

Boot Camp Study Guide

Boot Camp by Todd Strasser

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Plot Summary

"Boot Camp" is a novel by Todd Strasser. In this novel, Garrett has been sent to boot camp because his parents feel that his behavior has been out of control. Garrett has only been going to school a few days a week, he has stolen money from his parents, and he has been romantically involved with a woman who was his teacher. Garrett feels that most of his behavior is simply a difference of opinion with his parents. However, this does nothing to save Garrett from the dark, sadistic treatment he receives at boot camp. "Boot Camp" is an eye opening, fictional account of the secret network of boot camp's designed to imprison teenagers throughout the United States.

Garrett is kidnapped out of his own home one night and taken to a boot camp in upstate New York. Garrett is taken into a room and forced to stand for hours until a man comes with new clothes for him to wear. Garrett is forced to strip in front of several strangers, searched, and redressed in the uniform of the boot camp. Garrett then sleeps for a short time before being taken to the head of the boot camp where he is given a list of the rules. Garrett takes a test over the rules, surprising everyone by passing the test less than forty minutes of studying the rules, and is placed in his family group.

Garrett is picked on by his group leader, his 'father', the first few months of his time at boot camp. Garrett is sent to TI, Temporary Isolation, multiple times and forced to lay on bare concrete for upwards of a week. Despite this, Garrett continues to be sympathetic toward his fellow inmates, including a young boy named Paul whom Garrett saves from bullies one night, causing him to be placed in TI again.

As time passes, Garrett keeps hoping that his parents will come to their senses and take him home. However, when Garrett's dad comes for a visit, Garrett's 'father', Joe manages to make the boot camp look almost like a summer sports camp, complete with a gymnasium and television room that Garrett has never even set foot in until his dad's visit. When his dad leaves, Garrett begins to lose hope.

Paul approaches Garrett with a plan for escape. At first Garrett resists the idea, aware of what would happen if he tried to escape. However, soon after Garrett is attacked in the bathroom by a group of his fellow family members, Garrett finds himself in the middle of an escape, forced to help or turn Paul in. Garrett, Paul, and a girl named Sarah, manage to escape the camp when fire trucks come to put out a fire Paul started. In their escape, Garrett is forced to restrain Joe when Joe manages to follow them out and attempt to stop them. Garrett wants to hurt Joe, but instead Paul talks him into tying Joe up with duct tape.

The first day Garrett and his friends are on the run they hitch hike, taking rides first from a guy in a pickup and later in a semi. However, when they stop at a truck stop, Garrett recognizes the bounty hunters who kidnapped him and brought him to the camp. Realizing these people are searching for them, Garrett and his friends begin to travel by foot at night. By the time they reach the border with Canada, Paul is sick and Sarah has injured her foot.



Garrett tries to find a way for them to cross the border without identification. In his search, Garrett runs into one of the bounty hunters in a trucking company yard. Garrett manages to get away. Later, while attempting to escape across the border on a stolen boat, Garrett watches as the bounty hunters give chase in a boat Garrett has disabled. The bounty hunter's boat begins to sink. After dropping his friends at the border, Garrett goes back to save the bounty hunters.

Garrett is returned to the boot camp where he is repeatedly beaten and tortured. Finally Garrett begins to conform to the rules of the boot camp. Then Garrett's parents arrive with a lawyer after having been told the truth by one of the bounty hunters. However, Garrett has been beaten so badly and so often that when asked about his treatment at the camp, Garrett claims that he deserved all he got.



Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 Summary

Chapter 1. Garrett is traveling in a car with two bounty hunters, Harry and Rebecca. Garrett was taken from his home and transported to upstate New York. Garrett has no clue where he is going, but guesses it has something to do with trouble he has been having with his parents recently. Garrett asks that his handcuffs be loosened, but Harry claims that Garrett is trying to manipulate them into helping him get away. For this reason, Harry has no sympathy for Garrett and warns Rebecca not to either.

Chapter 2. Garrett arrives at the camp where he is led into a small windowless room where he is told to stand beside a cot. Garrett expects to receive new orders quickly, but he ends up standing for several hours. Finally a man comes into the room with clothing and tells Garrett to strip. When Garrett hesitates, the man threatens to make him stand there until the same time the following morning. Garrett strips down to his underwear and is surprised when the man orders him to take off his underwear as well. Garrett is quickly searched and then allowed to dress in his new clothes. Garrett is then given permission to sleep.

Chapter 3. Garrett is awoken some time later and escorted to the office of the director. The director gives Garrett a packet with the rules in it. Garrett is told that he will memorize the packet and when he is ready he will be tested on it. Garrett is then taken to a room filled with carrels designed for students to study independently. Garrett is ready for the test in less than forty minutes, making the guardian watching him angry. However, Garrett passes the test. Garrett is taken back to the windowless room where he is ordered to rest.

Chapter 4. Two days later, Garrett is at breakfast with his family, Dignity, and other groups. One of the other boys in Garrett's family begins making fun of him because of his large size. Garrett is a level one, therefore he is not allowed to talk, but he finds it difficult to ignore the kid. Joe, Garrett's family father, comes over and berates Garrett for his behavior even though he never spoke a word. Joe is clearly trying to goad Garrett into taking a swing at him, but Garrett resists. Garrett is still ordered to TI, temporary isolation.

Chapter 5. Garrett is forced to lie on a bare concrete floor without relief except for meal times and restroom breaks for a week. During this time, Garrett thinks about his girlfriend, Sabrina, and his parents. Garrett remembers how his mother once spoke poorly behind a woman's back, but nice to her face. Or the time he wrote an essay on what his parents did for a living and his mother hated it. When Garrett is released from TI he attends a Circle meeting, a kind of group therapy. Joe again jumps on Garrett, trying to force him to talk about Sabrina, a woman eight years his senior and his former teacher. The other inmates are cruel to Garrett, beating him emotionally.



Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The novel begins with Garrett's transportation to boot camp. Garrett's transporter, Harry, warns his partner, Rebecca, that these kids can be manipulative and should be ignored when they beg to have their restraints loosened or to go to the restroom. Harry is clearly jaded, a man who has been at this work for far too long. However, the reader can see almost immediately that Garrett is not the kind of kid who would do such a thing. Garrett is respectful, kind almost, in his dealings with the adults around him. For that reason, the reader immediately begins to wonder why Garrett has been brought to this place that is designed to change the behavior of criminal teens.

