

Black Swan Green Study Guide

Black Swan Green by David Mitchell

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Plot Summary

In David Mitchell's "Black Swan Green," thirteen-year-old Jason Taylor learned some hard realities about life. His coming-of-age story dealt not only with Jason's challenges as a teen but also with his own family struggles as his parents' marriage falls apart. Throughout the course of the novel, Jason struggled with grief and guilt because he accidentally broke the heirloom watch that had belonged to his grandfather. He was also tormented by his speech impediment and his struggle to stay on the good side of the popular kids. When Jason became the target of the bullies, he found a unique way to fight back.

Each chapter in this novel gives the reader a snapshot of a significant event in Jason's life during each month of his thirteenth year. The novel's thirteen chapters each correspond to one month in the year. In January, Jason accidentally broke the antique watch that had once belonged to his grandfather. He also got in trouble for answering a strange phone call on his father's office phone. In February, Jason shared information about his speech impediment. In March, he learned his older cousin Hugo wasn't as cool as he once thought. In April, Jason took on an adventure down a bridle path. In May, Jason witnessed the fighting between his parents becoming more intense as it seemed to focus on them hurting each other.

In June, Jason made it into the selective club called "The Spooks" and was just as quickly kicked out because he helped his friend who had been hurt while trying to complete the club's initiation challenge. In July, Jason met an eccentric old lady who taught him about truth and beauty. In August, Jason went on trips with both his parents in the chapter entitled "Souvenirs." In September, school began and Jason was grouped with the losers because he'd been seen waiting in line with his mother at the movies. Bullies also made fun of his stammer. In October, Jason learned that even adults had bullies among them in the chapter "Knife Grinder." In November, Jason found a wallet full of money belonging to Ross Wilcox and struggled to decide if he should give it back to this boy who picked on him relentlessly.

In December, Jason had enough of being bullied and smashed an expensive calculator belonging to Neal Brose in order to draw attention to what was happening. It was also in this chapter that Jason was first kissed by a girl. In January, a full year later, Jason and his family were moving out of Black Swan Green because his parents were getting divorced. He wondered how his life would ever be okay again.



January Man

Summary

In "January Man" Jason Taylor answered the phone in his father's office after it had rung fifty times even though it was against the rules for him to answer that phone. The person on the other end didn't speak, but Jason could hear a baby crying in the background. He left the office when his friend Dean "Moron" Moran rang the bell to invite Jason to go with him to a lake that had frozen over. The kids skated and played British Bulldogs. Their games were interrupted when Tom Yew, who was on leave from the Royal Navy, rode his Suzuki scrambler up to the lake.

Jason went into the woods to pee. He found a path he hadn't seen before and followed it to the house in the woods where it was said an old woman lived. He'd just finished his business when the woman came out of the house. She warned Jason not to wake her brother. He apologized. She told him that he and the other boys would be sorrier when the ice broke. She added Ralph Brendon, the butcher's boy, had thought the lake was frozen solid but it wasn't.

At lunch Jason's dad asked Jason and Julia if either of them had been in his office. Jason admitted he had answered the phone because it had rung so many times. Jason's dad was getting angry with him, but Julia stepped in and said she too had answered the phone in his office once because it had rung for so many times. Julia said no one had spoken to her when she did answer, just like the call Jason had answered. Their father told them not to answer the phone again, just unplug it. Jason noticed a strangeness between his mother and father.

To help himself feel better Jason decided to put on the watch that his father had given him. It was his grandfather's Omega Seamaster De Ville. Jason imagined his unborn twin telling him to go to the lake. At the lake Jason skated alone at first. Then he noticed another kid skating across from him. Jason called out to the boy and believed he got the answer back that the boy was Ralph Brendon, the butcher's boy. He asked Ralph if he could show him what it was like being dead. Just when he thought the boy hadn't heard him, he fell, slamming into the ice. His ankle hurt. He knew he couldn't walk back home. He went instead to the house in the woods. The woman there fixed a poultice for his ankle and made him drink something. She called him Ralph. When he woke, he was upset to discover that he'd smashed his grandfather's watch in the fall. He was also locked in the house. He went upstairs to wake the old woman.

Analysis

As the title indicates, this first chapter of the novel is set in the month of January. It serves to introduce the reader to the life of nearly thirteen-year-old Jason Taylor. Jason is the narrator of the novel. He lives with this older sister, Julia, who doesn't seem to like



her brother and often refers to him as “thing.” His father appears to be overbearing while his mother seems concerned about appearances. The novel is set in a town in England so the language can be a bit difficult for the American reader at first. There is a good deal of unfamiliar slang used: “bumfluff” for the hair that grows on an adolescent boy’s upper lip, “pongs” for smells, and “busting for a waz” for having to pee, just to name a few.

The novel follows thirteen months in the life of Jason, from the month he turns thirteen until the month he turns fourteen. The all-encompassing theme is Jason’s coming of age. Notice in this section he’s primarily concerned, as most boys are, with his own popularity. He isn’t the most popular kid but isn’t the least popular either, although there was an incident in which Gary Drake, Ross Wilcox, and Neal Brose ganged up against him during a game of British Bulldogs. Notice that Jason doesn’t seem to want to be popular, he just doesn’t want to be picked on. When the popular Tom Yew rides up the group of younger boys who are pictured as worshipping him, Jason isn’t impressed. He wondered why Pluto Noak did Tom Yew’s bidding as willingly as he did. Notice that behind his “friendship” with the boys Jason preferred his time alone on the frozen-over lake more than he did the rough games they played. He also admitted to his reader that he was Eliot Bolivar, his pseudonym under which he wrote poems for “Black Swan Green Parish Magazine.” Notice also Jason’s thoughts about sex and girls. He saw Dawn Madden only as a boy gone wrong because she was so tough. He was also not impressed by Batman’s alter ego, Clark Kent, and his decision to give up his powers in order to have sex with Lois Lane. He doesn’t think sex could be worth giving up the ability to fly.

Another important indicator in Jason’s coming of age is his accident in which he damaged his grandfather’s watch. Jason’s father had given Jason this watch that had belonged to his grandfather. He’d thought Jason was old enough to take care of it. Jason had carved out a book in which to hide the watch to keep it from being damaged. The first time he decided to wear it, however, he fell on the ice at the lake and smashed the face. The watch and the way that Jason dealt with what had happened to it is a story line that will continue through the course of the novel.

Dealing with a disability is another theme in this novel. There are two characters so far in the novel who have disabilities. Jason has a stammer that he refers to as “Hangman.” Because he doesn’t want other people to find out that he struggles with a stammer he often avoids words that he knows will cause a stammer. Sometimes he doesn’t say what he’s thinking because he doesn’t want to stammer. This happened when Jason wanted to tell Ross Wilcox he was wrong when he claimed Winston Churchill had kept their country from being overtaken by German forces in World War II. Another disabled character in the novel is Squelch. Squelch is described as being “funny in the head” ’cause he was born too early” (p. 7). The kids pick on Squelch but aren’t really mean to him.

Family relationships is another important theme in the novel. Notice the relationships between the members of Jason’s family. His father seems overbearing and moody. He was angry with his children for answering the phone in his office. He expected his rules



to be followed no matter what. The ringing phone incidents mentioned by both Jason and his sister, Julia, seemed to affect their mother, Helena, because she grew quiet when she learned about the calls and went to her bedroom. An astute reader can put together that Jason's father had a secret, perhaps a secret lover, and that Helena knew about and suspected was responsible for the strange phone calls. Notice in this instance that even though Julia does mention that she also answered the phone in her father's office, her loyalty to her brother didn't go much further than that. She referred to him as "thing" and said the things he talked about were making her lose her appetite. When she saw things getting rough between her mother and father at lunch she left Jason alone with them by making an excuse to get away. Notice also Helena's request for new tiles in her kitchen. It appears that she spent money fixing up her house as a way to get back at her husband for whatever relationship he had going on the side.

Also of interest in this section of the novel is Jason's encounter with the woman in the house in the woods. She appears to be senile and talks to Jason about a boy who drowned when the ice on the lake cracked. Later Jason believed he saw this drowned boy skating behind him on the lake. After he asked the boy to show him what death was like, Jason fell, badly spraining his ankle and busting his grandfather's watch. Jason was able to go only as far as the house in the woods for help. The old woman put a poultice on his ankle that helped him, but the whole experience is written in such a mystical way that the reader isn't sure if Jason is dreaming or if his encounter with the elderly woman really happened.

There are a few things to notice in this section of the novel as they will be significant later. First, notice the relationship between Grant Burch and Philip Phelps. They seem to be a younger version of Tom Yew and Pluto Noak. Remember also the unfamiliar sky-blue VW Jetta that Jason spotted driving on their street and turning around in the cul-de-sac. Remember also Tom Yew's rank as a member of the Royal Navy and his fear not that he would die, but that he would be the last to die. Finally, notice that Jason has separate parts of his identity that rage against one another. His Unborn Twin encouraged Jason to do things that were risky, like going back to the frozen lake after all the other boys had left. The Unborn Twin hated the other side of Jason's personality, which he referred to as Maggot. Maggot, obviously, was a side of himself that Jason didn't like. It was this side that tried to keep Jason away from trouble. For instance, it was Maggot who tried to persuade Jason to go home when the other boy appeared on the frozen lake. Maggot told Jason the other boy might have been a ghost but Jason chose not to listen to him.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Jason's pair of encounters with the elderly woman in the house in the woods. Do you think his second encounter really happened or was he dreaming?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the inner workings of Jason's family as seen during their lunch together. What sense do you get about the family? Is there trouble on the way? Give reasons to support your opinion.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the idea of popularity as it is presented in this section of the novel. Was Jason popular? Did he want to be popular? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

berserk, hovering, juggernaut, incinerated, glebe, queues, kamikazes, fray, venue, arrogance, lobbed, intercept, poultice, catastrophe, rookish



Hangman

Summary

In this section of the novel, which covers events in February, Jason's mother dropped him off at the clinic where he had his speech therapy sessions. Jason was keeping a count down to his execution time, the time he'd have to read aloud at his school the following day. He referred to his speech impediment as "Hangman" because his teacher had been playing a game of hangman with the students when he had his first incident of stammering. In his session Mrs. de Roo asked if Jason had told his teacher about his problem. Jason had but the teacher, Mr. Kempsey, had told Jason it was time to face his demons. Even though Jason was able to read without stammering in Mrs. de Roo's office, he knew he wouldn't be able to at school the following day.

That night Jason typed out a poem about skating on a frozen lake. He eavesdropped on Julia's conversation with her boyfriend, Ewan. Julia planned to study to be a lawyer. Jason wondered what options he would have as a career because of his stammer. When she came upstairs, Julia asked Jason if he had been spying on her.

The next morning Jason thought about skipping school but knew he'd get in trouble. Once Jason was inside the school building, Mr. Kempsey pulled Jason into the stationary storeroom. Jason wondered what he had done wrong but Mr. Kempsey explained he had a phone call from Mrs. de Roo. She'd thought it would be best for Jason's progress if he didn't have to read aloud in class. Mr. Kempsey decided to follow her suggestion even though he told Jason he'd eventually have to face his disability. Gary Drake pointed out in assembly that it had been Jason's turn to read. Jason wondered what he had done to Gary Drake.

Analysis

This chapter is appropriately titled "Hangman" because the focus is Jason's disability, his stammer. Notice Jason's jealousy of the receptionist at his speech therapist's office. She was able to say what she wanted when she wanted to say it without having to check words first to see if she would stammer on them. Jason described how he had trouble with "n" and "s" words. He'd learned to think a sentence ahead to change words if needed to avoid words that would cause him to stammer. These changes, however, were tricky even for Jason. Even though he knew a good deal of optional words he could use, he couldn't use some "adult" words around his friends without being considered a laughingstock. He often pretended not to know answers to questions if those answers contained stammer words. He believed anything would be better than being tagged as the boy who stammered.

Jason Taylor is a teenager. For this reason he does tend to use a good deal of hyperbole, or exaggeration, in his writing. When he first began stuttering, for instance,



Jason believed not only were all of the kids in his class waiting for him to get the word “nightingale” out but so were all the crows, spiders, clouds, and cars as well as Margaret Thatcher had paused in their lives because of his stammer.

There are several things to notice in this section. First, notice that Julia got angry with Jason when she saw her “Abbey Road” record in his room. Since the novel is set in 1982, records were one of the most popular forms in which people could purchase music. Notice also Michael Taylor’s mention of Danny Lawlor, a new trainee salesman he wanted to fast track. Specifically notice he pointed out Danny Lawlor’s ability to sweet talk even Michael Taylor’s boss, Craig Salt.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the relationship between Jason and his sister.

Discussion Question 2

Why was Jason so worried someone would learn about his stammer? To what lengths did he go to keep his friends from finding out about his disability? What did he think would happen if they learned about his stammer?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the literary techniques that author has used thus far in this novel.

Vocabulary

conspiracies, skive, melancholy, pendulums, indispensable, feudal, surveillance, abort, appalled, retaliated, stile, truant, interrogated, anoraks, auditory, clemency, trepidation, debilitating, conducive, nebulae, altruistic



Relatives

Summary

Relatives came to visit in this section of Jason's story, which takes place during March. Jason was awed by and hoped to impress his cousin Hugo who was two years older than he. During the visit, Jason's dad and Uncle Brian dominated the conversation. They first argued about the best route from Richmond, and then the best route to Bath. Over sherry they argued about the recession. Jason noted how his mother cooked a fancy dinner and spoke in fancy terms when Uncle Brian and Aunt Alice visited. The salt and pepper became condiments, for instance. Uncle Brian had bought a bottle of wine. When it was opened, Brian and Michael argued over the best place to get wine. Next, the parents gloated over their children's accomplishments. Jason had hoped his mother wouldn't mention his poetry prize, but she did. The family next argued about the problems with Japanese technology. Uncle Brian believed the Japanese were set to take over the world. He additionally thought Julia should go to a different university than the one she had planned to attend.

