

# **Franny and Zooey Study Guide**

**Franny and Zooey by J. D. Salinger**

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# Plot Summary

*Franny and Zooey* follows the conflicted and troubled minds of the youngest members of the Glass family, a sister and brother with an advanced education and intellect. Instead of helping them get through life, though, the siblings' elevated understanding of things leads to problems dealing with people not on the same intellectual level, which is almost everyone. Franny's negative views on virtually everything lead to a nervous breakdown while at college. Zooey is a successful actor who struggles with his own penchant for disliking people. Despite their shared problems, it's up to Zooey to help his sister through her crisis. After a long, rambling, sometimes mean-spirited talk with his sister, he finally says the right thing. He tells his sister not to worry about everyone else's faults, and to not let others get her down or get in her way. If nothing else, he argues, she should try to do her best for God. Happy and satisfied, Franny ends the novel by falling asleep with a smile on her face.

Franny and Zooey are young, attractive, and intelligent. They come from a successful family. However, none of this stops them from developing a sour, cynical view of the world that threatens their mental stability. Franny, whose real name is Frances, and Zooey, whose real name is Zachary, are 20 and 25-years old, respectively. They are the youngest members of the Glass family's seven children. All seven appeared on a long-running radio program, "It's a Wise Child," that featured the prodigiously smart children. Instead of finding rewards for their natural intellect, the oldest and youngest members of the family seem to suffer from it.

At the time of the novel, the oldest, Seymour, has committed suicide; the second-oldest Buddy, is a writer living alone in upstate New York; one of the twins Walt, died in an accident during the war; and the other son is a Catholic priest. Boo Boo, the other daughter, is a mother of three.

Franny is a 20-year old student at Yale who visits her boyfriend, Lane, at Harvard for the annual Harvard-Yale football game. Almost immediately, she starts deconstructing and putting down nearly everything and everyone he mentions. The more she criticizes, though, the more she sweats. The only time she sounds positive about anything is when discussing an obscure religious book, *The Way of the Pilgrim*. The book follows a Russian peasant who learns to pray incessantly, as the Bible instructs, by reciting the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." After several arguments with Lane, Franny passes out on the way to the bathroom. She awakens and is seen muttering something over and over.

That leads to the next section of the novel, entitled *Zooey*, where the second title character, Buddy Glass and Bessie Glass are introduced. The section opens with an introduction by Buddy. He provides the family background and apologizes ahead of time for his habit of rambling on. He explains that the following story is a love story, as told to him by the three main characters.



The story within the story begins with Zooley reading a four-year old letter from Buddy, while sitting in the tub. The long, wordy letter gives details about Seymour's suicide and seems to apologize for the lessons he gave Zooley and Franny as children. It ends with Buddy supporting Zooley's decision to become an actor. In fact, as Buddy explains in the introduction, Zooley has become a successful and highly sought-after television actor. Zooley's mother, Bessie, who comes in to drop off new toothpaste, interrupts him. This starts a series of illuminating and sometimes mean-spirited and humorous arguments between the pair. Zooley rudely tells his mother to get out and calls her fat and stupid at different times. In one of the more emotional moments of the novel, he rails against his brothers for turning him and his sister into "freaks," who cannot relate to normal people because of their advanced education and intellect.

Later, Zooley goes down to the den to talk to Franny, who came home and has spent all of her time lying on the couch, crying. He tells her about his inability to be kind to people, constantly criticizing and finding fault with everything. She tells him that she did the same with Lane. She later admits that she doesn't want to go back to college, because everyone is full of "ego" or is a "phony." The reason she is having a breakdown, she says, is because she is as full of ego as they are, and she's starting to hate herself. Instead of consoling her, Zooley lashes out at her. He tells her the breakdown isn't a real breakdown, because she came home to have it. He says that the Jesus Prayer, which she has started reciting over and over, isn't genuine, because she doesn't really believe Jesus was a good person. He leaves her crying and face down on the couch, in seemingly worse shape than before.

Zooley then shows his true concern and guilt. He goes into his older brothers' room, which he apparently hasn't been in since Seymour's suicide. After an hour's worth of thought, he makes a fake phone call to Franny. He pretends to be Buddy, but she catches on. Just before hanging up, he gives his sister a final, and successful, piece of advice. He tells her not to worry about the people she feels are inferior or phony, not because she's wrong about them, but because it's not her business. He says that she should act, if for no other reason than for God.