As the novel progresses, Garrett is treated with some disregard to his comfort, clearly because it appears that the people at the camp think Garrett is dangerous. However, as the novel continues, it is also clear that Garrett has become the object of abuse by his group leader, his 'father', Joe. Joe picks on Garrett, forcing him into situations where he might become violent. Although Garrett resists his instincts and does not become violent, Joe continues to pick on him. Joe also allows the other inmates to pick on Garrett, including some of the boys from Garrett's own 'family'. This sets up a situation that could possibly be dangerous for Garrett, allowing him to be bullied by both his 'father' and his fellow inmates.

The reader learns that Garrett has been sent to boot camp because he stole money from his parents, refused to attend school, and was romantically involved with a former teacher. These things seem inappropriate, especially his romantic relationship, but hardly reasons for him to be sent to a boot camp designed for teens who commit crimes and do drugs. It seems what Garrett really needs is some family counseling. However, Garrett's parents are clearly busy people who do not have time to deal with such difficulties on their own. The reader is left with the impression that Garrett has been sent to the boot camp not so much to modify his behavior, but to keep him away from Sabrina and to hide him from becoming an embarrassment to his parents.



Chapters 6-10

Chapters 6-10 Summary

Chapter 6. It is shut down, time for bed, in the dorms. Joe tells Garrett that the entire building is rigged with motion detectors so that inmates might not get out of bed at night and wander the building. Garrett is also informed that the doors lock down for forty-five seconds anytime a motion detector is activated. Joe then leaves, leaving two level five inmates in charge, Ron and Jon. Several other boys, Adam, David, and Robert, take Paul, a young, nervous boy, down to the bathrooms as everyone else prepares for bed. In seconds Garrett can hear Paul screaming and the sounds of a beating. When Ron and Jon do nothing, Garrett goes down to the bathroom and stops the beating.

Chapter 7. Garrett is sent to TI for leaving the dorm room without permission, but Adam and his gang are not punished. To add to his punishment, Garrett is forced to withstand daily beatings by Ron and Jon. Garrett tries to convince Ron and Jon that they are brainwashed, but they do not listen to him. As time passes, Garrett again finds himself thinking about the past to pass the time. Garrett remembers how he missed a week of school when he was twelve, but was able to catch up in less than two days. This made Garrett realize that he did not need to attend school every day to keep up. Therefore Garrett did not understand his dad's insistence that he go to school every day even though he continued to make straight A's.

Chapter 8. Garrett is finally released from TI after two weeks. The chaperone who comes to get him is Mr. Sparks, a tall athletic man who seems kinder than the others. Mr. Sparks tells Garrett to stay true to himself, but to give them what they want. At Circle, Garrett watches as Joe interrogates Sarah, a girl who has been at the camp for two years and is still a level one.

Chapter 9. One afternoon while cleaning their clothes near the parking lot, Paul comes up beside Garrett. Paul tells Garrett that a kid once died at the camp and that no matter what he does he cannot win. Paul then tells Garrett that he is only there because he is not the masculine son his father always wanted. Paul has been there for more than a year and he is beginning to fear he will not last another winter. Paul wants to escape and he wants Garrett to go with him. When Joe arrives, one of the other inmates tells him that Paul has been talking, so Paul is forced to do physical exercise as punishment. Garrett realizes what Paul risked to speak to him and it makes Garrett trust Paul. Later, while in line for dinner, Joe drops a gum wrapper and makes Garrett pick it up repeatedly. The others go to dinner while Garrett continues to pick up the wrapper. When Garrett is not paying attention and bends to pick up the wrapper without permission, Joe knees him in the nose. Joe continues to force Garrett to pick up the wrapper despite his bleeding nose until Garrett passes out. Finally Joe orders Garrett to clean up the mess.



Chapter 10. Garrett is called to the director's office again. The director wants to know what Garrett has learned. Garrett says he has learned that his parents are paying a lot of money to make him obedient. Then Garrett accuses the director of wanting to keep teens there as long as possible to make as much money as possible. Later, at dinner, Adam tries to take Garrett's hot dogs, the only decent thing they have had to eat in weeks. Garrett refuses, so Adam takes Paul's, leaving Paul with nothing to eat.

After dinner, Garrett and the other lower levels are supposed to write in their Reflection books. Instead of writing, Garrett thinks about a recent argument he had with his parents that he thinks is what spurred them into sending him to boot camp. Garrett had just come in from Sabrina's in time to get ready for school. His parents were waiting for him. They accused Garrett of not going to school, of stealing money, and of dating a woman inappropriate for him. Garrett conceded to his relationship with Sabrina, which he thought his parents never gave a chance, but he had been attending school, still making perfect grades, and he had only stolen what was pocket change to his parents because they had cut off his allowance. Garrett felt, and still feels, that he is a much better behaved child than most of his classmates at Governor's School and his parents should back off. With this in mind, Garrett begins to write a letter to his parents, but Joe finds the letter disrespectful and tears it up. Later, while preparing for bed, Adam threatens Garrett with a sharpened spoon.

Chapters 6-10 Analysis

Garrett helps a smaller inmate when some of the other kids in their 'family' are beating him up. As a reward, Garrett is sent to TI for two weeks and beaten almost daily by the two inmate guards in his 'family', Ron and Jon. It seems ironic that the one who ended the violence is the one punished, but this begins to illustrate to the reader the way things work at boot camp. Joe cannot physically hurt the inmates himself, so he had the other inmates do it for him. Adam and his crew are Joe's minions, young men who think they are winning points by doing what Joe asks of them, but are instead just being used.

By saving Paul, Garrett has proven his true personality to both the reader and other inmates at the boot camp. Most of the others hate Garrett for his actions, thinking that Garrett is just one who does not want to go along with the rules. However, Garrett also wins the attention of Paul, a young man sent to the camp because he is not the masculine, athletic child his father wanted. Paul is weak and will not make it much longer at boot camp. For this reason, Paul wants to escape and he wants Garrett to go with him because he knows he cannot survive without Garrett's brains and brawn.