Using the downstairs bathroom, Jason happened to overhear his mother and aunt talking outside. Alice asked Helena if they had gotten any more strange phone calls since January. Helena said there hadn't been any more and that she had jumped to conclusions. She did mention, however, an unspecified incident that Michael had nearly six years before. Later, Jason, Hugo, and Nigel played darts. Hugo made a comment about homosexuals that upset Nigel. Nigel accused Hugo of turning people against him. After Nigel left, Hugo challenged Jason to play for money. Jason didn't have to pay up because their game was interrupted by Aunt Alice. She not only chided Hugo because Nigel was crying but also asked the boys to go and get some coffee from the store.

At the store, Jason watched as Hugo stole a box of cigarettes, two Cadbury Creme Eggs, and a package of throat lozenges. After they left the store Jason asked why Hugo had stolen the things. Hugo said that "liberated" cigarettes, as he called them, were the best. He'd stolen the Cadbury Eggs, he said, to give one to Jason to ensure he would tell what had happened. The two walked to the lake where Hugo showed Jason how to smoke a cigarette. The smoke made Jason throw up. When Jason looked up from being sick, he realized that Hugo was laughing at him.

Analysis

The snapshot Jason describes from March focuses on a family visit from his mother's sister, Alice, and her family. Jason learned in this section that people he admired could turn out to be completely unworthy of his admiration. Jason had wanted his older cousin Hugo to like him. Jason believed Hugo was the epitome of a cool teenage boy. It turned out that Hugo had some undesirable personality traits. He lied to his parents. He was cruel to his younger brother. He stole things. He threatened to get Jason in trouble if



Jason told on him for stealing. Worst of all, Hugo laughed at Jason when Jason threw up after trying to smoke a cigarette for the first time. Jason was not only disappointed by his cousin, he was also hurt by him.

On the topic of disabilities, Jason overheard his aunt ask his mother how Jason's speech therapy was going. She criticized Jason because he was so quiet. Later when Hugo and Jason were alone together it can be inferred that Hugo picked up on the fact that Jason would use strange words like "fag" for cigarettes and "pinch" for steal because he was afraid if he tried to use the more common terms he would stammer on them.

Notice the stress at the family dinner as Michael and Brian tried to one up each other. Julia is the only one of the children who seemed to feel free to talk back to the adults or speak her mind. Jason pointed out the way his mother had cooked a fancy dinner in order to impress Alice and Brian. Later, Alice suggested that Helena should go back to work. Notice that when Jason heard his aunt and his mother talking, Alice asked Helena if there had been any more strange phone calls. She was obviously referencing the strange calls both Julia and Jason had answered. It appears that Michael had an affair about six years before that had caused Helena to be suspicious of him. In her conversation with Alice, however, she indicated she had probably jumped to conclusions.

Notice in this section Jason's continued use of hyperbole. For instance he said Julia had been called to come from her room "twenty hours ago" (p. 44) to meet with Uncle Brian and Aunt Julia. Jason also indicated that if he had not come when first called, "they'd've sent in a SWAT squad by now" (pp. 45-46).

Discussion Question 1

What does the reader learn from the conversation between Helena and Alice?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the character of Hugo. Did he turn out to be as cool as Jason thought he was? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways does the Taylor family show off when the Lambs come to visit? Is Jason also guilty of trying to alter his personality to try to impress Hugo or are his parents the only ones who seem set on making a good impression?



Vocabulary

bubonic, intrepid, horticulturist, telepathic, purgatory, innovations, memsahibs, concur, vintage, derelict, languish, phantom, notoriously, tutelage, annihilating, contraband, quandary, exploit, proposition, atomized



Bridle Path

Summary

In the chapter "Bridle Path," which takes place in April, Jason set off to find where a bridle path in his village ended. He'd heard rumors of it ending at the mouth of an old tunnel. He believed he'd be considered cool if he found the tunnel and had his picture on the front page of the newspaper for his feat. Along the path he met Kit Harris and his dobermans. Harris accused Jason of goading his dogs. Next he met Grant Burch, Philip Phelps, and Ant Little. Burch said he was going to fight Ross Wilcox. Because Jason thought Ross Wilcox was building a gang against Jason he thought it would be good for him if Ross got beat in the fight. Grant's wrist was broken in the fight, and Wilcox declared himself the winner. Moran and Jason got off with the excuse they were going to Moran's grandmother's house and passed the fight accidentally.

After they'd left the other boys Jason admitted to Moran he wanted to try to find the old tunnel rumored to be at the end of the bridle path. Moran said that was what he was doing. They decided to join forces. When they took a break lying on the roof of an old barn, Jason went to sleep. Moran went on without him. He was running across a field when he heard his name called. It was Dawn Madden. Dawn flirted with Jason for a while and conned him into acting like a dog. When he wasn't able to play along with her flirting, she got tired of him. She threatened to tell her stepfather Jason had groped her if he didn't leave.

Jason went on along the path until he found a tree he could climb. He was still in the tree when Tom Yew and Debby Crombie walked up to the tree. They spread out a blanket and had sex while Jason watched. They didn't see him. Jason stayed in the tree until after the couple had left. A nightmare about being on Tom's assigned ship the "Coventry" and it coming under enemy fire woke Tom.

Walking again, Jason came to an old bathtub he assumed was used as a feeding trough for horses. He was scared when he looked inside and saw what he thought was a dead boy. It turned out it was only Moran. They walked together talking about the experiences they'd had while they were apart until they came upon an old man in a turquoise smock. They ran from the man, who was surrounded by bees, until they reached the grounds of Little Malvern Towers. One of the residents believed Jason was her long-lost love.

Analysis

Sexual experiences are among those encountered by Jason in this section of the novel. He watched as Tom Yew and Debby Crombie had sex. Dawn Madden flirted with him, but because Jason was so inexperienced in flirting he was confused by her advances. Notice that Jason is sensitive to his friend in this section where some boys his age would not have been as understanding. He didn't get mad at Moran for leaving him



when he went to sleep even though they'd decided to go look for the tunnels together. One reason that Jason gave for not getting mad at Moran was that Moran had given him an excuse to get away from Ross Wilcox and his gang. Jason also sensed that Moran was upset because his father was a drunk. Moran tried to talk to Jason about his father, but Jason didn't really understand Moran was going through. Jason showed his maturity in the way he handled Moran.

In this section the theme of *Outsiders* is first discussed. Kit Harris, the man with the dobermans, got angry with Jason for upsetting his dogs. Harris immediately assumed Jason was an "outsider" as people from Black Swan Green would have known better than to upset his dogs. "Locals have more respect for my boys than some townie," as he said (p. 71). Jason described the hatred the man seemed to have for him as a poison. As he observed, "The dog man despised me for not being born here. He despised me for living down Kingfisher Meadows. That's a hate you can't argue with" (p. 72). Notice in this encounter, like Jason's encounter with the old woman in the house in the woods, the situation had an unreal feel, almost as if it were a dream. When the man released the dogs and Jason prepared himself for an attack that didn't come, the reader might wonder if the encounter was real. Moran, however, assured Jason later that Kit Harris did exist and that he was as hateful to everyone as he had been to Jason.

Significant in this section is the fight between Grant Burch and Ross Wilcox. Jason had hoped that Wilcox would get beaten in this fight so his popularity levels would be taken down a notch. Jason suspected that Wilcox was working on turning his group against Jason. Unfortunately, Burch broke his wrist in the fight, causing Wilcox to declare himself the winner. Notice that the other kids gossip about Wilcox before he arrived at the fight. They said that Wilcox's father was known for hitting his kids and wife. He had even put his wife in the hospital. This bit of rumor opens the theme of the Cyclical Nature of Life. Ross Wilcox's father was a bully, leading to having a son who was also a bully.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the fight between Grant Burch and Ross Wilcox. Who did Jason hope would win? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the relationship between Moran and Jason. Why did Jason not get angry with Moran when he walked on up the bridle path without him?

Discussion Question 3

Was Kit Harris right in making assumptions about Jason just because he was an outsider? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

deranged, gammon, stave, epicenter, trajectory, intergalactic, expertise, massacred, silage, trespassing, sluiced, hermaphroditic, eddied, infantile, quest



Rocks

Summary

In the chapter "Rocks," corresponding to the month of May, Jason and his family were horrified when one of Great Britain's warships was sunk by the Argentina forces during the Falklands War. It was the first time the people of Great Britain had considered they might lose the war. Meanwhile, Jason's dad had been sleeping in the guest bedroom. He said it was because of his back. Jason's parents had fought over dinner about the rockery that Helena wanted put in the backyard. Michael was against the rockery and was hateful in his protest. Helena defended her desire to have one made of marble, of course. Michael indicated it was a waste of a good deal of money. Helena broke a plate in the kitchen. Michael went after her but she'd already gone out and slammed the back door. Julia and Jason agreed the fight was worthy of four stars. Julia tried to console him by saying their parents were just going through a rocky patch.

Jason was keeping a scrapbook of newspaper articles pertaining to the war. At school, Nick Yew was deemed a hero because his brother was fighting in the war. When Jason got home from school one day his mother had bank papers spread out on the kitchen table. Jason's stomach turned when his mother sarcastically told him that his father would be in for a pleasant surprise when he got home. Jason recognized the sarcasm in both his mother and father's voices at dinner.

After dinner his mother and father seemed to have called a cease fire so Jason went into the living room to watch television. It was from there that he could hear his mother ask his father why he'd taken out a second mortgage on the house for five thousand pounds. Helena asked for an explanation about the second mortgage. Michael blamed it on Helena's spending habits. Meanwhile, the war was going even worse. Jason was upset because people were dying while he was going about his ordinary life.

The whole family was shocked when they learned that the "Coventry," the ship on which Tom Yew was assigned had been sunk. Nineteen men were killed. It was while Jason and the other students were waiting for the school bus that they learned that Tom Yew was among those who were killed. They realized Tom must have been among the dead when they saw Gilbert Swinyard and Pete Redmarley running toward them. Nick Yew was not with them.

Later in the month Jason came home from school to find a mound of granite in the driveway. His mother was angry because the men were supposed to put the rocks in the back yard. His father didn't mention the rocks when he first came home. He did later ask when he'd be able to park in the garage and ask Helena if she'd paid for the project yet. He indicated the people might rip her off if she had. Julia underhandedly told her father that he'd won the argument but that his victory might come at a price. Meanwhile, a ceasefire was declared in the war. Great Britain had won.



The landscape firm Helena had hired to do the work for her wound up going out of business because of bankruptcy. Mr. Broadwas and his sons helped Michael, Jason, and Moran put the rockery together. When it was finished and the pond filled, Helena put two koi in the pond. That night a heron flew away with one of the fish in its mouth. Helena tried to get the fish back but was unsuccessful. Jason was angry when he saw his father watching through the window. He knew his father knew he had won.

Analysis

In May, life handed Jason a lot for a young teen to handle. A resident of Black Swan Green, a boy whom Jason knew, was killed in the Falklands War. It brought the reality of war home to Jason. He had trouble understanding how his life could go on as usual when people were fighting and dying. The war between Great Britain and Argentina was shadowed by a war going on in Jason's household. His mother and father had declared all out combat against each other after Helena discovered that Michael had taken out a second mortgage on the house.

In one good turn for Jason, notice that he and his sister seemed to grow closer during this section of the novel. Instead of being hateful to him, Julia helped him with the dishes and even tried to make him feel better after their parents had their arguments. Notice that when Jason saw his sister and Ewan together he wondered if his mother and father had ever been that happy together.

The fighting between Jason's mother and father continued to hover around the question of Michael's affair. Even though Helena got close to accusing him of cheating on her, or at least giving money to his lady friend, she didn't come right out and accuse him. It was as if making the accusation would be crossing a line that could never be undone. Michael gave Helena an unsatisfactory answer about the second mortgage. Helena either didn't believe or didn't care that the family was in financial trouble because she insisted on building the expensive rockery in the back yard. It seemed to be her way of getting even with Michael. Notice that both Julia and Jason were angry with their father for the way he was treating their mother. Julia mentioned in an underhanded way to her father that even though he had won the fight about the rockery and made Helena feel belittled, his victory had come at a high price. At the end of the section, Jason was angry with his father's satisfaction when the heron took off with one of the fish from the new pond. Jason wished people could realize it was more important to be kind than to be right.

Notice the way that the author chose to parallel the "war" in the Taylor family with the war going on in the Falklands. There are similarities and differences between these two skirmishes. It is love and respect that is dying in the Taylors' war while there are actual fatalities in the Falklands War. In both instances, however, the wars are fought over who was right and who was wrong. Even though Great Britain had been believed to be a force that could not be overthrown, it was scary to its residents how quickly the war seemed to be going in the favor of Argentina.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the way the fighting between Jason's parents was used in contrast with the fighting of the Falklands War. What are the similarities between these "wars"? What are the differences?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think it is more important to be right or to be kind? Why?

Discussion Question 3

How did Tom Yew's death affect the people of Black Swan Green?

Vocabulary

frigate, quayside, decorum, cascade, enchanting, dictaphone, patronize, allies, pristine, aerial, surveillance, verbatim, astern, detonated, condolence, tarmac, gullible, pyrrhic, conscripts, revere



Spooks

Summary

In the section “Spooks,” corresponding to June, Ross Wilcox and his group were impressed by Jason’s idea to tie a string to Mr. Blake’s door knocker in order to trick the man. They were so impressed that they invited Jason to be a member of their special group, the Spooks. Jason felt popular for once. Kids were coming to him asking if he was the one who tied the string to Mr. Blake’s door knocker. Neal Brose, who’d been giving Jason the cold shoulder, was even friendly to him. That night at dinner Helena told the family she’d been offered a job by her old friend Yasmin Morton-Bagot. Michael made fun of the opportunity. He didn’t seem to want her to take the job.

