have someone else write the end of his story for him.

Friendship

The theme of Friendship is an important one in "100 Sideways Miles." Finn and Cade have known each other for several years and trust each other implicitly. Finn is a more sensitive person than Cade and sees life in symbols and is more emotional than Cade is. Finn and Cade are tall and blonde and some people think they are related. Cade is more outgoing than Finn and all the girls swoon over him. Cade is the class clown and all the students idolize him but the teachers find him difficult. Because Finn is epileptic, Cade is always by his side. Cade drives them everywhere they go because Finn is not allowed to drive. Cade even comes to Finn's house to stay with him when Finn's parents are out of town just in case Finn would have a seizure and need help. Finn and Cade are on the high school baseball team and plan to go to college in Oklahoma together if Cade doesn't get called up to a professional baseball team.

Love

The theme of Love is an important one in "100 Sideways Miles." Finn's father loves Finn very much and he often says that he doesn't want Finn to ever leave him. Finn and his father have a standing time every Saturday morning to have coffee together and talk. Finn's father may tend to be overprotective about Finn because he is epileptic but he



tries to let Finn grow up without too much interference. Finn doesn't recall much about his mother but he grows to love his stepmother and views her as his mother. These are all good examples of familial love but there is also romantic love in the story with Finn and Julia. Finn is smitten with Julia as soon as he meets her but he doesn't have the confidence to approach her. When Julia finds Finn recovering from a seizure at his house, he is especially embarrassed when she cleans up after him but this shows that she sees him as a real person. Finn has shown Julia all his vulnerabilities so he is able to open up to her and she is able to share with him too. Finn is heartbroken when Julia moves back to Chicago but when he decides to abandon his Oklahoma college visit in order to drive to see her, they rekindle their love and vow to stay connected.

Sex

The theme of Sex is an important one in "100 Sideways Miles." Finn and Cade are healthy teenage boys and their thoughts are practically consumed with sex. Cade is especially vocal about his thoughts on sex and he continually raises the ire of his history teacher because of his outrageous comments on the topic every day. Cade is also sexually active in that he accepts money from Monica, a foreign exchange student, so that she can give him hand jobs in the janitor's shed every day. Cade has admitted to Finn that he has had sex with only one girl so far. Finn is interested in sex but doesn't think he is ready for that level of responsibility yet. When he and Julia get close, Finn thinks about having sex with her but he doesn't initiate anything because he is inexperienced and doesn't want to change their relationship in the way that having sex would. On the dark side of the topic, Julia tells Finn that she had left Chicago because her boyfriend had raped her. Her parents sent her to California to live with her aunt and uncle to escape the gossip and notoriety of her situation.

Finding Your Way

The theme of Finding Your Way is important in "100 Sideways Miles." Because the main characters are teenagers, it is not unusual that they should be searching to find out who they are as people and what direction they want their lives to take them. The author uses Finn to represent this concept the most thoroughly because Finn feels that he lives in his father's popular book. The character is so much like Finn even down to his name. Although Finn's father tells him that the character is not him, Finn can't help but feel that the story is about his life. Finn seems to put his life on hold waiting for his father to write another book so he knows how his story will turn out. During the course of the book, though, Finn discovers more about himself through his epilepsy and his friendships with Cade and Julia. Finn thinks that his college experience has already been mapped out too but on the way for a campus visit, he and Cade rescue a boy and an old man from a van submerged in a flooded river. This experience alters both of the boys and they know that their life choices belong to them so they abandon the college visit and drive to Chicago to see Julia instead.

Styles

Point of View

The story is told from the first person narrative point of view. This means that the author tells the story directly in his own words. As the narrator, Finn uses the pronoun of "I" throughout because the story is being told just as he sees it or experienced it. With the first person narrative point of view, the reader has access to the thoughts and feelings of the narrator only. What is going on in the heads of any other people in the story is only speculative as the reader does not have the privilege of seeing them.

As Finn goes from present day to flashbacks in the story, he still maintains the first person narrative point of view. The story is his and the reader will learn only what the author wants him or her to learn. The first person narrative point of view tells the narrator's story and the reader must take into account who the narrator is to understand the perspective. For example, a child will see a story from a different perspective from that of an adult and the reader should make allowances for that.

An example of the first person narrative point of view is when Don states, "I am fine now. In baseball, I have a good arm and a bat, and I can field, but I am not interested in playing it after high school. My natural talent, I think, is in being fine--no matter what is actually going on inside me. I am fine." The author not only provides information from Finn's perspective about what he does, but also projects into Finn's thoughts about how he feels he is viewed in the world. If this were written in another point of view, the speaker would be able to say that Finn plays baseball and has a good arm and a bat but would have no insight into how Finn thinks about the sport.

Language and Meaning

Because "100 Sideways Miles" is set in modern day, the language is current for the times. The author uses 21st century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author uses things like current movies and pop culture icons so that the modern day audience can relate to them.

The author also keeps the language authentic to the age and gender of the characters. Finn and Cade are high school students so the language is relevant to their lives and their age. For example, Cade is always coming up with new descriptions for the pattern of scars on Finn's back and he says, "The tracks left in the snow by a horse with a ridiculously big hard-on. That's what that shit on your back looks like, Finn. If a horse with a really big boner left tracks in snow, 'cause you're so fucking white. It's fucking awesome." The language is raw sometimes but it does reflect the way boys talk to each other at that age. Plus, the author shows the familiarity between Finn and Cade in these types of interactions. This dialogue shows up in humor throughout the book, too, especially between Finn and Cade.

Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. "100 Sideways Miles" takes the structure of a character form. These types of novels tend to show a character's personal growth as the story extends. A character structure shows transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does. It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to stay in the current situation.



Quotes

Here is what I think about that horse falling on us: I figure it took a little more than four seconds for the horse to travel from the span of the bridge, over three hundred feet above, to where my mother and I stood on the bank of Salmon Creek. During that fall, the earth moved approximately one hundred miles. If you were to walk a straight line for a hundred miles and drop a total of three hundred feet, you wouldn't even realize you were descending in elevation at all. That horse fell one hundred sideways miles.

-- Finn (Twenty Miles Per Second paragraph 7)

Importance: Finn shares his perspective on the dead horse incident and his unique way of looking at things. He thinks that distance is more important than time and sets up his rationale with this example.

That's what that shit on your back looks like, Finn. If a horse with a really big boner left tracks in snow, 'cause you're so fucking white. It's fucking awesome.

-- Cade (Five Euros in Dollars paragraph 2)

Importance: Cade continuously comes up with new descriptions for the surgical scars on Finn's back. He is amazed by the pattern of the scars and by the accident that necessitated them so he is always coming up with different scenarios for the graphic pattern that they make on Finn's back.

What else can you do? It all just keeps going. Twenty miles per second. Twenty miles per second.

-- Finn (Doors That Open and Open paragraph 4)

Importance: When Finn doesn't know how to explain something or when there's nothing that can be said, he just says, "Twenty miles per second." That's the speed that the earth turns and Finn means that life goes on and there's nothing you can do about what happens.

Dad leaned toward me and said, 'It looks like it's about time you started shaving.

-- Finn's father (The Politics of Teenage Grudges paragraph 1)

Importance: Finn and his father have a really close relationship and Finn values what his father says. Finn's father is also afraid for the day when Finn disappears from his life and cherishes the time he has with him. Every Saturday morning, father and son have coffee on the patio to talk. When Finn's father suggests that it's time he started shaving, it indicates that his father acknowledges that Finn is growing up and Finn appreciates the validation.

Piss. Floor. Door. Night.

-- Finn (My Neighbor Julia paragraph 1)



Importance: When Finn starts to come out of a seizure, his words slowly return to him. In this case, this is how Finn processes what has happened to him.

I was trapped in that book and I couldn't get out.
-- Finn (One Atom At A Time paragraph 1)

Importance: Finn notes that there is one character in his father's book, the hero, who figured out he could identify the fallen angel--cannibal aliens by examining their naked backs. Plus all the incomers had two different colors of eyes. Finn has both of these characteristics and his father has used them in his book making Finn feel as if his life has been structured for him, he has only to wait to learn the ending.

Cade said, "Thirty four hours is a really long time. Do you suppose Charles Lindbergh masturbated at least once or twice during that flight, Mr. Nossik?"
-- Cade (Unlucky Lindy paragraph 9)

Importance: Cade is always thinking about sex and is not afraid to talk about it. It particularly irritates Mr. Nossik yet Cade does not stop because he gets attention from the other students who are in awe of his bravado.

Sticky atoms are caused to love, or sometimes by hate or fear. The knackery has a hard time breaking down love and hate into anything else.
-- Finn (Sticky Atoms paragraph 1)

Importance: Finn believes that everything is composed of atoms that get rendered into different elements because that is just the nature of the universe. The exception to the rule, however, are sticky atoms usually caused by love and hate because there is nothing else they can be rendered down to. Love is love and hate is hate.

Well, Julia told me she wanted to give me something special, and that to get it I had to come to her bedroom window the night before my birthday at exactly midnight. What else could that mean but she wants to have sex? But I'll be honest: It's scary to me. I don't know if I actually feel ready to have sex with someone.
-- Finn (The Driving Range paragraph 6)

Importance: Finn wants to be worldly like he thinks Cade is about the subject of sex so he puts on a front for him. But then Finn shows his maturity by being vulnerable in front of Cade about his not being ready to have sex yet.

I don't know the ending. It's something you have to write for yourself. Don't you get it? You have to open the doors. There's nobody else who's going to do it for you.
-- Julia (The Slowpoke Moon paragraph 5)

Importance: Julia is returning to Chicago and Finn doesn't know what he's going to do without her. He wants her to tell him how the story ends but she tells him that he is the only one who can know that, because, really, the path of his life is up to him and no one else.



Oh. What do you want me to be, Dad? Why don't you just map it out for everyone to see in your next book, and that will be me?

-- Finn (The Slowpoke Moon paragraph 7)

Importance: Finn has lived with the frustration of being compared to a character in his father's book for as long as he can remember. Finn suffers normal teenage frustrations about not knowing what to do with his life and he just assumes that it will be revealed to him when his father writes his next book. Finn would like to make decisions regarding his own life but he feels controlled by a script that he feels has already been written for him.

Sometimes--especially those times when I feel as though I've been trapped inside my father's book--I wonder if I haven't been on this Finn trip for many more miles than seventeen years might carry a guy.

-- Finn (The Boy, the Dog, and the Epileptic paragraph 2)

Importance: Finn feels like he knows things that kids his age shouldn't know and wonders if there is something to the concept of being the character in his father's book. He feels as if he's had experiences that other people wouldn't begin to understand and that perhaps he has gone around before in life to have gained so much insight.