Garrett is an object of torture to Joe. Joe purposely picks on Garrett frequently, pulling him out from the rest of the 'family' for special punishments, such as the day he makes Garrett pick up his gum wrapper repeatedly after catching Paul talking to him. Joe clearly dislikes Garrett and feels that he needs special attention to conform to the ways of the boot camp. This makes life difficult for Garrett, especially as Garrett feels that the only reason he is at the boot camp is so his parents can protect themselves from the embarrassment of Garrett's relationship with Sabrina becoming public. As the reader

learns more about Garrett's behavior, while it is disobedient, it continues to seem much too mild for his parents to send him to such a place.



Chapters 11-15

Chapters 11-15 Summary

Chapter 11. Garrett has found a pencil and begins leaving notes for Sarah in the lunch room. Sarah comes off somewhat suicidal in the notes. Paul tells Garrett that he wants to go to Canada when they escape because they cannot get them there. Then Paul tells Garrett that Sarah is in on the plan too. After learning this, Garrett learns in the notes that Sarah hopes Garrett will go along with them. At Circle some time later, Joe pushes Garrett to talk about Sabrina. To make Joe think he is trying to conform, Garrett talks about her, but is pushed too far when the other inmates begin to taunt him with the idea that Sabrina has moved on. The only one to show Garrett any sympathy is Sarah in their notes. Sometime later, Joe is pushing a new girl in Circle when the girl attacks Joe, knocking him out. During the chaos, Paul tells Garrett that he plans to set a fire as a distraction so they can escape. Garrett immediately worries about collateral damage, but Paul insists he and Sarah must get out soon or they will die.

Chapter 12. A few days later, Garrett fakes a headache so that he can meet Sarah in the infirmary. Garrett is surprised to find the nurse is hippy-style man, another example of the boot camp's attempts to save money. Sarah tells Garrett that her father put her in the boot camp because he is an apostle in the Mormon Church and she refused to conform. Several relatives tried to help Sarah, but each failed. Now Sarah is convinced that she will remain in the camp until her eighteenth birthday, which is still two years away. At lunch, Adam tries to turn Garrett in on the notes he and Sarah have been sharing, but Joe cannot prove they are Garrett's. At Circle, Garrett is allowed to talk because he has moved up to level two. Garrett pushes some of the other inmates to explain why they claim they would be dead if they had not been taken to boot camp. Garrett then confronts Adam on his in camp as Joe's enforcer. This conversation causes Garrett to be sent back to TI.

Chapter 13. While in TI this time, Garrett begins to wonder if being with Sabrina was worth all this. For this reason, Garrett agrees to Joe's order that he write a letter to Sabrina. However, Joe is not happy with the letter because Garrett does not accept any blame. For this reason, Joe tears the letter up. Sometime later, Garrett plays soccer with his 'family' and Mr. Sparks. During the game, Paul tells him that he plans to shut off the circuit breaker to the dorm and lock it with a lock Sarah has to make it possible to get out of the dorms after he sets the fire. Paul tells Garrett he wants to leave in two weeks during the new moon.

Chapter 14. A week later, Garrett is nearly injured when Adam and his gang drop a television they are moving on him.

Chapter 15. Garrett has been at the boot camp for six months. This means it is time for a visit from his parents. Joe warns everyone the night before the visit that they must be on their best behavior. The following morning, Joe invites Garrett to stand outside with



him. Joe warns Garrett to keep his mouth shut about the unpleasant parts of being at boot camp. After lunch, Garrett is escorted to the administration building where his dad waits. Garrett learns that his mother could not make it because of business. Joe takes them on a tour of the camp, showing Garrett's dad all the things that the higher levels get to do, such as the television room and the gymnasium, places Garrett has not set foot in until this day. At the end of the tour, Garrett's dad says goodbye and leaves him there, making it clear to Garrett that he is not going to be rescued. Then Garrett is searched.

Chapters 11-15 Analysis

Garrett begins to befriend Sarah and learn more about her plan to escape with Paul. Paul is the planner and he is clearly motivated to get out. Sarah seems depressed and resigned to her fate, despite the small hope she gets from Paul's plan. Sarah is the daughter of a Mormon apostle. It is because of this, and her failure to believe in the church, that Sarah has been sent here and will more than likely remain until her eighteenth birthday. Even though they no longer try to put Sarah in TI or otherwise bully her, she is falling deeper and deeper into a depression and will not make it much longer. Garrett is clearly aware of this, but he continues to hope to find a better way out and has not committed to the plan.

As time passes, Garrett becomes more and more of a target to Adam and his gang even as Joe seems to have lost some of his interest in Garrett. Garrett is not afraid of Adam and his gang because he is bigger and stronger than them, but Adam remains a threat just the same.

Garrett has been at the boot camp for six months. In this time, Garrett has spent four weeks in TI and been abused both physically and emotionally. Garrett continues to cling to the idea that his parents will eventually come to their senses and save him. However, when Garrett's mother fails to come see him, her first opportunity in six months, and his dad visits but sees nothing wrong with the camp, Garrett begins to lose hope. The reader must wonder then if Garrett will be the type to lie down and fall into a depression, or if he will continue to fight.



Chapters 16-20

Chapters 16-20 Summary

Chapter 16. After his visit with his father, Adam goads Garrett and Garrett accidentally causes the table to tip and spill food on everyone on Adam's side of the table. However, by the time Joe and the other chaperons appear, Garrett has gained control of his emotions. Over the next few days little changes except the faces in the 'family'. A new boy, Miles comes and is made an object of abuse for Adam and his group for a short time before joining them. Paul and Sarah continue to push Garrett to join their escape even though their window of opportunity has passed and they must wait another month.

Chapter 17. At reflections, Joe pushes Garrett to write another letter to Sabrina. Garrett tries, but fails and is sent back to TI. A short time later, Joe reads the letter Garrett wrote to Sabrina to get out of TI to the group at Circle. The other kids debate the honesty of the letter and come to the conclusion that Garrett still has not learned his lesson. Sometime later, Mr. Sparks invites Garrett to play basketball with him and a group of level fours and fives. Afterward, Mr. Sparks warns Garrett to be careful. That same night, Garrett is attacked by Adam and his gang, disabled by a bag of pepper before they begin beating him.