Jason had almost given up on the Spooks when he finally noticed a boy sitting on a gravestone. Jason was surprised that it was Moran. He had gotten an invitation, too. They followed the smell of cigarette smoke to the group of Spooks behind a pile of roof tiles. Grant Burch gave Jason and Moran their challenge. They each had fifteen minutes to get through six backyards. Jason volunteered to go first. One man chased him, thinking he was a fox. Mr. Broadwas saw Jason tell him the easiest way out of his backyard. In the next yard he fell into a decorative pond. He worried he’d fall through the greenhouse in Mr. Blake’s yard but made it across safely. Squelch’s yard was the last one that Justin had to traverse. It took him a while because two women sat talking in that yard. The women were called into the house just as the first chime of nine was sounding. Jason made it over the fence with two chimes to spare.

The boys were still celebrating Jason’s victory when they heard a crash. Jason knew it was the sound of Moran falling through Mr. Blake’s greenhouse. The other boys prepared to run away but Jason knew that Moran wouldn’t abandon him. Jason suggested they should make sure Moran wasn’t hurt. He was warned that the Spooks would find out and disown him if he did go back to check on Moran. Despite the warning, Jason went to check on Moran. He knew he was committing social suicide.

Analysis

This chapter, which represents the month of June, includes a turning point for Jason. It is in this chapter that he had the opportunity to go one of two ways. He had received an invitation from the Spooks to join their club and had successfully completed his challenge. His trouble came when his friend, Moran, who was also given the chance to complete a challenge to become part of the popular club, got hurt. The other boys abandoned Moran. As much as Jason wanted to be part of the popular club, he couldn’t abandon his friend. While he was trying to complete his challenge to qualify as a Spook, Jason made the observation about himself that he cared too much. He realized that in order to be a really popular kid he had to not care about what happened to other people.



Even though he knew he was committing "social suicide," Jason went back to check on Moran.

Notice the way the author illustrates the idea of social suicide in this section of the novel. While in the graveyard Jason had been thinking about the direction in which people were buried. He thought it was cruel that it was said that suicide victims were buried facing north so they wouldn't be able to find Jesus. At the conclusion of this chapter, Jason believed he could understand the suicides and their endless wandering into nowhere. He believed he had symbolically committed social "suicide" and was to wander to nowhere in the popularity scale. He realized, however, he had done what he'd done because he wanted to help Moran. He made his own decision.

Note in this section that in the middle of his challenge to join the Spooks, Jason picked up Jimmy Carter's nose from one of the gardens. It was a symbol of the significance of what he was going through in order to gain popularity. Notice also the comments that Squelch's mother made about her son and the effect they had on Jason. Jason had never really thought about Squelch's future. He was just a boy the other kids made fun of. When he heard the concerns that Squelch's mother had about her son, Jason realized the sort of life the boy would have.

In the theme of Outsiders, notice that Helena pointed out to Michael that she wasn't really accepted in Black Swan Green. She described to him the way people were polite but didn't really make her feel accepted. They had lived there only since just after Jason was born, just slightly more than ten years. Julia backed up her mother's claims that the family was not considered real residents of the village by saying, "Kate says if you haven't lived in Black Swan Green since the War of the Roses, you'll never be a local" (p. 129). The idea is mirrored when Jason was told by one of the members of the Spooks that the group and its members had been there long before he'd come to live there. It was as if the length of time one had lived in the village somehow impacted his social standing.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Michael's reaction to his wife's decision to get a job. Why do you think he was so critical of her and the opportunity she'd been given?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Jason made the right decision when he went back to check on his friend even though it meant he was out of the Spooks? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss Jason's reaction to what happened after he helped the boys in his class trick Mr. Blake with the door knocker. Where is the line drawn between an innocent prank and cruelty?

Vocabulary

confiscated, truncheon, squandered, prefects, entrepreneur, plummeted, impaled



Solarium

Summary

In July, Jason went to the vicarage believing he had an appointment with the vicar to discuss his poetry. Instead he met an eccentric old lady named Eva van Outryve de Crommelynck. She wanted to discuss his poetry with him. She recognized that in his last poem, entitled "Rocks," the people doing war in the garden were representative of his mother and father. It was through his poetry that he was able to say the things he felt he couldn't say with his own voice. She taught him about word choice and beauty and explained to him that the words should convey the beauty, not be the beauty. The discussion was difficult for Jason because no one, not even his teachers, had challenged him to think about words and writing before. She challenged him to say what he thought around her instead of hiding his true feelings.

Jason learned that Madame Crommelynck's father was a composer and that she had grown up and lived around artists of all types including poets, novelists, musicians, and cinematographers. She was of Belgian descent. Before he left that day she made him come close to look at her. She explained she had once been beautiful but that beauty had left her.

At his second visit Madame Crommelynck was listening to music. She chided him for using a pen name for his poetry. She guessed correctly when she assumed he used the pen name because he didn't want the boys at his school, who she termed "hairy barbarians," to make fun of him. She challenged him to tell her exactly why he wrote under a pen name, and he explained the other boys would make his life miserable if they knew he wrote poetry. She told him he can't live a double life if he wants to be a true artist. The old lady showed Jason a picture of herself as a young woman. Jason noticed how beautiful she was. Seven or eight years after the photo was taken she and her husband escaped the Nazi regime and fled to Sweden. The estate her parents owned was demolished to build a German airfield. She also showed him a picture of Robert Frobisher, a composer whom her father had liked. Robert had killed himself because a girl he liked did not like him in return. She assured Jason that even after all the years that had passed since Robert's death that girl was still hurting because of what he had done. Before he left that day the two listened to Robert's music together. Madame Crommelynck gave him her copy of "Le Grand Meaulnes" and suggested he begin translating it.

Jason grew excited as he began translating the book Madame Crommelynck gave him. He worked harder on it than he had his regular classes but also found it more interesting. Meanwhile, the students at his school were picking on him. On the last day of school Ross Wilcox pushed him into a puddle while the rest of the kids laughed. To make matters worse, when Jason went for his third visit with the old woman he learned from the vicar and his wife, Gwendolin Bendincks, that the Crommelyncks had been extradited back to Bonn. Gwendolin believed they'd been responsible for some financial



scam though she didn't know the real reason for their arrest. It was during their discussion that Jason realized the man who opened the door for Jason each time he'd visited was not the butler but instead Madame Crommelynck's husband. He decided to bury Eliot Bolivar. He believed he was a fool to think he could ever learn to be a good poet or translate French.

Analysis

The events of this chapter are devastating for Jason as he meets a lady with whom he can talk about poetry and art but this lady disappears after only their second meeting together. Descriptions have been interesting in this novel but seem especially so in this chapter. Jason describes the differing voices of the doorbell and the door knocker. The knocker, he said was more of a holler while the doorbell was shy and more polite. Particularly interesting is the way Jason's perception of the house changes from visit to visit. This changing perception is demonstrated in the words the author chose to use. He describes the same portion of the house as it appeared to Jason during his three visits to the vicarage. During his first visit, when he was excited and believed it was the vicar himself who wanted to talk about his poetry, the entry of the house was described as: "A velvet staircase sliced sunlight across the hall. A blue guitar rested on a sort of Turkish chair. A bare lady in a punt drifted on a lake of water lilies in a gold frame" (p. 143). In this description, the house is made to seem grand, almost romantic.

At his second visit, however, the same scene is described in this way: "The stairway needed fixing. A knacked blue guitar'd been left on a broken stool. In the gaudy frame a shivery woman sprawled in a punt on a clogged pond" (p. 151). The velvet staircase turned into one that needed repairs. The guitar as well was described as damaged and was sitting on a broken stool instead of a Turkish chair. Instead of "resting," a term that indicates the guitar was left there intentionally as if the owner planned to come back, the guitar had been "left" on the chair a word that indicated the guitar had been abandoned. The painting of the woman was described as being gaudy. The description of the woman "sprawling" in the boat made the painting seem unattractive.

Things are again described differently in Jason's third visit: "Today the hallway had a behind-a-waterfall gloominess. The guitar's blue paint'd flaked off like a skin disease. In her yellow frame a dying woman in a boat trailed her fingers in the water" (p. 164). Here the author's word choices make the scene seem full of depression, as if someone were dying. The flaking blue paint on the guitar is compared to a skin disease while the woman in the boat is described as "dying."

This chapter closes and leaves Jason believing that he was not on the minds of the Crommelyncks because they were in jail. He was frustrated with himself for getting excited about his new friendship and disappointed because there was so much more he thought he could learn from the lady. This chapter, like other chapters, closes and leaves Jason and the action surrounding him dangling. The reader is left to draw his own conclusions as to what happened to the Crommelyncks.



Discussion Question 1

What do you think that Madame Crommelynck was trying to teach Jason? Why did he catch her attention?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Madame Crommelynck's story about Robert. What detail of her story does Jason miss? Why is it significant?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Gwendolin Bendincks' statement that the Crommelyncks had been arrested for some financial ploy. Why did she say this even though she didn't know if it was true or not? How could her statement cause problems for others?

Vocabulary

vicarage, keen, solarium, punt, incontinence, propagate, rectory, anonymous, robust, ludicrous, atrocious, inarticulate, maladroit, pantomime, pragmatic, destitute, formidable, repertory, adroit, stratagems, patronize, dredge, pseudonym, coterie, quintessentially, versifier, quotidian, biffed, resilient, amanuensis, venerate, encomium, alchemy, respite, despondency, sophistry, serendipity, parochial, aura, extradited, embezzlement



Souvenirs

Summary

In the section “Souvenirs,” taking place in August, Jason went with his father to a conference in Lyme Regis. They made plans to have dinner together that night and watch “Chariots of Fire” at the movie theater. Jason explored the towns and checked jewelry shops for Omega Seamasters but couldn’t find any. One jeweler suggested he try antique shops. A girl talked to him at the arcade. He was so nervous that he didn’t even stammer. The girls’ two friends came and began making fun of them. The girls got into an argument and forgot about Jason.

Instead of meeting his father for dinner, Jason wound up eating with Danny Lawlor. Danny was sent by Jason’s father because Craig Salt, the head of Greenland Supermarkets, had decided to attend the conference. Jason enjoyed the dinner with Danny. He even asked Danny to help him pick out a stunt kite. After they returned from dinner, Jason waited upstairs for his father. He didn’t come until long after the movie had already started. He promised Jason they’d go out and fly the kite he bought first thing in the morning. He then went out with Craig Salt. While he was gone, Jason revolted by using his father’s electric razor to shave off the fluff from above his lip.

When Jason’s dad finally returned to the hotel room, he was drunk. Jason accidentally got a glimpse of his father in the shower. He was impressed by the size of his penis but also grossed out. Even though Jason thought his father would be too hungover the following morning to fly the kite, they did go out as planned. Later they went to the fossil shop and Jason bought a fossil that his dad called a *Lytoceras fimbriatum*. Jason was still admiring the fossil as they walked back to the hotel. He didn’t notice when a jogger’s elbow smacked his head. The jogger turned out to be Craig Salt. Craig noticed the fossil that Jason had. He called it a trilobite. When Jason tried to correct him his father agreed with Craig. Jason was so angry at the way his father cowed to Craig that he didn’t even want to talk to him after Craig left.

Later in the month Jason went to Cheltenham with his mother. They planned to see “Chariots of Fire” after she got off work. His mother gave him a ten pound note. He added it to the rest of the money he had in his pocket, almost 29 pounds. He found an antique shop where he asked about Omega Seamasters. The woman there didn’t have that type of watch but found a colleague who did. He wanted 850 pounds for it.

Jason went back to his mother’s shop to wait for her to finish after learning that he did not have enough money to buy a watch. He noticed one of the shoppers, a young girl, steal some opal earrings and put them in her bag. He told his mother what he’d seen. His mother cleverly tricked the girl into giving back what she’d stolen. It turned out that the girl as well as her two friends had taken some things. Although he was impressed with the way his mother had handled the shoplifters, Jason was embarrassed when he had to stand in line with her at the movie theater. He hoped that no one would see him.



Analysis

Significant in this section of the book is the comparison and contrast of Jason's time with his mother and his time with his father. These separate incidents have parallel phrases and incidents but also play out differently in many ways. Some of the parallels include comments made by both Jason's mother and father that he'll, "get to swan around Cheltenham all morning like Lord Muck! All right for some, eh?" (p. 184) according to his father and, "get to swan round Lyme Regis in the sun. All right for some, eh?" (p. 167) according to his mother. Along with others, these parallel phrases bring the reader's attention to the similarities and differences in the two outings. "Then I saw this lush girl" (pp. 170 and 192) is another parallel phrase in both the outings. Jason flirted with the lush girl he saw on his trip with his dad. The lush girl he saw during his day with his mother turned out to be a shoplifter.

Another similarity between the two outings is that Jason got frustrated with his parents during his days with them. He was so angry with his father that he couldn't even speak to him after his father let Craig Salt, his boss, talk down to him. He was angry with his mother for embarrassing him when they stood in line waiting to watch the movie. Notice also that while Jason's dad did not keep his promise to take Jason to see "Chariots of Fire" his mother did keep the promise. In a way, however, Michael made up for not getting to see the movie by taking Jason out to fly the kite the next morning. Their kite flying experience was a bonding experience for the two just like Jason's helping his mother catch the shoplifters was a bonding experience between the two of them.

Notice that Jason is still worried about having broken his grandfather's watch. Jason tried to find a replacement while in Lyme Regis and Cheltenham. He was able to locate one with the help of an antique dealer in Cheltenham but learned that the watch would cost him much more money than he had. When Jason told the lady in the antique shop what had happened to the watch and voiced his fear that his father would kill him, she belittled his problem. Her attitude was somewhat like that of Jason's father when he said he wished he was thirteen again. Jason thought to himself that if anyone wanted to be thirteen again and face the problems of that age, they must have forgotten what it was like to be thirteen.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the differences and similarities between Jason's trip with his father and the one with his mother.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Jason's time with Danny Lawlor. What kind of impression did that character make on you?