In the climatic conversation of the novel, Zooley tells her about a piece of advice that Seymour gave him. As a boy, Zooley didn't want to appear on the radio show, because he felt everybody involved with the show was a "moron." Seymour told him to shine his shoes and do his best for the "Fat Lady." The Fat Lady, Zooley tells Franny, is everywhere and everyone. It's Jesus Christ. In other words, do your best for God. This advice finally turns Zooley's mood around. The novel ends with her falling asleep on her parent's bed with a smile on her face.



## Franny (pgs. 3-21)

### Franny (pgs. 3-21) Summary

On a cold winter morning, Harvard senior Lane Coutell waits for his girlfriend, Franny, on the platform of a train station. Lane is one of the few people on the platform instead of the heated waiting room, purposely trying to avoid his classmates. While waiting for Franny, he opens a letter she mailed him earlier in the week. It's full of affection and sentiment, with Franny saying over and over how much she loves him and misses him. The letter has apparently been opened and read many times. The only sign of trouble is a wish by Franny that they not over-analyze everything this weekend, especially her.

When she arrives, they kiss and hug. However, on the taxi ride to lunch, Franny tells Lane she misses him, and feels guilty because she knows she doesn't mean it. Once they arrive at the restaurant, Sickler's, the trouble starts almost immediately. Lane starts talking about a paper he wrote for a class that he believed was going to get a poor grade, but instead got an "A." He seems almost offended by the grade and by the teacher's request to possibly publish his paper. All the while, Franny isn't really listening and grows more annoyed, interrupting the conversation and trying to change the subject.

Finally, Franny tells Lane that he's talking like a "section man," the smug, negative graduate students at Yale that substitute in a teacher's absence. She calls them "tearer-downers." Franny immediately apologizes when Lane gets upset. She tells him that she's been feeling destructive lately. Franny tells him that if she had any guts, she would not have gone to college this year. Lane doesn't understand, noting two poets that work in Yale's English department that he would love to have at Harvard. Franny tells him that they're not real poets, which leads to another argument. Lane wants to know her definition of a real poet, and she tells him that a real poet leaves something beautiful behind. She apologizes again and wants to drop the subject. Not looking well, Franny gets up to use the bathroom.

### Franny (pgs. 3-21) Analysis

Lane's character comes into focus almost immediately, as it's clear he's trying to establish himself as something unique. He stands on the platform to avoid his classmates. Even though he has reread Franny's letter several times, he tries not to seem too excited when the train arrives. He is also dismissive of a classmate who tries to start conversations with him about a class they are sharing. He picks a restaurant that is not too well known, yet attracts the right kind of crowd. Later, when Franny goes to the bathroom, he is content to be in the right place with the right-looking girl. Earlier in their conversation, he makes mention of a paper that got an "A," and seems to be simultaneously bragging and trying to make light of it. All these characteristics add to

the re-occurring theme of ego and phoniness that Franny will bring up throughout the novel.

In another reoccurring theme, Franny's feelings and actions seem contradictory. She rails against phoniness and people who are "tearer-downers," but she shows sign of being both. On the cab ride to the restaurant, she tells Lane she has missed him, but she feels guilty, as she knows it isn't true. This is direct contrast to her letter and enthusiastic greeting at the train station. During their ensuing conversations, she complains about the "section men" at her school, the kind of people that put everything down and try to take the beauty out of everything. Ironically, she is doing the same thing.

Also, in an act of foreshadowing, Franny arrives at the train station with a book in her hand. Lane asks her about the book, and she says it's nothing, even though she obviously was reading it on the train trip. The book means something to her, and it will play a key part in the next section and the rest of the novel.



# Franny (pgs. 21-44)

## Franny (pgs. 21-44) Summary

When Franny gets to the bathroom, she pauses for a moment before sitting in a stall and crying for five minutes. It's an uncontrollable crying, but when she is done, she quickly composes herself and holds the small green book to her chest before cleaning up and going back to the table. Lane asks her if she's OK, and she doesn't really answer. Lane gets upset again when all she orders is a chicken sandwich.

Lane tells Franny that they're going to meet Wally Campbell for a drink before going the Harvard-Yale football game, which leads to another argument. Franny says she's sick of people like Wally. He's one of those rich, pretentious snobs who think they have all the answers. The more she puts Wally and people like him down, the worse she feels, perspiring even more. Their lunch arrives and another argument ensues when she tells Lane that she has quit her theatre group, even though she told Lane how much she enjoyed acting just a few months ago. Franny tells him that she is tired of all the egos and that she doesn't like her fellow actors. Lane tells her that those same actors received good reviews and that perhaps she's the one that's wrong.