Chapter 18. Garrett wakes in the infirmary. Mr. Sparks has come to visit. Mr. Sparks tells Garrett that Adam and his group is how the 'fathers' beat inmates into submission without breaking any laws. For four days, Garrett remains safe in the infirmary. On his first day back to his 'family', the 'family' is walking into the dorms when Paul purposely falls into the kids in front of him, creating a distraction. Garrett keeps the distraction going by falling into Adam while Paul sneaks off to the circuit box to turn off the power.

Chapter 19. Garrett grabs Joe's leg to keep him from stopping Paul. Paul then instructs Garrett to get some food from the kitchen. Garrett meets Paul and Sarah by the flagpole near the main gate after the lights come back up. In the distance, they can hear an approaching fire truck. As the gates open, several kids make a run for it and the chaperons quickly chase after them, pulling them back. Garrett, Paul, and Sarah wait until the fire truck arrives, using the large vehicle to hide their escape. Somehow Joe spots them and nearly takes Sarah out. Garrett runs back and knocks Joe to the ground, pulling his arm back in the same technique the guardians use with the inmates. Garrett thinks about hurting Joe for all he has done to him, but Paul comes back and convinces him not to. They tie Joe up with duct tape and hide him in the woods.

Garrett, Paul, and Sarah walk for hours in the woods, finally finding their way to a road. They use Sarah to convince a driver of a red pickup to pull over. The man agrees to drive them to Canada. The trio becomes frightened, however, when they learn the driver has a friend who works at the boot camp.



Chapter 20. The driver of the pickup stops at a gas station and offers to buy coffee and doughnuts for everyone. However, Paul begins to worry that the man might be calling the police, so the trio slip out of the truck and hide in a cornfield. A short time later, they hitch another ride with a truck driver. After a while, Sarah has to use the restroom so they ask the driver to pull into a truck stop. As soon as the teens are out of the truck, the driver drives off. In the bathroom, Garrett spots a man who looks like the bounty hunter who took him to the boot camp. Out in the store, Garrett spots the bounty hunter's partner, Rebecca.

Chapters 16-20 Analysis

Joe continues to try to bait Garrett, both by himself and with help from Adam and his group. Garrett is learning to spot the tricks, however, and manages to avoid most of the traps. Unfortunately, Garrett often under estimates Joe and finds himself in TI again and again. At the same time, Garrett continues to butt heads with Adam, causing himself more trouble. Therefore, it is inevitable when Adam finally manages to get the better of Garrett.

Mr. Sparks proves himself to be a good man and he often tries to help Garrett. However, even Mr. Sparks cannot always protect Garrett. In fact, Mr. Sparks chooses not to protect Garrett even when he knows that Adam is gunning for him, in favor of saving his own job. This leaves Garrett glaringly aware of his own vulnerability.

When Paul and Sarah decide it is time to put their escape plan into effect, they do not tell Garrett. Instead, Garrett finds himself stuck in the middle and having to choose in a second's notice whether or not to help. Garrett makes the decision to help and he escapes with Sarah and Paul. However, it is clear from the very get go that this will not be easy and they have to be smart if they are going to survive. Garrett quickly becomes aware that they are being hunted by the same bounty hunters that brought him to the camp in the first place. It is luck that Garrett knows them and is able to get his friends to safety without being spotted. However, the fact that they are being sought this quickly leaves their chances of escaping slim.



Chapters 21-28

Chapters 21-28 Summary

Chapter 21. Each of the teenagers slips out of the truck stop one at a time and meet in the back. They discuss their next move and decide it would be best to travel on foot during the night rather than attempt to hitch another ride. The trio lies down in the woods to try to sleep. Sarah and Garrett talk about Sabrina and how his parents got Sabrina fired after learning about their relationship, causing him to become more determined to continue it. Garrett claims that their motivation for having Sabrina fired, but not going to the police, had more to do with his mother trying to protect herself from embarrassment than saving Garrett.

When they wake, the teens eat food thrown away behind the truck stop before setting out on foot in the woods. Sarah gets a stick in her foot that causes an injury bad enough to make it painful for her to walk.

Chapter 22. They stop when Sarah can no longer walk. As they settle down to sleep, Sarah expresses her fear of getting caught and returned to the camp. The following morning, Paul is sick. They begin walking again and soon come within sight of a bridge that crosses the Saint Lawrence River between the United States and Canada. Unfortunately there is a custom's station on the United States side. Garrett knows they cannot cross there because they have not identification. There is a truck depot or distribution center near the bridge. Garrett walks to it to see if he can find a way across the river there. Instead, Garrett is spotted by Rebecca.

Chapter 23. Garrett runs and manages to get under a break in the fence before Rebecca can reach him. When he is safe, Garrett talks to Rebecca, trying to understand how she could have survived the boot camp only to bring other kids there. Rebecca claims that she deserved to be there and so do all the kids she takes there. Garrett eventually gives up trying to convince Rebecca to leave him alone. On his way back to the others, Garrett sees a boat rental place on the river and thinks that might be there way across. Garrett leads Sarah and Paul to the rental place where they hide in the woods and wait for the owner to leave.

Chapter 24. When Garrett and the others make their way to the boat rental place, they are spotted by Harry and Rebecca. Garrett puts Sarah into one of the boats and then has Paul help him disable the other boats by removing the stopper designed to drain them while they are in dry dock. Half way across the river, Garrett can see Harry and Rebecca getting into one of the disabled boats. Garrett know it will sink before they are halfway across the river and they will more than likely die of hypothermia in the frigid water. Garrett wants to ignore this truth and continue fleeing, but he cannot. Garrett drops Sarah and Paul on the shore in Canada and returns for the bounty hunters. Garrett rescues Harry and Rebecca, but before he can return to the Canadian shore, they are stopped by a police boat.



Chapter 25. Garrett, Harry, and Rebecca are taken to the police station where everything is straightened out. When they are released, Harry handcuffs Garrett for the drive back to the camp despite Rebecca's doubts.