Discussion Question 3

If you were Jason, what would you do about the broken watch? Do you think Jason was right to lie to his father about why he wasn't wearing it? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

quay, conjured, frieze, battalion, detained, sadistic, omniscience, promenade, venerable, improvise, nocturnal, reprobate, masticate, serendipitous, impasse, goaded



Maggot

Summary

In September, Ross Wilcox, Gary Drake, and Neal Brose picked on Jason because they'd seen him standing in line with his mother to watch "Chariots of Fire." Wilcox even pointed out Jason's stammer, an attack Jason hadn't seen coming, before Mr. Flanagan, the deputy head, walked past the boys during school. When Jason was called to the board during math class, Leon Cutler, who was a known loser, muttered that Jason was a loser. It was at this point that Jason knew his popularity was in the toilet. The boys laughed and called Jason names as he tried to solve his equation. Jason joined the unpopular kids in their changing area at P.E. Ross Wilcox and Gary Drake sabotaged and tackled him during the game. Mr. McNamara punished Wilcox and Drake along with Darren Croome by having them run to the bridge and back but instead the boys ran to town and got treats for themselves. Later, in the changing room they sang a dirty song about Mr. McNamara and then refused to admit they had initiated it. Mr. McNamara had tried to get Jason to tell on the guilty boys but even he had refused. Mr. Nixon joined Mr. McNamara in the changing room. He told them that because of the way they had acted he didn't care who was responsible, he was going to punish everyone.

In the cafeteria, Jason noticed people were looking at him, trying not to laugh. Moron told him the cause. There were ten sticky labels stuck to his blazer. Each had the word "Maggot" written on it. Also at lunch Moron told Jason that Debby Crombie was pregnant. After lunch, Jason went to the old gym as he and the other boys had been told to do for their punishment. They had to sit there for 45 minutes in silence each day that week. The day got even worse for Jason when the student teacher made Jason read out loud in English class. When Gary Drake read, he stammered as Jason had, making fun of him. The regular English teacher, Miss Lippetts, angrily told him he was despicable for treating Jason as he had.

During music class Mr. Kempsey sent Jason on an errand. He went the long way through the old gym where he ran into Holly Deblin. Holly told him that he wasn't a maggot as the other boys told him he was. In the staff room, Mr. Dunwoody pointed out Mr. Kempsey's cubicle to Jason. The whistle that Mr. Kempsey had sent Jason to get was on top of a stack of papers. Printed on those papers was advice about how to handle bullies. Jason took one of the papers and wondered if his teacher had purposefully orchestrated the errand.

On the bus, the only person who would sit with Jason was Moron. On the bus ride Jason noticed some Gypsy trailers parked near Danemoor Farm. After he got off the bus Ross Wilcox made fun of him while Wayne Nashend came up from behind him, knocked him down and took his bag. When Ross began yelling in Jason's face, Jason calmly told Ross that his breath smelled. The boys gave Jason a "grundy" (a wedgie), but they lost interest because Jason didn't try to fight them. Gary Drake threw Jason's



bag on top of the school bus. He had to get Norman Bates, the bus driver, get it down for him. The driver suggested to Jason that he get a Bowie knife to protect himself against the other kids.

Analysis

Significant in this chapter is Jason's realization that the students in his classes had decided he was the person upon whom they wanted to focus their hatred. He was smart enough to realize that there was nothing he could have done differently in order to keep the other boys from honing in on him. Adding to the theme of Disabilities, the boys learned about Jason's stammer. It was Jason's worst fear realized when he was made to read out loud in English class. Gary Drake made matters worse by volunteering to read after Jason finished and pretending to stammer.

Notice the reactions the different teachers have when they notice that Jason had been singled out. The P.E. teacher attempted to punish the students who tackled Jason, but they outsmarted him. When the students made fun of the P.E. teacher by singing a dirty song about him, the teacher was furious. Jason acted in a more mature manner about the attack against him than the P.E. teacher did when he was the focus of the boys' taunting. The P.E. teacher wanted names of the people who had initiated the dirty song, but Mr. Nixon, the principal, chose to punish all of the boys. Jason's math teacher didn't really address the bullying Jason received in his class. His English teacher, however, told Gary Drake how despicable and cowardly he was for attacking Jason by mimicking his speech impediment. Jason's music teacher sent Jason on an errand on which he had arranged for Jason to find a pile of papers with suggestions for dealing with bullies.

Notice in this section the author's use of the "labels" to make both a literal and figurative point about bullying. In the cafeteria the students were laughing at Jason because he had physical labels stuck to the back of his coat. He was able to remove these labels. When Ross Wilcox and Gary Drake began referring to him as the stuttering boy, Jason was afraid that that "label" was one he was never going to be able to remove.

Discussion Question 1

When Jason was thinking about what he could have done differently to keep Ross Wilcox from making fun of him he thought to himself: "Hate doesn't need a why. Who or even what is ample" (p. 198). Do you agree with Jason? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the different ways in which the teachers dealt with the bullies. Which way do you think was most effective? Why?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss Holly Deblin's advice to Jason. How would he be able to keep the school boys from deciding he was a maggot?

Vocabulary

credibility, malingering, sabotage, encore, recalcitrant, infantile, affront, decorum, onerous, fatuously, evokes, guile, halitosis



Knife Grinder

Summary

In October, Jason went home every day to an empty house. He couldn't believe how much he missed Julia. Before she'd left for college, she had given him her "Abbey Road" L.P. for safekeeping. He also found that his father had bought him a television as a surprise and put it in his room. He wondered why his dad had bought the television. He didn't do things like that for no reason. On the bus Ross Wilcox sat next to Jason asking him to get out his pencil case. Jason refused. Ross Wilcox stammered and stuttered when he talked to Jason, making fun of him. The only thing that interrupted Ross Wilcox's torture was when Squelch threw up.

The door bell rang. A man was there who wanted to sharpen their knives. He said he'd sharpened them the year before. Jason asked him to come back later, not seeming to really trust the man. When he told his parents about the man, his father said it was a Gypsy scam. Jason asked his dad why people didn't like the Gypsies. Michael said they didn't pay taxes and broke city planning regulations. He accused Helena of keeping secrets when she told him she'd had the man sharpen the knives the year before. Jason got tired of hearing his parents argue, so he asked to get down from the table.

Upstairs in his room, Jason found that a mouse head had been put in his pencil case. Later, the door bell rang again. It was Samuel Swinyard asking for signatures on a petition against allowing the Gypsies to have a permanent site in Black Swan Green. He also said there would be an emergency meeting on Wednesday about the issue. After hearing the men talk about the Gypsies, Jason wished he had allowed the man to sharpen their knives. He went to the meeting with his father. It was cut short by a stampede when the fire alarm went off. Later at Moran's house Jason learned that Mr. Moran had Gypsy heritage. He said the people weren't the best, but weren't the worst either.

Jason happened to run into Ross Wilcox and Gary Drake as well as about ten other kids while walking home from the Moran's house. He hid from them in the woods. Trying to get away from them, he went deeper into the woods. When he stopped to relieve himself, a big dog grabbed his bag and ran off. He tried to follow the dog but wound up falling into the old rock quarry where the Gypsies were camped. The Gypsies took care of him and talked to him. One of them, the knife sharpener, told Jason they didn't want to stay in Black Swan Green any more than the village residents wanted them there. Jason realized through their discussion that the Gypsies were just regular people. Alan Wall, the Gypsy boy who had gone to Jason's school for a short while, said he remembered Jason. When Jason asked, the Gypsies did give him back his bag. One boy gave Jason a replica of Jason's expression when he fell into the quarry that he had carved into a hunk of rubber. Alan Wall asked Jason to tell the other people in the village that they weren't thieves.



Analysis

While the chapter “Maggot” focused on the students who were bullying Jason, the chapter “Knife Grinder” focuses on bullying by adults. Although there is not as much of a focus in the world on adults bullying each other, this is basically what the people of Black Swan Green are doing to the Gypsies. They hate the Gypsies without even understanding who they are or why they hate them. In the same way, the boys at school hated Jason even though they didn’t understand who he was or even why they hated him. Jason saw what was happening because they were both having similar things done to them. The entire village was ganging up against the Gypsies, just like the entire school body was ganging up against Jason.

The mass hatred against the Gypsies adds to the theme of Outsiders. The people of Black Swan Green claim they don’t want the Gypsies there because they are outsiders. They believe if the Gypsies were allowed to live in Black Swan Green that their presence would throw off the balance of the community. They believed the Gypsies would bring nothing but problems to their village. Jason was allowed to get a look at the other side of the Gypsy controversy when he found himself in their camp. It turned out that the Gypsies didn’t want to live in Black Swan Green any more than the people of Black Swan Green wanted them there. They believed the people of Black Swan Green would want to make their children attend public schools and expect them to follow their rules for sanitation.

In the theme of Family Relationships, notice how Jason’s relationship with his sister had changed since January. In the introductory chapter of the novel it appeared that she could not stand Jason. When she left for college, however, she left her “Abbey Road” L.P. in his care. Notice also that the arguments between Jason’s parents seem to be getting more vicious. They argued violently about the Gypsy man who’d come to sharpen the knives. Michael accused his wife of keeping secrets from him because she hadn’t told him that the man had done work for them before.

The television set that Jason’s father gave him is another interesting point to notice in this chapter. Jason indicates that his father did not often give him gifts for no reason. When Jason thanked his father for the set, Michael was sarcastic and said he was glad it met Jason’s approval. Jason’s mother, on the other hand, commented that the gift was generous of his father, but Jason got the feeling that she was being sarcastic. It appears the gift might be a way for Jason’s father to try to gain favor with his son.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think it is significant that the Gypsy boy who was in class with Jason for a while was in Jason’s class on the day of the Hangman incident? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the changes in the relationship between Julia and Jason. Why is her gift of the "Abbey Road" L.P. so significant?

Discussion Question 3

Why were the people of Black Swan Green so against the Gypsies? Why did they think those people were a danger to their community? On the other hand, why did the Gypsies not like the way the villagers lived?

Vocabulary

migrated, trivial, vagrant, dismember, edifying, anarchy, inaugural, requisitioned, foraged, druid, dubious, assimilation



Goose Fair

Summary

In November, Jason found Ross Wilcox's wallet while on a ride at the Goose Fair. While leaving the ride, Jason saw Ross Wilcox with Dawn Madden begging to get back into the ride so he could look for his wallet. He'd been banned from the ride for walking from car to car so the fair worker wouldn't even let him in to look for his wallet. Then Dawn dumped Ross when he called her a cow. Dean Moran had been watching what was happening at the same time Jason was seeing it. He said sarcastically it was too bad. Jason and Dean went off to find Dean's sister. On the way they passed a booth manned by Alan Wall. He learned the Gypsies owned and ran the carnival. They were given a free try at the game. As they were playing Gary Drake, Alan Little, and Darren Croome came and made fun of them. They didn't expect the fair workers to step in on the side of Jason and Dean. Alan angered Gary Drake when he accused him of being at Strensham's barn. When Alan threatened to fight Gary and the other two, they crept away. Before Jason and Dean left, Clem told them a story about his father, who was a prizefighter. For his last fight he'd bet everything he owned to win twenty guineas of prize money. He knew if he hadn't fought for everything he owned he would have lost. He used the prize money to buy a carnival ride.

As Jason looked for Maxine in the Hall of Mirrors, he considered the different versions of himself that he saw. Maxine heard him talking to himself and asked if he was a loony. Jason bought himself, Maxine, and Dean toffee apples. At the apple stand Kelly Moran told them she'd heard about Ross and Dawn's breakup. She also said that Ross had lost his wallet that contained hundreds of quid in it from Ross' father's business. They gossiped that Ross' father was vicious and had put his mother in the hospital over a strip of postage stamps. When Jason finally had a chance to count the content of Ross' wallet there were thirty 20 pound notes there. He considered keeping the money. He knew Ross would get a beating but thought it might serve him right.

Dean and Jason ran into Jason's father. Jason thought it was strange. His unborn twin prompted him that it might be the last time he'd see his father. With this in mind, he told his father he wanted to be a forester. After his father left, Jason made the excuse he had to go relieve himself to get away from Dean. He instead went to find Ross and return the wallet. Ross might have been grateful the wallet had been found but was still hateful to Jason. Jason went back to ride the rides with Dean. After they finished one ride they heard screams coming from somewhere other than the carnival grounds.

They learned that Ross had apparently gone to make up with Dawn after the wallet was returned to him. He'd found Dawn having sex with Grant Burch. Ross was angry and stole Grant's scrambler. He rode through town and had a wreck. A woman who stopped to check on Ross found him lying bloodied. His right leg stopped at the knee.



Analysis

This chapter, set in November, is the climax of the novel. It is in this chapter that Jason had to make the most difficult decision of all. He'd found Ross Wilcox's wallet stuffed full of money at the carnival. If he kept it he could get a passive revenge on Ross for all the times that Ross had been cruel to him. Because the money belonged to Ross' father, he'd have to answer to his father, who was said to be viciously cruel, about the loss of the money. Jason foresaw that Ross would get a beating because he'd lost the money. Jason felt that beating would be fair punishment for the way Ross had tormented him. Jason also thought he could have used the money to buy himself another Omega Seamaster watch and would never have to tell his father about the damage that had been done to his grandfather's watch. Jason's conscience won out, however, and he returned the money to Ross.

Notice the different ways that Jason's fight with his conscience is portrayed through the course of the novel. He first considered the quandary in the context of a trial. The prosecution argued against Jason keeping the money because it wasn't his and because Ross would be panicked because he'd lost it. In his defense, lawyers pointed out all of the mean things Ross had done to Jason. The judge brought back the verdict that Jason should keep the wallet. As Jason watched Ross and Dawn have their fight and breakup, the wallet, "shrieked at its master to rescue it" (p. 244). This description personifies the wallet and indicates how the guilt was eating away at Jason. As he stood talking with some other kids about Ross' lost wallet, Jason indicated he felt as if, "A mile-long neon Chinese dragon wove through the Goose Fair and bit my jeans pocket. Luckily, no one else saw it" (p. 250).