Lane asks her if she's afraid to compete, and Franny says that it's the opposite. She's afraid of competing and trying to accomplish something like everybody else. Franny continues to perspire and again apologizes. She tells him that she thinks she's going crazy, and, now, it's not clear if she's being serious. Lane asks her about the book she's carrying. After some prodding, she tells him the book is *The Way of the Pilgrim*, a religious novel by a Russian peasant. Franny tells him that the book is about a peasant traveling through Russia, learning and then instructing people on how to pray continuously. Lane only mildly seems to be paying attention, much the same way she was when he was talking about his paper.

Franny explains the secret of learning to pray incessantly. She says that the person must recite the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," over and over. Eventually, the words become synchronized with the heartbeat and a person is able to connect with God. As she explains this, she is not really looking at Lane anymore. Lane agrees that it sounds interesting, but he's not really sure if he believes it.

When Lane tells Franny that he loves her, she excuses herself to go to the bathroom again. Before she gets to the bathroom, she stops and faints. When she comes around, Franny finds herself lying on a couch in the manager's office. She tells Lane that she is feeling better, and he goes to get her a glass of water. He tells her that she should rest at the boarding house he reserved for her, and that maybe he could sneak up the back steps later that night to meet her. She lies there, mouthing some words over and over.



## Franny (pgs. 21-44) Analysis

The conflict and irony in Franny's words and actions are further pronounced. Once again, she complains about negative people who put everything down, just as she puts everything down. When she mentions she quit her theatre company, Lane mentions that she was raving about it just last summer.

The only time during the entire lunch that Franny seems happy is when she finally tells Lane about the book she is reading, *The Way of the Pilgrim*. This is the start of a continuing theme in the novel concerning religion and spiritualism. She not only mentions Christianity, but Buddhism and Indian religion. She mentions that the prayer is a way to escape from the problems and concerns of the real world to get closer to God, or some kind of peace. In an act that foreshadows her belief and devotion to the prayer, she starts to look past Lane as she's talking, as if she's almost in a trance. Her thoughts on the book are also the first time she sounds positive about anything.

In more foreshadowing, after fainting, the final sentence of the section reveals that Franny is mouthing some words. This is an indication that she doesn't just believe in the Jesus Prayer, she's practicing it. This makes two things clear: Franny is trying to heal herself; and, secondly, it's not working.

Lane's character is also cast further into question. The couple's contrasting meals are symbolic of their differing views and attitudes. Lane orders snails and frog legs; fancy, upscale dishes that speak to his attempt at being unique and superior. In contrast, Franny orders a chicken sandwich and milk, a simple, unpretentious meal that upsets Lane. After she faints, Lane mentions sneaking into her boarding house since "it's been more than a month." Despite his girlfriend's fainting spell, his thoughts are on a possible sexual encounter later that night.





## Zooey (pgs. 47-69)

### Zooey (pgs. 47-69) Summary

The "Zooey" section of the novel begins with an introduction by Buddy Glass, explaining that the following is a family story as told to him by its three main characters, whom he calls the main actors. Buddy says the three characters urged him against writing the story for different reasons, the young female lead because it mentions her blowing her nose, the older lady because it mentions her in a bathrobe, and the male lead because of the story's mention of God. Buddy states, however, that the following is not a mystical story, but a complicated love story.

It begins with Zooey Glass reading a four-year old letter from his brother, Buddy, while lying in the tub on a November Monday in 1955. The letter has been read so much that it is starting to tear and fray. Before getting into the details of the letter, the narrator, Buddy Glass, gives a brief family history. There were seven Glass children in all, spaced by 18 years. Seymour was the oldest and Franny the youngest. Zooey was the youngest boy. All seven appeared, at one time or another, on a popular radio show called *It's a Wise Child*. On the show, the prodigiously intelligent children answered trivia questions sent in by viewers. The most popular of the children were Seymour and Zooey. The latter of the two was tested by several child psychologists because of his abnormally high intelligence.

The long, rambling letter begins with Buddy touching on normal topics, such as their mother, Bessie, and how things are going with Zooey's career. Buddy then goes into some detail about Seymour's suicide, which happened three years earlier at the time of the letter. He also seems to say that he regrets giving Zooey and Franny lessons on mysticism when they were toddlers.

Eventually, though, Buddy writes that the real reason he wrote the letter was an incident at the supermarket where a little girl told him that she had two boyfriends: Bobby and Dorothy. That reminded him of a conversation he had with Seymour about how religious study should teach people to unlearn the differences between boys and girls. In the end, he tells Zooey that if he wants to be an actor, he should do it with all his heart.