Chapter 26. Garrett is laid face down in the director's office where he listens to him speak to Sarah's father. When he is done with the phone, the director orders Garrett taken to TI. This time when Garrett is beaten on the TI floor, no precautions are taken to prevent bruising. The next day, Garrett is forced to crawl into the lunch room just seconds before the director announces that because of the seriousness of Garrett's escape, everyone will be reduced one level. This causes the other inmates to take their anger out on Garrett.

Chapter 27. Garrett is forced to lie on the cold ground outside the dorms that night. Joe comes out and orders Garrett to stand. Each time he stands, Joe knocks him back down. Garrett is then beaten as he runs barefoot, carrying two car tires. Later, Garrett is forced to crawl to TI where he is ordered to stay on his knees despite his exhaustion. The only reprieve Garrett gets is when Mr. Sparks comes to sit with him for a few minutes, allowing him to sleep.

Chapter 28. It has been many weeks. Garrett is now almost a level five. Garrett now complies with everything he is told to do. When Garrett is called to the main office and finds his mother and father waiting, he is confused. Garrett's parents confront him, asking if he was beaten by members of the staff at the camp. Although the director gives Garrett a warning look, he tells them he was. However, Garrett insists he deserved everything he got.

Chapters 21-28 Analysis

Garrett and Sarah appear to be growing closer to one another. Garrett shares with Sarah the evolution of his relationship with Sabrina, revealing that if his parents had not gotten Sabrina fired the relationship might have naturally played itself out. However, his parents' interference only made Garrett more determined to be with Sabrina. This goes to show the reader the mentality of a young man who thinks he is very mature, but is still only a fifteen year old boy.

Garrett and the others manage to make their way to the Canadian border without too much trouble. However, Sarah is injured and Paul is terribly ill. Garrett has become the leader. Garrett searches for a way to get his friends across the border only to discover that the bounty hunters have arrived ahead of them. Garrett tries to reason with Rebecca, but like his conversations with Ron and Jon, it is clear that she believes in the dictates of the camp after her own internment there. There is no reasoning with her.

Garrett and the others make it to Canada. However, Garrett cannot allow Rebecca and Harry to die. For this reason, Garrett gives himself up in his attempt to rescue the bounty hunters. Garrett is returned to the camp despite Rebecca's doubts and undergoes a horrible degree of torture to pay for the embarrassment and trouble his



escape has brought on the camp. In weeks, however, Garrett has become just like Ron and Jon, a brainwashed child afraid to bring any more wrath down on his head. That is why, when his parents finally come to rescue him, Garrett does not feel he needs to be rescued. It is a sad and ironic turn of events that the author seems to express is the only expected outcome of such a situation.



Characters

Garrett

Garrett is a fifteen year old boy. Garrett is highly intelligent, so intelligent that he has a high grade point average despite only attending school a few days a week. Garrett has become involved with a woman who was a teacher at his school and eight years his senior. Garrett's parents are unhappy with this relationship and as a result have gotten the woman fired from her job. This only makes Garrett more determined to make the relationship work, a relationship he believes is true love.

Garrett and his parents fight frequently. Garrett believes the problem between him and his parents is the fact that he does not think the same way they do about their lifestyle. Garrett feels his parents are concerned about being publicly humiliated should news of Garrett's relationship with Sabrina come out. Garrett also believes that his parents' idea of maturity is more about conformity, something he is sure he will never do no matter how mature he might become. However, Garrett finds it difficult to believe that his parents will honestly force him to stay at the boot camp until he turns eighteen. Therefore, when his dad fails to take Garrett home after a visit to the camp, Garrett becomes disillusioned about his parents and his future.

Garrett escapes the camp with fellow inmates, Paul and Sarah. Garrett takes control of the group and manages to get his friends across the Canadian border. Unfortunately, the bounty hunters chasing them take a boat that Garrett removed a stopper from and begin to sink. Garrett takes pity on them and saves them, only to find himself returned to the camp. Garrett is badly beaten and tortured repeatedly until he finally conforms.

Paul

Paul is a small, weak child who is highly intelligent. Unfortunately, Paul's father wanted a masculine child who was athletic and less of a bookworm. For this reason, Paul's father has sent him to Harmony Lake in order to make a man of him. Paul has been there for more than a year. Due to Paul's diminutive size and his inability to stand up for himself, he has become a frequent target of the bullies at the camp. Garrett stands up for Paul once and finds himself punished for it.

Paul knows he cannot survive at the camp much longer and knows that another boy once died there. For this reason, Paul knows he must escape. Paul has come up with a plan for escape with Sarah and he decides to ask Garrett to join. Garrett does not commit to the plan until it is in action. When they do escape, Paul stops being the leader and Garrett takes over. Paul becomes ill after spending several nights sleeping outside. In the end, Garrett gets Paul and Sarah across the border to Canada where Paul is placed in the hospital and rescued by his parents, who have changed their minds about the camp.



Sarah

Sarah is the daughter of a Mormon apostle, a man who is very powerful in the Mormon Church. Due to the fact that Sarah does not believe in all the Mormon Church preaches, her father has sent her to Harmony Lake to keep himself from being embarrassed by her beliefs. Sarah was sent to the camp at the age of fourteen and will more than likely stay there until her eighteenth birthday despite attempts by other family members to get her out of there. Sarah is depressed and convinced she will not make it much longer. Garrett speaks to Sarah through illicit notes, learning more about her situation. This connection between Garrett and Sarah is partly what convinces Garrett to run away with her and Paul. When they do escape, Garrett grows even closer to Sarah and eventually sacrifices himself after making sure Sarah and Paul get away.

Joe

Joe is the 'father', or leader, or Garrett's 'family', Dignity. Joe is a cruel man who uses any means necessary to get the results that parents want from Harmony Lake for their children. Joe often picks on the weaker inmates, humiliating them in front of the others and setting them up to become disobedient so he can punish them. Joe is so cruel to Garrett, often using him not only as a verbal punching bag, but condemning the bullying of other inmates, that when Garrett is escaping the camp and Joe comes after him, Garrett thinks about repaying some of this cruelty. Eventually, however, Joe breaks Garrett when Garrett is returned after his escape attempt and Joe is given permission to use any means necessary to punish him. Joe has Garrett beaten, sleep deprived, and verbally abused.