Also interesting in this section of the novel is the way the author uses the hall of mirrors symbolically to give Jason a chance to discuss his desire to change himself. Of course this adds to the theme of Coming of Age as nearly every adolescent goes through stages of wanting to be someone else but realizing it isn't quite possible. Jason decided he could only change his superficial features, as he looked at the changes the mirrors made to his body, and couldn't really change who he was inside. In another mirror Jason's inner Maggot told him that if he acted differently he would be more popular. An upside down version of himself made Jason wonder if it would be better if he just had one version of himself, an outside Jason who matched the inside Jason.

Notice in this section the unusual aura that Jason sensed from his dad at the fair. He had a strange feeling it might be the last time he would see him and told him he wanted to work as a forester.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the story that Uncle Clem told about his prizefighting father. Why do you think it is included in the story?



Discussion Question 2

Did Jason do right by returning Ross Wilcox's wallet to him? Should he have returned it sooner?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Jason's interaction with his father at the carnival. Why might he have thought he'd never see his father again?

Vocabulary

prosecution, defense, verdict, publican, siphon



Disco

Summary

In the chapter "Disco," taking place in December, Jason smashed Neal Brose's scientific calculator in a vise during metal working class. In Mr. Nixon's office Jason was asked if it was true that his father had lost his job. Mr. Nixon told Jason he couldn't go around destroying other people's things just because he was unhappy. Jason tried to explain he hadn't done it because his father had lost his job. He told Mr. Nixon about Brose's popularity lessons in which that student was extorting money from him as well as three other students. They were told they'd get beaten if they didn't pay up. Mr. Nixon asked if the other boys would back up Jason's story. He also lectured Jason for not telling him sooner. Jason was sent to the stationary room to wait. He got the urge to write and filled three pages with what he described as a confession.

Mr. Kempsey lectured the 3KM class about their refusal to speak up when they knew something was happening that was wrong. Every student turned to look at Jason when the teacher said it was shameful that it had taken Jason's actions to bring the situation to a head. As Gary Drake stared at him, Jason asked him if he'd forgotten what he looked liked. The teacher joined Jason's questioning of Gary, making that boy appear a fool. Since Gary had been embarrassed, Wayne Nashend and Ant Little suspended, and Neal Brose probably expelled, Jason believed he would get beat up for sure.

In Miss Lippetts' class Jason took Neal Brose's seat. They talked about secrets and what made a secret a secret. Miss Lippetts also instructed her students on the ethics of what secrets should be kept and which ones shouldn't be kept. Jason thought of his secrets. The connection between Ross' accident and his lost wallet, his grandfather's ruined watch and Madame Crommelynck were all secrets he was harboring. They also discussed reputation. Jason talked about how Neal Brose's reputation as a golden boy had been wrecked as well as his reputation as a hard person was also wrecked.

At home, Jason got the Christmas tree out and decorated it. He got a strange call from Julia. She said their mother had called and asked her to call as soon as possible. Julia advised Jason on how to dress for the village's Christmas disco before she hung up the phone. Jason knew if he didn't go to the disco the bullies would have won. He thought he was in trouble right away when an older kid in a rugby shirt grabbed him. Turned out the boy was Floyd Chaceley's older brother. He thought Jason was Neal Brose and intended to beat him for picking on his little brother. Pluto cleared up the confusion. Gary Drake actually spoke to Jason when they ran into each other in the bathroom. Later, Jason and Holly met up by chance in a storage area. They kissed. Holly described to him the look on Neal Brose's face when Jason smashed the calculator. She told him how much she admired him for what he had done. They kissed again.

Michael was sitting alone in the dark when Jason got home. Jason asked if he could start the conversation. He first told his father about the calculator. Michael said he



already knew, that Neal Brose's father had called to apologize to him. Jason then told his father about the watch being damaged. He explained how he'd tried to find a new one but had been unable to do so. His father told him it didn't matter. There would be no punishment because it appeared Jason had already punished himself enough. Jason's father then began trembling as he tried to tell Jason his news.

Analysis

In the theme of Coming of Age, Neal Brose had taken over Ross Wilcox's spot as the lead tormentor at Jason's school. It served as a lesson to Jason that when one bully disappeared, another would step up to take his place. Also in the theme of Bullies, notice the inclusion of Flyod Chaceley's older brother. This older, bigger boy symbolizes the idea that there are always older, bigger, and tougher bullies.

It is significant in this chapter that Jason finally stood up to the bullies in his life. In the past, he hadn't fought back against the bullies or told anyone what was happening. He'd come up with a way to not only stand up for himself but to do it in a way that technically wouldn't make him a tattletale. When Mr. Nixon, the headmaster asked Jason why he had destroyed Neal Brose's calculator he had no choice but to tell him about the way that Brose and his friends were extorting money out of some of the students. He made the point to other students that Brose wasn't so hard that he couldn't be cracked. He also made the point to his teachers that Brose wasn't the perfect student and child that all the adults believed he was. Later, when Miss Lippetts encouraged her students to talk about secrets and ethics Jason even had the opportunity to explain to the students why he'd acted as he had.

The reader can now put together why Jason thought his father was acting so strangely the day of the Goose Fair. He'd just been fired from his job. Jason perhaps had sensed his father's distress and desperation from being fired when he met him at the fair. It could be for that reason that Jason got the idea he might not see his father again.

Jason did see a different side of his father's personality in this section of the novel. Jason indicates when he talked to his father the evening after the Christmas disco that he'd never seen his father get so upset that he trembled before. This was the only spot in the novel that Jason's father let his feelings show through his bravado. Michael's reaction was muted by his distress even when Jason told his father about damaging his father's watch.

Discussion Question 1

If Jason had calmly talked to the headmaster of his school about what Neal Brose and his friends were doing, do you think it would have had the same effect as his act of smashing the calculator? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the reaction that Jason's father had when he learned about the smashed watch. Was it what you expected? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think Michael was trying to tell his son at the end of this chapter? Give reasons to support your answer.

Vocabulary

lathe, vivisector, extortion, aspersions, pally, alleged, duress, feigned, pithy, palpably, delusion, rhetorician, ambiguous, appalled, avuncular



January Man

Summary

In “January Man,” Jason eavesdropped as Gwendolin Bendicks and Mrs. Rhydd gossiped about his parents’ divorce. Gwendolin suspected Michael had gotten his lover a contract with Greenland Supermarkets back when they began having their affair. She suspected the affair was the reason Michael had gotten fired. Jason had been browsing in the store when he heard the two women talking. He and his mother were moving out of Black Swan Green that day. He’d been sent to say goodbye. His father had come to pick up the rest of his things the day before. He’d ridden in the car with Cynthia, his girlfriend. As Jason said hello to her, he considered she might be his stepmother one day.

Jason walked to the lake. He dozed off on the bench. When he woke Squelch was sitting next to him. He said he’d come to see the swan. Jason was surprised when a swan did land on the lake a few minutes later. After his visit with Squelch he walked back to the house in the woods. He introduced himself to a man working there. He said that the woman who lived there had helped him when he’d hurt his ankle the previous year. Joe, the working man, said he was the woman’s son-in-law. He was surprised to meet Jason because his mother-in-law had told him about a boy she helped but he had thought she had imagined him. Joe let Jason go and talk to the woman, Mrs. Gretton, who was living with him. Jason confessed to Mrs. Gretton that Ross Wilcox’s injury had been his fault. Jason noticed that when he was talking to Mrs. Gretton that he didn’t stammer at all. After his visit with Mrs. Gretton, Joe showed Jason pictures of Mrs. Gretton’s brother. He had died in 1941 in the war. Jason heard running footsteps as he was walking back to his house. He hid in time to see Grant Burch run past. He was being chased by Philip Phelps, who was threatening to kill him.

Back at his house, Jason got his grandfather’s Oxo tin from under the floorboard for the last time. The tin contained a variety of significant objects from his life, such as the nose from the stone statue of Jimmy Carter, the book from Madame Crommeynck, the fossil his dad bought him, a bracelet Holly gave him, and the remains of his grandfather’s watch. Julia came to Jason’s room to tell him it was time to go. She asked him about Eliot Bolivar and his poetry. She said she hoped he hadn’t given up writing all together. As they leave, Jason commented on how it didn’t feel right with them leaving without their father. Julia told him it would be all right in the end. Julia told Jason that even though it did not feel all right it was because it wasn’t the end yet.

Analysis

Just like the first chapter of the novel this chapter is titled “January Man.” It is set in the month of January, a full year after the opening of the novel. The purpose of this chapter seems to be to show the reader how much things can change in a year’s time. Philip



Phelps, who was once Grant Burch's servant, has apparently turned on him because Jason encountered Philip chasing Grant through the woods threatening to kill him. Notice the location and situation described is similar to the one in the initial chapter of the book where Jason hid when Phelps ran past returning from the store where he'd been sent to get food and drink for Burch.

Jason also revisits the house in the woods that he discovered January one year ago. The woman there was now living with her son-in-law. Jason learned there was no brother to wake, that the woman's brother had been killed in war in 1941. The mention of a death in war reminds the reader of Tom Yew's more recent death in the war. Joe told Jason that his mother-in-law had never really recovered from her brother's death. The reader must wonder if Nick Yew, Tom's brother, will turn out to be like Mrs. Gretton in years to come. Also reminding the reader of the tragic loss of Tom Yes is Squelch's guess that the ambulance he and Jason heard was for Debby Crombie and her baby.

A good deal of back information in the novel becomes clear not only to Jason but also to the reader. The two gossipy ladies that Jason overheard validated that the strange phone calls that both Jason and Julia answered were probably from Cynthia, their father's lover. The sky-blue vehicle that Jason had seen driving slowly in their cul-de-sac a year prior had been Cynthia's. The second mortgage that Michael had taken out on the Taylor's house had been taken out for Cynthia, not to cover the family's expenses. While Michael was left jobless and weak, however, Jason's mother was doing well in her new business.

In the theme of Family Relations, note how uncomfortable Jason is with the new family dynamics. Julia seemed to have sided with her mother. Jason envied her because she lived at college and didn't have to choose between her parents. He was going to live with his mother but felt like he was choosing sides. He tried to think of Cynthia as his stepmother but couldn't imagine it. He knew she was trying to be nice to him for his father's sake but couldn't warm to her.

Closing the theme of Disabilities is Jason's encounter with Squelch and his conversation with Mrs. Gretton. At the lake, Squelch told him he was waiting for the swan. Jason didn't even consider that Squelch might have known what he was talking about. He immediately countered that there was no swan. He was surprised when a swan swooped down and landed on the lake but Squelch wasn't. Jason was mature enough to apologize to Squelch because he hadn't believed him simply on the grounds that Squelch wasn't very smart. Later, when Jason was talking to Mrs. Gretton about his part in Ross Wilcox's accident, he noticed he didn't stammer at all. He wondered if his stammering was somehow connected to the way he expected the person to whom he was talking to would respond to him.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think it was so important for Jason to confess to someone, even if it was only the demented Mrs. Gretton, that he thought Ross Wilcox's accident was his fault?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the items in Jason's Oxo tin. Why were they significant?

Discussion Question 3

How does this chapter address the cyclical nature of life?

Vocabulary

liaison, indiscretion, collateral, foisted, senile, docile, lorry, petrify, facade



Characters

Jason Taylor

Jason Taylor is the main character and narrator for this novel. He is the son of Michael and Helena Taylor, and the younger brother of Julia Taylor. In January, when the book opened, he had just turned thirteen. Even though he was a boy, Jason enjoyed writing poetry and submitted poems to the parish magazine under a pen name. Because of these poems, he made friends with a strange German lady who encouraged him to think about his writing and word choice along with the real meaning of beauty and truth. Jason didn't want his friends to know he wrote poetry because he believed it would cause him to be labeled a loser and/or gay. He also didn't want his friends to find out that he stammered as he believed this disability was another detail about himself that would cause him to be labeled a loser.

Popularity was important for Jason. He didn't necessarily want to be popular — he didn't want to act in the hateful ways the popular kids did — but he didn't want to be unpopular either. He thought his big chance to seal his fate had come when he had an opportunity to join the Spooks, a club of popular kids. He successfully completed the challenge he was given but could not ignore his friend who was hurt when he tried to complete the same challenge. Jason was ousted from the club when he went back to check on Dean, who had fallen through a greenhouse and broken his arm.

After this things went downhill for Jason. He was picked on mercilessly and called a maggot. The other boys talked to him in stammering, stuttering voices to torment him about his speech impediment. One group of boys even began demanding money from a group of boys they deemed as losers. Jason was among those boys who had to pay money to keep from getting beaten up or having his things destroyed. Finally, one day he'd had enough and brought things to a head when he smashed a calculator belonging to one of the boys in a vise.

Jason's struggles with bullies was only one of the challenges he faced during his thirteenth year. When his sister went to college and his mother went back to work the dynamics of his family changed. They changed even more when Jason learned his parents were getting a divorce. Jason also struggled with a pair of secrets he harbored. One was the damage he'd accidentally done to his grandfather's antique watch that he'd been given as a gift from his father. When Jason finally worked up the courage to tell his father what had happened, his father chose not to punish him because he thought Jason had already punished himself enough. A second secret that Jason confessed only the Mrs. Gretton, a woman with dementia, was that he believed the accident that had caused Ross Wilcox to lose his leg was his fault.



Michael Taylor

Michael Taylor was the father of Jason and Julia. He was the husband of Helena. He was portrayed in the novel as a bad father and husband. Even though he promised his wife he would stop the affair he was having with Cynthia, he began seeing her again. He even took out a second mortgage on the home in which his family lived in order to give Cynthia money. He was a manager with a supermarket chain who took his job very seriously. He put his work before his family. Just before the end of the novel he was fired from the supermarket chain. It was said that he was fired because of a small amount of missing money. At the end of the novel, after Christmas, he left his wife and family to move in with his lover.