Mr. Sparks

Mr. Sparks is a chaperone at Harmony Lake. Mr. Sparks is an athletic man who often joins the team sports that the inmates play. Mr. Sparks is kinder than the other chaperones and often tries to help Garrett by offering him advice and information about the program. However, Mr. Sparks needs his job, therefore he does nothing else to help Garrett despite his awareness of the abuse taking place in the camp.

The Troll

The Troll is one of the chaperones at Harmony Lake. Garrett refers to him as the Troll because of his physical build. The Troll is cruel and often looks the other way when other inmates abuse their fellow inmates. The Troll seems to thrive on the abuse and cruelties perpetrated on the inmates at Harmony Lake, much like Joe.



Adam

Adam is a bully who is an inmate at Harmony Lake along with Garrett. Adam is a higher level inmate who often works as Joe's instrument in bullying and torturing the other members of his 'family'. Garrett is larger and stronger than Adam, therefore he is able to get the better of Adam most of the time. However, Adam is persistent. One day, Adam and his friends corner Garrett in the bathroom, throw some pepper in his face, and beat him badly.

Harry

Harry is a bounty hunter whose job it is to take kids to Harmony Lake, a boot camp, and return them after escape attempts. Harry is a jaded man who thinks all the teens going to the camp deserve to be there and that their pleas of innocence are just a way of manipulating Harry into releasing them. When Garrett saves Harry after his boat sinks in the Saint Lawrence River, he refuses to show Garrett any kindness. Harry returns Garrett to Harmony Lake.

Rebecca

Rebecca was once an inmate of Harmony Lake. Now Rebecca works as a bounty hunter, taking kids from their homes and delivering them to the camp and returning students who have managed to escape. Rebecca is confronted by Garrett when she spots him during his escape, but he cannot convince her not to chase after him and his friends. Rebecca, however, has doubts about returning Garrett to the camp after he places himself at risk to save Rebecca and Harry from drowning or dying of hypothermia when the boat they are chasing Garrett in begins to sink. Later, Rebecca goes to Garrett's parents and tells them the truth about the camp.

Mr. Z

Mr. Z is the director of Harmony Lake, the boot camp where Garrett has been sent by his parents. Mr. Z takes a special interest in Garrett for an unknown reason, although the reader suspects his reasons have to do with his parents' wealth and social position that could mean more children of Garrett's background being sent to the camp. Mr. Z is very unhappy when Garrett, Sarah, and Paul make their escape and takes that anger out on Garrett after his return.

Garrett's Parents

Garrett's mother is a crisis manager, a business owner who works trying to control the release of information to the press whenever a company of celebrity is faced with a scandal. Garrett's father is a high powered lawyer in New York City. From an early age



Garrett has trouble understanding his parents' actions or gaining his mother's affection. Garrett essentially raises himself, learning from observing rather than spending much time with his parents. Therefore, when Garrett realizes he does not have to attend school every day to learn what it takes others to learn in that amount of time, he begins skipping school, but manages to keep a high grade point average. When Garrett's parents cut him off financially, he steals a small amount of money. When Garrett meets Sabrina, he feels they are well matched intellectually and therefore will not allow his parents to break them apart despite their eight year age difference. For these reasons, Garrett's parents send him to a boot camp to improve his behavior and to protect themselves from the embarrassment of Garrett's relationship with Sabrina becoming public.

Sabrina

Sabrina is a twenty something teacher who recently moved to New York before taking a job at Governor's School, the high school Garrett attends. Garrett has a crush on Sabrina and begins hanging around her classroom before finally meeting her off campus at a bookstore. Although Garrett expects Sabrina to keep their relationship professional, they soon develop romantic feelings for one another. When Garrett's parents learn of this relationship, Garrett's mother has Sabrina fired. This causes Garrett to become more determined to see Sabrina and the relationship continues, often including sleep overs for Garrett at Sabrina's apartment. This is the main reason Garrett's parents have him sent to Harmony Lake, a boot camp for troubled teens.



Objects/Places

Families

The inmates at Harmony Lake are divided into groups called 'families'. Each family is led by a chaperone who is referred to as father or mother. Each group is given a name. Garrett's 'family' is called Dignity.

Letter to Sabrina

Joe forces Garrett to write a letter to Sabrina to get out of TI. Joe does not think the letter expresses Garrett's mistake in getting involved in the relationship properly, so he tears it up. Later, however, Garrett learns that Joe sent a copy of the letter to Garrett's parents to serve as an example of Garrett's progress at the camp.

Broken Pencil

Garrett finds a broken pencil in the parking lot one afternoon. He hides the pencil in his pillow case and uses it to write notes to Sarah.

Soft Markers

Students are given soft markers to write with at reflections or class time because they cannot be used as a weapon.

Notes to Sarah

Garrett begins exchanging notes illegally with Sarah by stuffing the notes under the table where he sits in the lunch room. These notes are found by Adam and turned over to Joe, but Garrett used his left hand to write the notes, therefore Joe cannot connect them with Garrett.

Circle

Circle is an activity at the camp in which half of a male and a female 'family' get together to discuss the issues that have brought them to the camp. Joe often uses Circle time to humiliate or emotionally abuse the weaker or newer inmates.



Reflection Notebook

Each inmate at Harmony Lake is given a reflection notebook in which they must write every evening after dinner. One night Garrett writes a letter to his parents in this notebook, but Joe finds it unacceptable and tears it up.

Harmony Lake Brochure

Garrett steals a Harmony Lake brochure while on a tour of the facilities with his dad during his parents' six month visit. In the brochure, parents are promised that the camp will return to them the child they have always wanted.

Rental Boats

Garrett finds a place on the Saint Lawrence that rents boats. Garrett, Paul, and Sarah steal one of these boats to reach the Canadian border. Garrett and Paul disable the other boats by removing the stoppers that are used to drain the boats in dry dock. Unfortunately, Harry does not notice the missing stoppers and he and Rebecca chase after Garrett in the others in a boat that quickly sinks in the middle of the frigid water.

Dorms

The inmates at Harmony Lake are divided into 'families'. Each 'family' has a room in the dormitory where they sleep in a group, supervised by inmates who have reached the higher levels outlined in the Harmony Lake rule bible.