Miss Lippetts

Miss Lippetts was the teacher who submitted Jason's poem in a poetry contest. He'd won the Hereford and Worcester County Libraries Poetry Prize with that poem. Miss Lippetts also recognized Jason's speech impediment and for that reason didn't make him read out loud in class. One day she returned to her class, which was being taught by a student teacher and discovered that teacher had made Jason read. When she heard the way the students were making fun of Jason's stammer she told them they were being childish and immature. It was also during a class discussion about ethics and secrets that Jason was able to talk openly about what had happened between himself and Neal Brose.

Eva van Outryve de Crommelynck

Eva van Outryve de Crommelynck was the German woman who invited Jason to her house to talk about poetry. She encouraged Jason to think about his views on life and what he wanted out of life. They discussed music, poetry, beauty and truth. Eva shared with Jason memories from her childhood and young adulthood. Her family had been forced to leave their estate in Germany by the Nazis. Eva taught Jason how to light a lady's cigarette and how to pour wine. They met only twice before their friendship came to a sudden end. Jason was told by the vicar's wife that Eva and her husband had been extradited back to Germany because of some financial scam.

Cynthia

Cynthia was the woman with whom Michael Taylor had an affair nearly six years before the time of the novel. It was rumored that Cynthia had an office equipment firm that was a supplier for Greenland Supermarkets, where Michael worked. Cynthia was the person who had been called on Michael's office phone both when Jason answered the phone and when Julia answered the phone. Cynthia stopped calling when Michael took out a second mortgage on his house to help her with her bills. When Jason finally met Cynthia he was surprised to discover she was not as pretty as his mother.



Neal Brose

Neal Brose was the boy who took over Ross Wilcox's spot as the meanest bully at Jason's school. He was the one who came up with the idea to make the less popular boys pay him and his friends for popularity lessons. If the boys didn't pay up they were in danger of being beaten up or having their things damaged. Brose's extortion plan was exposed after Jason got his revenge on the boy by smashing Brose's expensive calculator in a vise in metal working class. Brose got expelled from school and he lost his image as a golden boy among the teachers because Jason stood up to him.

Dean "Moron" Moran

Although he was not the most popular kid in school, Dean Moran was Jason's best friend. Dean's father had a reputation of being a drunk, an issue that caused his son a good deal of grief. Dean received an invitation to join the Spooks at the same time that Jason did. Instead of successfully competing his challenge, Dean fell through Mr. Blake's greenhouse. Jason had successfully completed his challenge but went back to check on Moran even though he knew by doing so he'd be kicked out of the club he'd just managed to get into.

Grant Burch

Grant Burch was the boy at the end of the novel who Jason saw being chased through the woods by Philip Phelps, the boy who had at one time been considered Burch's servant. Phelps was threatening to kill Burch. Burch was one of Ross Wilcox's direct enemies. During a fight in the spring, Wilcox had beaten Burch and broken his wrist. When Dawn Madden, Wilcox's girlfriend, broke up with him she went and slept with Burch. When Wilcox saw the two of them together, he was so angry he took off on Burch's motor bike. Wilcox crashed the bike and tore off part of a leg in the wreck.

Ross Wilcox

For most of the novel Ross Wilcox was the toughest boy at Jason's school. He headed the group that picked on Jason and other boys whom they considered losers. Ross left the school after he lost one of his legs from the knee down in a motorcycle accident. He'd been angry because he saw his girlfriend, Dawn Madden, sleeping with Grant Burch, a boy who was basically Wilcox's worst enemy. Wilcox and Gary Drake were cousins. They often ganged up on the less popular kids together.

Giles "Pluto" Noak

Pluto Noak was the boy who worked the thread in the cherry-knocking prank the boys played on Mr. Blake. It was Pluto who was so cruel to Mr. Blake and tortured him by



saying he'd heard how Mr. Blake beat his son when Mr. Blake tried to confront Pluto about the knocking. Jason and Dean believed Pluto was a leader in the group called the Spooks. After Dean hurt himself during his challenge to become a Spook it was Pluto who warned Jason that if he went back for his friend he would be kicked out of the Spooks.

Wayne Nashend

Wayne Nashend was one of Ross Wilcox's followers. He was the one who took Jason's Adidas bag when he and the other boys attacked Jason at the bus stop. It was Wayne who threw the bag up on top of the school bus. Wayne was one of the people who Jason imagined he was crushing when he crushed Neal Brose's calculator. He was among the group who was extorting money from the less popular kids for "popularity lessons." He was suspended because of his part in the extortion plan.

Helena Taylor

Helena Taylor was the wife of Michael and mother of Jason and Julia. Helena was portrayed in a more sympathetic light than her husband but she still had her faults. She was a good mother to her children and carried through with the promises she made to them. Helena, however, seemed to spend money unwisely on lavish items just to spite her husband. She insisted on an expensive kitchen renovation and a rockery for the garden even though her husband told her they couldn't afford the expenses.

Mervyn "Squelch" Hill

Mervyn "Squelch" Hill was one of the students in Jason's class. He was not as smart as his classmates because he was born prematurely. The kids in the class called him squelch because they learned he was wearing a diaper even when he was nine years old. The other kids picked on Squelch and made fun of him but were never really mean to him. Even though Squelch told Jason he'd seen a swan on the lake Jason didn't believe him until he saw the swan for himself.

Gwendolin Bendincks

Gwendolin Bendincks was one of the gossips of Black Swan Green. She was the wife of the vicar and wrote a good deal of the parish magazine for which Jason wrote poems. When Jason went to the vicarage to visit Mrs. Crommelynck, Bendincks told Jason that the Crommelyncks had been extradited back to Bonn by the West German Police. Jason later heard Bendincks gossiping with another woman about his father's affair. In her first meeting with Jason Madame Crommelynck calls Gwendolin a "harpy of tattle-tittle" (p. 145).



Danny Lawlor

Danny Lawlor is the salesman who was trained by Michael Taylor, Jason's dad. Michael had liked Danny and planned to fast track him to the top of the line in sales. Michael even trusted Danny enough to allow him to take Jason to dinner when Michael's conference ran late. Danny, however, stabbed Michael in the back when he worked with Craig Salt, the main boss of Greenland Supermarkets, to get Michael fired.

Julia Taylor

Julia Taylor was Jason's older sister. At the beginning of the novel Julia disliked her younger brother and called him "The Thing." By the end of the novel the two had developed a friendship. She tried to console him when their parents fought. The two even shared dish duty willingly. When Julia went to college, she gave Jason her "Abbey Road" LP for safekeeping. It was a sign the two had finally grown into friends.

Mrs. Gretton

Mrs. Gretton was the woman who lived in the house in the woods. She was the one to whom Jason went for help after he hurt his ankle. Later, on the day that Jason was to leave Black Swan Green Jason happened to see Mrs. Gretton again. He confessed to her that he believed Ross Wilcox's injury was his fault.

Craig Salt

Craig Salt was Michael Taylor's boss at Greenland Supermarkets. He fired Michael from his job because a small amount of money was discovered to be missing from an expense fund. Jason met Craig Salt only once during the course of the story. He was angry with the way his father cowed to the opinionated man.

Gary Drake

Gary Drake was Ross Wilcox's cousin. He was one of the main boys who caused trouble in school. He was also an enemy of Jason's. Drake was the one who pointed out to the teacher that he'd skipped Jason's turn to read out loud in assembly. It was also Gary Drake who humiliated Jason by pretending to stutter and stammer as he read out loud.

Roger Blake

Roger Blake is the man who was the object of Jason and the other boys' cherry knocking. When Blake came out of his house and threatened to call the police, Pluto accused Blake of being a child abuser. Later in the story it was Mr. Blake who called the



ambulance when Dean Moran fell through his greenhouse trying to complete the spooks challenge.

Ant Little

Ant Little began the story as a disciple of Grant Burch but switched allegiances to Ross Wilcox. Ant Little was one of the students who was suspended after Jason smashed Neal Brose's calculator and brought to light a scheme some of the popular boys were using to extort money from the less popular ones.

Tom Yew

Tom Yew was the town hero of Black Swan Green because he was in the Royal Navy. Yew was killed when the "Sheffield" was hit by the forces from Argentina. Before he'd left for duty Yew had sex with Debby Crombie. She got pregnant and had her baby months after Tom was killed.

Ralph Bredon

Ralph Bredon was the name of the butcher's boy that Mrs. Gretton told Jason had drowned when the ice on the lake broke. Jason believed he saw the ghost of that boy when he was skating by himself on the pond. He believed it was that boy's fault that he fell, hurting his ankle and breaking his grandfather's watch.

Hugo Lamb

Hugo Lamb was the son of Brian and Alice Lamb. Jason admired Hugo and wanted his older cousin to think he was cool. While they were together Hugo was not only mean to his younger brother, but he also stole cigarettes from a store in Black Swan Green. He laughed at Jason when Jason threw up after smoking the cigarette Hugo gave him.

Kit Harris

Kit Harris was the man whom Jason met in the woods. Harris owned the dobermans that he accused Jason of egging on. Dean Moran told Jason that Harris was a teacher at a military like school. Harris was the one who accused Jason of being inferior because he had not lived in Black Swan Green his entire life.

Joe the Builder

Joe the builder was Mrs. Gretton's son-in-law. He was surprised to see Jason and learn that it was Jason whom his mother-in-law had helped. Mrs. Gretton had been getting



senile. Joe believed she had not actually interacted with a real boy but had only imagined him.

Mr. McNamara

Mr. McNamara was the P.E. teacher who the kids made fun of and sang a dirty song about after their gym class one day. The song resulted in all of the boys being put in detention.

Grigoire

Grigoire was Eva's husband. He was the one who answered the door both times that Eva and Jason visited. It was not until after Grigoire and Eva were extradited back to Germany that Jason learned Grigoire was not the butler but was in reality Eva's husband.

Philip Phelps

Philip Phelps was the "servant" of Grant Burch. Philip was generally docile and obeyed Grant. It was during Jason's last trip to the lake that he watched as Philip chased down Grant yelling that he was going to kill him.

Pete Redmarley

Pete Redmarley was one of the students who attended Jason's school. After Jason was kicked out of the spooks, Pete Redmarley was not mean to Jason, he just pretended like he didn't exist.

Uncle Brian Lamb

Uncle Brian Lamb was the husband of Alice Lamb. He was the father of Hugo, Nigel, and Alex. He was portrayed as being overpowering when he came to eat dinner with his wife's sister and her family. He was opinionated and boisterous.

Rosemary

Rosemary was the woman from the psychiatric hospital who dressed in a nurse's uniform and made Jason think she was not a patient. Rosemary accused Jason of being the man who ran away and abandoned her.



Yasmin Morton-Bagot

Yasmin Morton-Bagot was Helena's friend from college. She was in Helena and Michael's wedding. Yasmin gave Helena an important opportunity when she offered her the job of working as the manager for one of her galleries.

Holly Deblin

Holly Deblin is the name of the first girl who Jason kissed. They had met at school when Holly told Jason that he was not a maggot regardless of what the other kids at school wanted him to believe. They kissed at the town's Christmas disco.

Norman Bates

Norman Bates was the name of the man who drove Jason's school bus. It was Bates who suggested to Jason that he get a Bowie knife to protect himself from the boys who were picking on him.

Samuel Swinyard

Samuel Swinyard was Gilbert Swinyard's son. He was the one who came to Jason's dad wanting him to sign a petition against the Gypsies getting a permanent home in Black Swan Green.

Mr. Nixon

Mr. Nixon was the headmaster of the school that Jason attended. Jason said of Mr. Nixon that he was the only adult he even knew who bluffed kids.

Josh Chaceley

Josh Chaceley was the older boy who attended the Grand Christmas Village Hall Disco with the intent of beating up Neal Brose because Brose had picked on his little brother

Mr. Murcot

Mr. Murcot was the woodworking teacher at Jason's school. It was in Mr. Murcot's class that Jason smashed Neal Brose's calculator in a vise.



Aunt Alice Lamb

Alice Lamb was Helena's sister. Jason noticed that his mother felt that she had to put on airs when her sister and her family came to visit them.

Debby Crombie

Debby Crombie was Tom Yew's girlfriend. She got pregnant by Tom before he was killed in the war.

Kelly Moran

Kelly Moran was Dean Moran's sister. She was responsible for spreading a good deal of gossip in Black Swan Green.

Alan Wall

Alan Wall was the Gypsy who said he was in class with Jason when they played hangman game in grammar school. Wall remembered that Jason had stammered even then.

Gerald Castle

Gerald Castle was the Taylor's next door neighbor. Castle headed up the group that wanted to keep the Gypsies from moving into their village.

Unborn Twin

The unborn twin was one of Jason's inner personalities. It was this personality that encouraged him to be fearless and take chances.

Mrs. de Roo

Mrs. de Roo was Jason's speech therapist. She was the one who contacted Jason's teacher and suggested that Jason not be made to read aloud.

Hangman

Hangman was the name that Jason assigned to his speech impediment. His stammer was named Hangman because Jason first noticed his problem while playing this game.

Ewan

Ewan was Julia's boyfriend. He was nice to Jason and even let Jason sit in his sports car.



Symbols and Symbolism

An Omega Seamaster de Ville

This watch, an Omega Seamaster de Ville, had been originally purchased by Jason's grandfather from an Arab at a port in Arabia. Jason was given the watch as a gift on Boxing Day because his father thought Jason was old enough to take care of it. When Jason wore the watch the first time he fell on the ice and smashed the face of the watch. Jason tried to find a watch to replace it but learned he didn't have anywhere near enough money to purchase a replacement. It was on the same night that Jason's father told him that he and Helena were getting a divorce that Jason finally told his father what had happened to the watch. The watch was a symbol of Jason's increasing maturity.

Silver Reed Manual Typewriter

Jason particularly liked his Silver Reed Manual Typewriter. He used it to type out his poems. He believed that if his house ever caught fire it would be the first thing that he would save. The typewriter was a symbol of Jason's love of writing.

A Box of Cigarettes

Hugo stole this box of cigarettes from the store in Black Swan Green. The cigarettes and their theft was a symbol of the faults in Hugo's personality.

A Rockery

This rockery became a symbol of the ongoing argument between Michael and Helena Taylor. It appeared that Helena decided to go ahead with having the rockery built because she was trying to get back at Michael for taking out a second mortgage on their house without telling her. Michael made jabs at his wife through the rockery and belittled her decisions.

Note from the Spooks

Jason believed this note from the Spooks was a symbol that he had finally been accepted among the popular students in his school.

"Abbey Road" L.P.

When Julia had spotted this record in Jason's room early in the novel she had gotten angry at him for taking it. Later, when she was packing to move to college Julia gave



this album to Jason. The album was a symbol of the changes that took place in the relationship between Julia and Jason since the beginning of 1982.

A Television

Jason was surprised to find this television in his bedroom when he came home from school one day. Although Jason was never sure why his father had gotten him the television as a gift, it appears it was symbolic of the guilt Michael was feeling because his affair was destroying the family.

Mouse's Head

Jason found this mouse's head in his pencil case. He knew it was a symbol of the dislike some of the boys in his class had for him.

Ross Wilcox's Wallet

This wallet was a symbol of a quandary in Jason's life. Jason found the wallet where it had dropped out of Ross' pocket at the fair. He learned that the wallet contained money from Ross' father's business. Jason knew if he didn't give Ross the wallet back the boy would be in bad trouble with his father. On one hand Jason thought any punishment Ross got was deserved because of the way that Ross treated Jason. On the other hand, Jason knew it wasn't right to keep the wallet. Jason gave Ross the wallet back but not before Ross had a fight with his girlfriend. When Ross tried to make up with Dawn he discovered she was having sex with another boy. It was at this point that Ross stole the motor bike and wrecked it. The wreck caused him to lose part of his leg. Jason blamed himself for Ross' injury.

Neal Brose's Calculator

It was during a metal working class that Jason crushed Neal Brose's expensive calculator in a vise. The crushing of this calculator was a symbol of the beginning of Jason's refusal to take the abuse the "popular" boys were doling out to him any longer.

Oxo Tin

This Oxo tin had belonged to Jason's grandfather. His grandfather had taken the tin with him when he fought in the second world war. Jason kept all of the things that were significant in his life in this tin. It was kept hidden under a loose floorboard in Jason's bedroom. The tin, and the items it contained, was symbolic of everything that was important to James.



Settings

House in the Woods

The house in the woods is where Jason first met Mrs. Gretton, who he referred to as the sour aunt. When he hurt his ankle while skating on the frozen lake, Jason could only make it back to this house for help. A year later when Jason was saying goodbye to the lake he went back to the house in the woods where a man, who was Mrs. Gretton's son-in-law, was working on the house.

Kingfisher Meadows

Kingfisher Meadows is the name of the street on which Jason and his family's house was located.

Black Swan Green, Worcestershire

Black Swan Green, Worcestershire, is the village where Jason and his family lived until his parents got divorced. Many people have lived there for generations, so Jason's family feels like outsiders.

Malvern Lake Clinic

Malvern Lake Clinic was the clinic where Jason had his speech therapy sessions with Mrs. de Roo.

Upton-on-Severn Comprehensive

Upton-on-Severn Comprehensive is the school that Jason attended in Black Swan Green.

Bridle Path

Both Jason and Moran decided to explore the bridal path to see if it really led to secret tunnels. While exploring this path, Jason saw Grant Bunch and Ross Wilcox fight, flirted with Dawn Madden, and watched Tom Yew and Debby Crombie have sex.

Little Malvern Towers

Jason's story of his adventures on the bridal path end at Little Malvern Towers. This is the psychiatric hospital in the area. It is mentioned in several places in the novel



including Jason and Moran's accidental visit to the hospital when they were exploring the bridal path.

A Solarium

It was in the solarium of the vicarage where Jason talked with Eva van Outryve de Crommelynck about poetry, music, and beauty.

Lyme Regis

Lyme Regis was the town where Jason went with his father for a supermarket conference. It was while he was visiting this town that Jason got to know Danny Lawlor.

Cheltenham

Cheltenham was the town where the gallery for which Helena was hired as manager was located. It was in this gallery where Jason helped his mother catch three girls who were shoplifting from the gallery. It was also in Cheltenham that Jason was spotted by another boy from his school standing in line to watch a movie with his mother. After Jason's mother and father got divorced, Jason moved to Cheltenham to live with his mother.

The Old Quarry

Jason accidentally fell into this old quarry when he was chasing a dog who had stolen his school bag. He discovered Gypsies had set up camp in the quarry. He talked to the people and realized that they were people just like he and the other people of Black Swan Green were.

The Crossroads by Rhydd's

It was near the crossroads by Rhydd's that Ross Wilcox wrecked Tom Yew's motorbike. Ross lost part of one leg because of that accident.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

The overriding theme of this novel is that of Jason's coming of age. He had just become a teenager and was experiencing many firsts in his life. He struggled with popularity and tried to hide his speech impediment so his school mates wouldn't judge him. To make matters worse, his family life was changing with his sister going to school and his parents fighting continually. When bullies began picking on Jason found an interesting way to stand up for himself and draw the attention of his teachers to what was happening at his school.

Girls were the biggest mystery in Jason's life. He thought Superman was crazy for giving up his superpowers in order to sleep with Lois Lane. Still, Jason was obsessed with girls. He had a crush on Dawn Madden, a girl who flirted with him but had no interest in dating him. He was impressed when he was able to talk to a pretty girl whom he met on vacation without stammering. When the girl and her friends began fighting about boys while Jason was still standing there, Jason came to the conclusion that girls were from a different planet than boys. Near the end of his adventure, Jason finally got his first kiss.

Popularity was a major cause of concern for Jason. He wanted to try to keep a balance between being popular and being tagged as a loser. He thought he was on his way to permanent popularity when he got an invitation to join the selective club the Spooks. Jason passed his challenge to join the club but was kicked out because he went to help his friend even though the leaders of the Spooks warned him not to do so. A major concern for Jason in terms of popularity was his speech impediment. He stammered. He was afraid that if his classmates ever found out about his disability, he'd be tagged a loser.

Meanwhile, Jason's life at home was getting more and more difficult. His parents were fighting almost continually and his sister had gone away to college, leaving him alone at home with his parents. Jason didn't completely understand that his parents' fighting was serious enough that it would lead to divorce. It was not until his father told him that he and Jason's mother were getting a divorce that Jason realized what was happening.

Jason's faced his biggest challenge when he had to decide how to deal with a group of boys who were trying to extort money from him and some other boys. In the past when he had been faced with bullies he had refused to fight back. He knew that if he did, he was giving the bullies what they wanted. In the extortion incident, however, Jason stole an expensive calculator belonging to one of the leaders of the group and smashed it in a vise during metal working class. The incident brought the teacher's attention to Jason and Jason was able to tell his teachers and principal what was happening at the school.



Disabilities

Dealing with a disability, and dealing with people who have disabilities, is a theme in the novel "Black Swan Green." Jason dealt with his own disability, his speech impediment. Also in the novel Jason had a friend who was mentally handicapped because he was born prematurely. Jason realized when listening to the boy's mother talk about her son that life would never be normal for him.

Jason lived in fear that his school mates would discover his disability. He went to see a speech therapist but didn't seem to make much progress with her because he didn't stammer when he worked with her. On his own he had developed his own store of tricks to keep himself from stammering in front of his friends. When talking, he learned how to think several words ahead in order to avoid using words that would make him stammer. Most of his teachers knew about his stammer and didn't make him read aloud in class because of it. One day, however, he was forced to read out loud. The boys tormented him endlessly once they learned about his stammer.

On the other hand, Jason also learned important lessons about dealing with people who had disabilities from his friend Melvin who had earned the nickname "Squelch" because he still wore diapers when he was nine. Jason had never really thought about Squelch as anything other than the boy that everyone made fun of at school. One day Jason heard Squelch's mother talking about her fears for her son. She was afraid he'd never be able to get a job or have a family. Jason realized he'd never thought about the difficulties that Squelch would have in the future. What really brought Jason's own opinion about Squelch to light was an incident when he and Squelch were sitting together by the lake. Squelch told Jason he was waiting for the swan to come. Because others had told Jason that there were no swans in Black Swan Green, Jason took it for granted that Squelch didn't know what he was talking about. He was shocked when a swan did actually come to light on the surface of the lake.

Outsiders

Because Black Swan Green was a small village, the people who lived there did not take well to outsiders. At one point in the novel Helena complained about feeling lonely in Black Swan Green. Julia supported her mother's claim by saying that her friend, Kate, had told her that people weren't accepted in Black Swan Green unless their families had lived there for generations.

The first time that Jason really believed he was hated because he was an outsider came when he met with Kit Harris in the woods. The man told Jason that he had upset his dogs because he didn't know how to act around them. He insinuated that a person who lived in Black Swan Green all of his life would not have upset the dogs as Jason did.

This hatred of outsiders was demonstrated on a larger scale when the villagers learned that a permanent Gypsy camp was planned for Black Swan Green. The people lashed



out against the idea that these outsiders whom they didn't understand would be living in their village. They signed petitions and even met to fight the Gypsies. The situation was ironic because Jason happened to meet the Gypsies in their camp and learned the Gypsies didn't want to live in Black Swan Green any more than the people of the village wanted them there.

Family Relationships

Through the course of the novel Jason's relationships with the members of his family change and develop. He and his sister grow closer to each other as their parents fought more and more. Jason learned the details of his father's affair, the issue that ended his parents' marriage. He also watched as his mother became a successful businesswoman.

At the beginning of the novel, Jason didn't often hear his sister call him by his name. She most often called him "the thing." As time grew closer for Julia to go to college, she became more and more accepting of Jason. She began to help him with his chores and share more details about her life. When their parents arguments became more and more violent the two made a game of rating the spats. She gave him her "Abbey Road" L.P. for safekeeping when she went to college. When they moved out of their house after their parents' divorce Julia tried to comfort Jason by telling him that everything would eventually be all right.

Jason's father, Michael, was portrayed as being a bit of a dictator when he yelled at his children for answering the phone in his office. Even though Jason didn't completely understand what was happening with his father, the reader may realize that Michael had some sort of secret he was hiding. It turned out he was having an affair. His relationship with Jason was strained through the course of the novel. During the vacation they took together, for instance, Michael chose to stay at the conference and spend time with his boss instead of keeping the plans he had with Jason. Jason was angry with his father when he saw how he allowed his boss to belittle him and undermine his authority. The only time the reader really feels any sympathy for Jason's father is when he tried to tell his son that he and Helena were getting a divorce.

Despite her husband's behavior, Helena took the opportunities she was given and thrived. Since the time Jason was born she had been a stay at home mother and wife. When an old friend offered her a job, Helena took it even though Michael didn't seem to want her to do so. One day, while Jason was at his mother's shop with her he helped her to catch a trio of shoplifters. It was during this experience that Jason learned it was important for him to like his mother.

Jason was deeply hurt by the way his parents treated each other during the last months of their marriage. He noticed even though the words they said to one another were polite, they were sometimes poisoned with a sarcastic or hateful attitude. Michael got angry with Helena's plans to update and renovate parts of their home. Particularly disputed was Helena's plan to install a rockery in their back yard. Michael fought her



every step of the way, belittled her decisions and then was pleased when a heron carried away one of the fish she'd put in the new pond. Even though Jason knew his father was right about the family not being able to afford the rockery and realized his mother was building it because it was fashionable, he was still angry with the way his father was so unkind to his mother.

The relationships in Jason's family changed a final time when his parents got their divorce. Julia was in college so she did not have to choose with which parent she would live but Jason felt his sister had sided with their mother. Jason felt stuck in the middle between his parents. He believed he was being forced to choose one of them or the other. Even though his sister told him it would be all right in the end, he wasn't sure.

Cyclical/Connected Nature of Life

Although the novel is made up of snapshots of significant events that happened to Jason over a course of thirteen months in his life, these thirteen chapters are tied together by the cyclical nature or connectivity of life. For instance, in the course of the story Tom Yew was killed in the war. His death devastated his family. In the first chapter of the novel Jason met a woman who swore her brother would be upset with Jason if she woke him up. In the final chapter of the novel Jason learned that woman's brother had been killed in the war in 1941. His death had devastated his sister. She had never been the same. Just like wars come in cycles, bullies also come in cycles. After Ross Wilcox, the meanest bully at Jason's school was injured so badly he couldn't go to school, another bully, Neal Brose, stepped up to take his place. These cycles or parallels are also see in the pair of trips that Jason took, one with his father and one with his mother.

These snapshots of Jason's life also turn out to be connected in unusual ways. For instance, it turned out that the Gypsy boy that Jason remembered from his school happened to be in the group that was camping in Black Swan Green. Also unusual was the fact that the boy had been in class with Jason on the day they'd been playing hangman and Jason had first noticed his stammer. Notice also the connection between Neal Brose's plan to extort money from fellow students in the chapter "Disco" and the rapt attention to which Neal paid to Hugo in the chapter "Relatives" when Hugo explained to him how he got all the money that he had.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told from the first person point of view of thirteen-year-old Jason Taylor. The point of view is important because this is a story about a boy's coming of age. Without this intimate and close look into Jason's thoughts, emotions, and motivations the changes in Jason's personality and his maturity level as well as the impact his experiences had on him would not be as significant. Because Jason narrates the novel, the reader sees his world through the eyes of a thirteen year old. Even though he doesn't quite understand the changing dynamics of the relationship between his parents he gives enough information that the reader can understand what is probably happening. He tells his story to a general audience.