Temporary Isolation

Temporary Isolation, or TI, is a room where discipline problems at Harmony Lake are placed. These inmates must lie on the cold concrete floor twenty-four hours a day for however long the chaperones decide as punishment.

Harmony Lake

Harmony Lake is a boot camp for trouble teens. Parents pay four thousand dollars a month to send their children there in hopes of having them become the child they always wanted. Some of the kids sent to Harmony Lake are drug users or criminals, but many are kids who simply fail to live up to their parents' expectations, like Garrett, Sarah, and Paul.

Saint Lawrence River

The Saint Lawrence River is a river that separates the borders of Canada and upstate New York. It is this lake that Garrett, Sarah, and Paul must cross to reach Canada.



Themes

Troubled Teens

The main theme of "Boot Camp" is trouble teens. This is the main theme because the purpose of the plot is to show what it is like for a teen to be sent to one of the many boot camps in America that is designed to take a troubled teen and force them to comply with their parents' ideas of proper behavior. Most of these places are legitimate attempts to take criminal teens or teens that use drugs and convince them that they would be better off learning discipline and order. However, this book is about a teen whose behavior, while not appropriate, is hardly criminal.

The teens at Harmony Lake are clearly troubled. Adam likes to corner people in the bathroom and beat them, while making threats against their future safety. Ron and Jon like to beat other inmates in ways that will not leave bruises when ordered to do so by their 'father', Joe. These inmates are clearly criminal in nature, but the reader must wonder if they were that way before they arrived at Harmony Lake, or if they became that way under Joe's constant bullying.

Garrett is clearly a good boy, someone who says bless you when someone sneezes and who rescues the weak from bullies. However, Garrett has been sent to this camp along with the Adams and Jons and Rons. In the end, Garrett complies with the rules of the camp, accepting that he deserved the beatings and torture he received because of his behavior. This leaves the reader wondering if Garrett was a troubled teen before he arrived at Harmony Lake, or if being at Harmony Lake made him into a troubled teen.

Parent-Child Relationship

The parent-child relationship is an important theme in this novel because of the role Garrett's parents played in his arrival at Harmony Lake. Garrett is clearly a smart boy, a well-behaved boy who is courteous and kind. However, his parents claim that Garrett is a thief, a drug user, and a discipline problem. For this reason, Garrett has been sent to Harmony Lake. However, Garrett has an excuse for each of the claims against, telling the reader that although he is guilty of all his parents have accused him of, that his actions are mild compared to those of his peers in high school. Garrett also claims that his parents simply want him to conform to their ideal and not embarrass them.

As the novel develops, and the reader learns more about Garrett, his parents, and Garrett's relationship with Sabrina, the reader must wonder if Garrett truly belongs at Harmony Lake. Garrett's mother does not even bother to come see him at the first opportunity Harmony Lake presents, even though it has been six months since she last saw him and will be another six months before she can see him again. This tells the reader a great deal about Garrett's relationship with his mother, about her priorities. It also gives weight to Garrett's claim that the only reason his parents sent him to



Harmony Lake was to prevent his relationship with Sabrina from embarrassing his mother.

The parent-child relationship is an important one, the first many form in their lives. Garrett and his parents obviously are not on the same wave length when it comes to attitudes about life and society. However, the reader must wonder if this is enough of a reason for Garrett to be sent to Harmony Lake and treated as he is. Despite the fact that Garrett's parents finally comes to the rescue in the end, the reader must wonder how they could send him away in the first place.

Abuse as Discipline

The novel is about a boot camp that uses both military order and abuse to adjust the attitudes of their inmates, turning them into something different from what they were to begin with. The 'mothers' and 'fathers' who care directly for the inmates treat them harshly, often emotionally abusing them with words. This is used in tandem with instruction on hygiene and proper nutrition that is undermined by the food served at the camp and the opportunities for personal hygiene presented. The inmates are always getting two different messages, therefore it is no wonder they are often confused and act out.

Many people believe that if you shame a person, by abusing them verbally, that they will change their behavior. Harmony Lake takes this a step further by abusing its inmates with uncomfortable punishments and even beatings. The Circles that are supposed to help inmates deal with the issues that brought them to the camp turn into a free for all show of verbal abuse. These students are brainwashed, forced to act in a certain way in order to earn the right to graduate from the camp.

Abuse rarely works to curb bad behavior. Instead, this type of abuse usually only causes the inmates to resort to the same sort of abuse to survive. In this novel, the abuse must reach an intense degree to change Garrett. Garrett, who is a kind, tender young man at the beginning of the novel, becomes a broken person who believes he deserved the abuse he suffered, changing him into a docile, frightened young man. It is a change that cannot possibly be anything like what his parents thought they wanted, and a change that will alter Garrett's life forever.



Style

Point of View

"Boot Camp" is written in the first person point of view. The main character, Garrett, is also the narrator of the novel. Garrett takes the reader along as he is sent to a boot camp that specializes in changing the behavior of teenagers through discipline and order. Garrett, a highly intelligent and mature young man, does not feel he deserves to be there, but eventually is broken enough to comply with the program.

The point of view of this novel creates an intimate relationship between the reader and the main character, making the reader feel all the emotions the main character feels as he finds himself constantly abused in one way or another by the people at the boot camp where he has been sent by his parents. When Garrett escapes, the reader feels the same hope for the future that Garrett feels, but also the same disappointment as him when he is captured after returning to save the bounty hunters chasing him from sure death. This point of view places the reader so close to Garrett that the reader cannot help but feel a great deal of sympathy with Garrett and wish him the best, only to feel deeply disappointed at the end. For these reasons, the point of view of this novel works well with the plot.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in a boot camp designed to fix the bad behavior of teenagers sent there by their parents. The idea of a boot camp for teenagers is to take teenagers who are badly behaved and use military like order to help them change their behavior. However, this boot camp relies more on abuse than order to change the behaviors of its inmates.

The setting of this novel is important because it plays a major role in the plot of the novel. The setting is a major part of the conflict that propels much of the plot of the novel. Garrett is sent to this boot camp because his parents do not like that he is dating a woman eight years his senior. Garrett is bullied by his 'father' at the camp, constantly forced to defend his relationship with Sabrina in front of the other inmates. At the same time, Garrett is faced with bullying from other inmates that is condoned by his 'father'. Garrett is punished for minor infractions and treated more like a prisoner than a child. For these reasons, the setting of the novel becomes a major factor in the plot, making it very important to the overall structure of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written with the intended audience of young adults. The main character is also a young adult. For these reasons, the language of the novel tends to be simple, a



language that is common to young teens. The language contains little in the way of foreign language or slang, making it easy for the intended audience to comprehend.

The language of the novel is appropriate to the novel because it is authentic to the main character and the intended audience. The language of this novel is simplistic. However, it does not include any military phrases as one might expect in such a novel, underscoring that fact that this boot camp is more of a prison than a military type installation. This too makes the language more authentic to the plot, making the language perfect for this plot.

Structure

"Boot Camp" is divided into twenty-eight chapters. Each chapter is fairly short, some spanning weeks or months of time while others take place in the matter of moments. The novel is written both in narration and dialogue, telling a story that is both described to the reader and shown. The plot follows a linear time line, but also includes a great deal of backstory to catch the reader up on the events that brought Garrett to this place in time.

The novel contains one main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot follows Garrett as he struggles to survive boot camp. One subplot takes the reader back in time to understand the reasons why his parents sent him to this place. Another subplot follows Garrett's relationships with Paul and Sarah and their plan to escape. Another subplot follows Garrett's relationship with Joe, his 'father' and tormentor. All the plots come to a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"Harry's been calling me blue blood ever since he and the woman riding shotgun took me against my will from my parents' house, drove me to the airport, and flew me to upstate New York." Chapter 1, pg. 2

"I'm tired—it must be four a.m. by now—and would prefer to lie down and sleep, but something tells me to obey, so I stand. The men in the chairs watch me. The tall one yawns. This must be boring as hell for them. It sure is for me." Chapter 2, pg. 8

"It's my second morning. I've been here for roughly thirty hours, and it's been one nonstop caffeine headache." Chapter 4, pg. 20

"To fight the monotony and boredom of TI, I begin to relive memories: the day I walked into math class and saw Sabrina for the first time, in a red short-sleeved dress, writing an equation on the board; the first time we met outside of school; the first kiss the first time we made love; and then every time after that." Chapter 5, pg. 34

"Because you don't get out of Lake Harmony unless you prove whose side you're one." Chapter 7, pg. 52

"I went to school as much as I needed to maintain a 3.8 average. Maybe I smoked once in a while with my friends, but mostly on weekends. The only thing I ever broke was curfew. I don't deserve this." Chapter 10, pg. 83

"Her eyes are swollen shut, and her face is streaked with drying blood." Chapter 11, pg. 100

"Why is this? Why the watery eyes? The answer is instantaneous. I want him to get me out of here immediately. I want him to say he's made a terrible mistake and that he's come to take me home."

Chapter 15, pgs. 128-129

"Endless house pass with nothing but my thoughts to keep me company. No one comes in to grind my ankles and twist my legs. It's as if Joe doesn't want anything to distract me." Chapter 17, pg. 146

"In my grip is the person who has caused me so many months of pain and agony. So many months of despair. The person who allowed me to be beaten within an inch of my life." Chapter 19, pg. 163

"As I look longingly toward the Canadian shore and try to judge the distance, a heavy dose of disappointment weighs down my shoulders. There's no way I'll get there." Chapter 25, pg. 211



"Joe says I'm progressing really fast. He says sometimes the kids who've resisted the most change the fastest once they've learned their lesson. I understand what he means." Chapter 28, pg. 228



Topics for Discussion

Who is Garrett? Why was he taken from his house without warning? Where is he going? Why does Harry warn Rebecca that Garrett and teens like him can be manipulative? Why does Harry think Rebecca should understand Garrett better than anyone? What does Garrett do that makes him seem manipulative? Is he really trying to get away with something? Explain.

Who is Joe? Why does he pick on Garrett? Why does Garrett think that Joe wants Garrett to hit him? Why does Joe repeatedly send Garrett to TI? What happens to Garrett in TI? For what reason? What does Garrett think about while in TI? How does this reflect his feelings about being sent to this place? Why does Joe try to get Garrett to talk about Sabrina? What does Joe say is Garrett's mistake in his relationship with Sabrina? Does Garrett agree? Explain.

Who is Sabrina? Where did Garrett meet her? How did their relationship develop? How do Garrett's parents feel about Garrett's relationship with Sabrina? Why does Garrett's mother get Sabrina fired from her job? How does Garrett feel about that? Why does Garrett continue his relationship with Sabrina despite his parents' unhappiness? Why does Garrett believe it is this relationship above all else that has gotten him sent to boot camp? Is he right?

Discuss Garrett's parents. What do Garrett's parents want from him? Are these fair expectations? What is Garrett's relationship with his parents like? For what reason? Is Garrett unfair in his choice of not complying with his parents' desires for him? How might this relationship have been different if Garrett had complied with his parents' wishes? What does Garrett's mother's refusal to see him at Harmony Lake suggest about her feelings toward Garrett? About her feelings about Garrett's current situation?

Who is Paul? Why does Garrett save Paul from being beaten by the bullies in their 'family'? What was Garrett's intention? What reward does Garrett get for this action? Why does Paul later seek Garrett out? What does Garrett think of Paul's initial attempts at friendship? What does Garrett think of Paul's ideas of escape? Why does Garrett refuse to commit to the plan? Why does Garrett eventually go with Paul and Sarah? What does this say about Garrett's character?

Who is Sarah? Why is Garrett drawn to her? How long has Sarah been at Harmony Lake? For what reason was she sent there? Why does Sarah not care about what happens to her? Why have the chaperones stopped trying to discipline Sarah? Why does Sarah want to escape? What do Garrett and Sarah talk about before and during their escape? What does this suggest about a future relationship between them? What happens to Sarah in the end? How does Sarah help Rebecca convince Garrett's parents to rescue him?

What is boot camp? What is its purpose? What is the author's purpose in writing his novel from Garrett's point of view? Did Garrett belong in such a place? Does any

teenager deserve to be sent to such a place? Why did many of the parents send their children to Harmony Lake? In what way did the camp try to change the behaviors of these teens? Does this time of boot camp really work? Explain.