Language and Meaning

This novel is set in England so the first thing the reader will notice about the language is the use of British slang. Although some of the words may be unfamiliar the reader will probably be able to pick up on their meanings using context clues. The restroom is called the bog; kissing is called snogging; smells are referred to as pongs while people who are being sarcastic are being smarmy. Notice also that the author catches the nature of teen talk, particularly when it comes to combining contractions and dropping letters from their words. In conversation "suppose" is "s'pose" and phrases like "he would have" are shortened to "he'd've." The use of slang as well as these abbreviated pronunciations gives the book a very relaxed feeling.

Because Jason is a poet it makes sense that his writing would contain a good deal of literary techniques like metaphors, simile, and personification. Some noteworthy quotes from the novel include the following: "A cow of an awkward pause mooded" (p. 52). The use of imagery, personifying the pause as a cow, indicates how long and drawn out the pause was. Jason personifies the lake when he says, "The lake was nervous with riplets and counterriplets" (p. 63). Another quote with beautiful imagery states, "Maybe I heard a poem, seeping from its cracks" (p. 70). Jason gives the poem not only the characteristic of being able to be heard but also animates the poem as he indicates a poem could seep from the cracks of the thatched cottage. Two more quotes that are full of imagery are "Something silent smashed without being dropped" (p. 114) and "Quietness rings loud as ringing at first" (p. 130). A metaphor that Jason includes in his novel is "Sunlight on waves is drowsy tinsel" (p. 173). Similes include his descriptions of good and bad moods: "Good moods're as fragile as eggs" (p. 195) and "Bad moods're as fragile as bricks" (p. 195).

Structure

This novel is written in the past tense following a linear timeline. The thirteen chapters of this novel coincide with thirteen months out of Jason's life. The novel starts in January of 1982, the month that Jason turned thirteen. Each month has its own chapter ending in January of 1983 just before Jason turned fourteen. Each chapter gives a snapshot of a significant event in Jason's life. "Solarium," for instance, tells the story of Jason's interactions with Madame Crommelynck. His meetings with the eccentric lady as well as the final meeting meeting with the vicar's wife is all that the chapter is focused on. This chapter, like some of the other chapters in the novel, leaves the reader not completely knowing the resolution of that chapter's issues. In this particular chapter the reader doesn't learn for certain what happened to the Crommelyncks. Of course, the reader must take into consideration that Jason had not told his parents about his meetings with Madame Crommelynck and there was no Internet at the time for Jason to look up information about the Crommelyncks' fate so he really didn't know what happened to his friends. The reader, just like Jason, is left not knowing exactly what happened to the Crommelyncks.



Quotes

Mind you, if they knew Eliot Bolivar, who gets poems published in Black Swan Green Parish Magazine, was me, they'd gouge me to death behind the tennis courts with blunt woodwork tools and spray the Sex Pistols logo on my gravestone."

-- Narrator (January Man paragraph 35)

Importance: Even though he knew it was uncool, Jason wrote poems for his village's parish magazine. He wrote under a false name hoping his fellow students would never find out he was a poet.

Games and sports aren't about taking part or even about winning. Games and sports're really about humiliating your enemies."

-- Narrator (January Man paragraph 42)

Importance: It was during a game of British Bulldog that Jason realized that boys played sports and games not to win but as an opportunity to humiliate the kids they didn't like.

Then, where the faint path from the House in the Woods meets the main path to the lake, I heard a boy, gasping for breath, pounding this way. Between a pair of wishbone pines I squeezed myself out of sight."

-- Narrator (January Man paragraph 53)

Importance: This quote is significant because it is repeated almost verbatim in the final chapter of the novel. It represents the cyclical nature of life.

Most people think stammering and stuttering are the same but they're as different as diarrhea and constipation."

-- Narrator (Hangman paragraph 4)

Importance: Jason fittingly describes stammering and stuttering as being as different as diarrhea and constipation. Jason suffers with stammering but people often accused him of stuttering.

I know, with Gary Drake and Neal Brose and everyone watching, Hangman'll crush my throat and mangle my tongue and scrunch my face up."

-- Narrator (Hangman paragraph 10)

Importance: Jason's stammering was worse when he was reading or speaking in front of his fellow students, especially those he was afraid would make fun of him if they discovered his speech impediment.

Great news. Ross Wilcox's building up a sort of gang at school and he's made it pretty clear he's got it in for me."

-- Narrator (Bridle Path paragraph 80)



Importance: Jason thought the fight between Grant Burch and Ross Wilcox might be good for him because he believed Ross Wilcox had been gathering a gang against him. He thought if Ross Wilcox was beaten by Grant Burch that Ross Wilcox would lose some popularity.

Green is made of yellow and blue, nothing else, but when you look at green, where've the yellow and the blue gone? Somehow this is to do with Moran's dad. Somehow this is to do with everyone and everything."

-- Narrator (Bridle Path paragraph 227)

Importance: Jason recognized that a person could have two different conflicting personalities just like green was made of both yellow and blue. He was on the verge of understanding that everyone has a variety of conflicting personality traits that can be camouflaged by his overriding personality.

I can't do jokes, but I'm keeping a scrapbook about the war. I'm cutting out stuff from the newspapers and magazines."

-- Narrator (Rocks paragraph 59)

Importance: The newspaper was offering an award for anti-Argentina jokes. Even though Jason couldn't write jokes, he believed he was doing his part by keeping a scrapbook of newspaper articles about the war.

(What Mum and Dad say to each other's half a world away from what they mean, these days. Ordinary polite words shouldn't be so toxic, but they can be.)"

-- Narrator (Rocks paragraph 68)

Importance: Jason observed that even though his parents were saying one thing to each other with their words, their intentions were opposite what their words meant. Jason believed that ordinary polite words shouldn't be used so hatefully.

Right now. That's what freaks me. I dip my fountain pen into a pot of ink, and a Wessex helicopter crashes into a glacier on South Georgia. I line up my protractor on an angle in my Maths book and a Sidewinder missile locks onto a Mirage III. I draw a circle with my compass and a Welsh Guard stands up in a patch of burning gorse and gets a bullet through his eye. / How can the world just go on, as if none of this is happening?"

-- Narrator (Rocks paragraph 107)

Importance: Jason was bothered by the war effort because his life was going on like normal even though people were fighting and dying in the war.

Our dining room sort of juddered like a silent bomb'd gone off. Me, Mum, and Julia froze as Radio 4 told us which ship'd been sunk."

-- Narrator (Rocks paragraph 154)



Importance: Jason and his family were shocked when they learned it was the ship to which Tom Yew was assigned that had been sunk.

Me, I want to bloody kick this moronic bloody world in the bloody teeth over and over till it bloody understands that not hurting people is ten bloody thousand times more bloody important than being right.”

-- Narrator (Rocks paragraph 254)

Importance: Jason was angry at his father for being so happy about his mother’s pain. He wished his father realized that it was more important to be kind than to be right.

That my cherry knocking’d led to this was horrifying.”

-- Narrator (Spooks paragraph 76)

Importance: Jason was upset when the harmless prank that he instigated against Mr. Blake turned into an attack against Mr. Blake with the man being accused of abusing his son.

Kate says if you haven’t lived in Black Swan Green since the War of the Roses, you’ll never be a local.”

-- Julia (Spooks paragraph 182)

Importance: One of the themes in the novel addresses the idea that outsiders aren’t tolerated well in Black Swan Green. Not only were people of a different culture, like the Gypsies not wanted in the village, but also people like Jason, who hadn’t been born in that village, were classified as outsiders.

Ackkk, a wonderful, miserable age. Not a boy, not a teenager. Impatience but timidity too. Emotional incontinence.”

-- Eva van Outryve de Crommelynck (Solarium paragraph 30)

Importance: The elderly lady who talked to Jason about poetry and music summed up the basis of a teenager’s existence in this quote.

Problem was, all this is new. In English at school we study a grammar book by a man named Ronald Ridout, read Cider with Rosie, do debates on foxhunting, and memorize “I Must Go Down to the Sea Again,” by John Masefield. We don’t have to actually think about stuff.”

-- Narrator (Solarium paragraph 84)

Importance: Among the challenges Madame Crommelynck gave Jason, she pushed him to think about his writing as well as the world around him.

Aha! Truth! You are afraid the hairy barbarians will not accept you in their tribe if you write poetry.”

-- Eva van Outryve de Crommelynck (Solarium paragraph 179)



Importance: Above all else, Madame Crommelynck required that Jason speak the truth to her. Just before she said these words to him she had finally gotten him to admit that he didn't want his friends to know he wrote poetry because he knew they would make fun of him.

I was so nervous that even Hangman'd run off to hide somewhere. It makes no sense but it happens.”

-- Narrator (Souvenir paragraph 37)

Importance: When Jason tried to talk to the girls he met at arcade in Lyme Regis, he was so nervous that he even lost his stammer.

Boys are bastards, but they're predictable bastards. You never know what girls're thinking. Girls're from another planet.”

-- Narrator (Souvenir paragraph 70)

Importance: As a new teenager, Jason has not yet discovered a like for girls. He does, however, already realize that girls act and handle their problems in a completely different way from boys.

Mum and Dad can be as ratty or sarcastic or angry as they want to me, but if I ever show a flicker of being pissed off then they act like I've murdered babies. I hate them for that. But I hate my guts for never standing up to Dad like Julia does. So I hate their guts for making me hate my guts.”

-- Narrator (Souvenir paragraph 176)

Importance: In this quote Jason explains how his parents requirement that he keep his own feelings and emotions under cover make him not only hate them but also hate himself.

Will I be some kid's dad one day? Are any future people lurking deep inside mine? I've never even ejaculated, apart from in a dream of Dawn Madden. Which girl's carrying the other half of my kid, deep in those intricate loops? What's she doing right now? What's her name?”

-- Narrator (Souvenir paragraph 220)

Importance: Jason wondered about his future while he was on vacation with his father.

But walking down Regents Arcade this afternoon, I noticed a new need that's normally so close-up you never know it's there. You and your mum need to like each other. Not love, but like.”

-- Narrator (Souvenir paragraph 448)

Importance: It was when he went on a business trip with his mother and helped her catch three shoplifters that Jason realized how important it was for he and his mother to like each other. Notice he was also able to differentiate liking his mother was a choice while loving her came as a prerequisite of their relationship.



Authors knit their sentences tight. It's their job. Why make us unpick them, just to put it back together more shonkily?"

-- Narrator (Maggot paragraph 76)

Importance: Because he was a writer Jason hated the process of rewriting work done by another author.

You're not a maggot. Don't let dickheads decide what you are."

-- Holly Deblin (Maggot paragraph 101)

Importance: Holly, a girl who attended Jason's school, told him that he should not let the cruel boys in school make him believe he was undesirable.

I ain't ashamed of Jason knowing I've got Gypsy blood in my veins! My grandfather was one, Jason, see. That's why we didn't go to the meeting. Gypsies ain't angels but they ain't devils neither."

-- Mr. Moran (Knife Grinder paragraph 125)

Importance: Mr. Moran told Jason he didn't attend the anti-Gypsy meeting because he had ancestors that were Gypsies. He was not embarrassed by his heritage.

The Triple Invisible Boy, that's Jason Taylor. Even I don't see the real Jason Taylor much these days, 'cept for when we're writing a poem, or occasionally in a mirror, or just before sleep."

-- Narrator (Knife Grinder paragraph 142)

Importance: By this point in his life Jason has three reasons to try to be invisible. He tried to be invisible to keep people from knowing he stuttered, to keep people from picking on him and to keep from instigating arguments between his parents.

That's the dumbfool joke of it!' Knife Grinder poked the fire. 'We don't want 'em built any more'n yer locals.'"

-- Knife Grinder (Knife Grinder paragraph 212)

Importance: Just like the residents of Black Swan Green didn't want the Gypsies living in their village, the Gypsies didn't want to live there either.

Best of all? I'd be pounding Wilcox into a pulp. Me. Via his dad. Why should I feel bad about that? After what Wilcox's done to me. Neither of them'd ever know it. It's the perfect revenge."

-- Narrator (Goose Fair paragraph 144)

Importance: When Jason first realized he had found Ross Wilcox's wallet with the money from Ross Wilcox's dad business inside it he thought he'd be getting revenge on Ross because Ross' dad would beat him as punishment for the missing money.



Greenland Supermarkets sacked Dad 'cause an expense account was £ 20 short. After eleven years. This way, Mum'd told Aunt Alice on the phone, they don't have to pay Dad a penny in redundancy money."

-- Narrator (Disco paragraph 14)

Importance: Jason's father was fired from Greenland Supermarkets because of a small amount of missing money. Because store officials accused him of theft, they didn't have to pay him any unemployment.

But she made nuisance calls to his house at all hours, that sort of carry-on. So, he borrowed a hill of money without so much as breathing a word to his own wife, using her family home as collateral."

-- Mrs. Benedict (January Man paragraph 15)

Importance: Mrs. Benedict, who didn't realize that Jason was listening in on her conversation, gossiped about the divorce through which Jason's parents were going. If the reader believes Mrs. Benedict's information, it was probably Cynthia who was calling both the times that Jason and Julia answered the phone in Michael's office. It was also for Cynthia that Michael had taken out the second mortgage on the house.

Lost' — this could only be whispered— 'half his leg. His leg. You see? It's my fault. If I'd just ... given him back his wallet, he'd be walking. Hobbling up to your old house over there on a sprained ankle last year was bad enough. But Ross Wilcox ... his leg stops at this ... stump."

-- Jason (January Man paragraph 168)

Importance: Jason was able to confess to Mrs. Gretton that he believed it was his fault that Ross Wilcox had lost his leg in his motor bike accident.

Either you suffer the consequences of not noticing your fault forever or, one day, you do notice it, and fix it. Joke is, once you get it into your brain about that hidden step and think, Hey, life isn't such a shithouse after all again, then BUMP! Down you go, a whole new flight of hidden steps."

-- Narrator (January Man paragraph 112)

Importance: Jason has learned in the course of the novel that life will keep giving him troubles with which he must deal his entire life.