### Zooey (pgs. 47-69) Analysis

Buddy's introduction serves to lay some background on the Glass family history, and, in some ways, serves as an epilogue. The introduction foreshadows some general events, as the reader knows that there will be crying, an older woman in a bathrobe and mention of God. Buddy's notice that the following is a love story is also a bit of foreshadowing and an important element for the reader to keep in mind later in the novel when trying to decipher its more complex points.



The letter introduces or revisits several important themes in the novel. First, Buddy mentions the complicated family relationship that exists, especially between the brothers. He says he didn't get a B.A., because Seymour already had a PhD, and he couldn't and didn't want to catch up to him. In terms of religion/spirituality, Buddy writes that he wanted to give philosophy lessons to Franny and Zooey so they would know about philosophy and religion before they were taught regular lessons in school. He mentions Zen and the art of "no-knowledge" and of "satori," a state of pure consciousness that gets one closer to God. Notice how this sounds like what Franny is trying to achieve through the Jesus Prayer.

Buddy also adds how much he knows that Zooey resents him for putting all these ideas in his head, another reminder of the complicated relationship between the brothers. It's a theme that will be directly touched upon in the next section.



## Zooey (pgs. 69-91)

### Zooey (pgs. 69-91) Summary

After finishing the letter, Zooey, still in the tub, puts it away and starts reading a manuscript. After reading a few lines, he puts it down, disappointed in the material. Soon, his mother, Bessie, comes in the bathroom under the guise of dropping off a new brand of toothpaste she wants him to try. Bessie, despite Zooey's pleas that she gets out, sits on the toilet as he bathes. Almost immediately, the two get into a verbal joust, with Zooey telling her to go away, and Bessie determined to speak her mind.

Bessie asks Zooey to speak to Franny. Franny has been at home for the past several days and has eaten almost nothing. She has been crying inconsolably for days with only a cat to keep her company. Bessie also mentions that Franny has been mumbling something to herself. Zooey says that he talked to her for two hours the day before, but nothing came of it. Bessie is upset, because she cannot get a hold of Buddy, who doesn't have a phone in his room. She's also concerned that her husband and Zooey do not seem to take Franny's condition as serious as she does. After going back and forth in a sarcastic, mean-spirited and sometimes funny conversation, Bessie finishes a cigarette that she lit and leaves the room.

This section also provides more background information on the Glasses. They live in a New York City apartment house in an affluent section of the city. There is also a long description of the mother, Bessie, who walks around in a blue Japanese kimono/bathrobe that her family wishes she would get rid of.

### Zooey (pgs. 69-91) Analysis

Zooey's acerbic back-and-forth conversation with his mother reveals the connection with his sister, and foreshadows a problem the pair will have. Franny spoke of people who have egos and are always critical. Zooey appears to be the same kind of person. He treats his mother with disrespect and talks down to her, an obvious sign of ego. More than just critical, though, Zooey appears to be mean and even borderline cruel to his mother, calling her fat and stupid. His form of communication with his mother is a combination of insults, shouts and bitter sarcasm.

In short, Zooey sounds exactly like the kind of person Franny says she can't stand. Just like Franny, however, Zooey shows signs of conflict with his feelings. He's hypercritical of his mother; yet, he dislikes the screenplay he is reading, because the characters seem fake and "phony."

There's also another indication about the Glass brothers' relationship. Symbolic of Zooey's feelings toward Buddy is the way he handles the letter. He's kept it for four years, but he plays with it on the edge of the tub. It's as if Zooey is not sure if he really

wants to keep the letter and his connection to Buddy. In the end, though, he grabs the letter before it falls in the water.



## Zooley (pgs. 91-118)

### Zooley (pgs. 91-118) Summary

Bessie reappears in the bathroom when Zooley starts to shave, much to Zooley's dismay. Again, he tells her to get out, but she stays to have another conversation with him. This time, Bessie says she has a question that she wants Zooley's opinion on: She wants to know if she should call Waker, the older Glass brother who is now a priest and presently in Ecuador on a Jesuit mission. Zooley asks what Franny said about talking to Waker, and Bessie says that Franny said she doesn't want to talk to anyone.

After rebuking his mother for ignoring Franny's wishes, Bessie tells Zooley that Lane, Franny's boyfriend, has called five or six times in the last two days to check up on her. Zooley tells his mother that Lane is a "charm boy and a fake." Upset that Zooley doesn't like Lane, Bessie gets into another argument with him. This time, she accuses him of not liking anybody. She says if he doesn't like somebody within two minutes, he is done with that person forever. Zooley gives her a look that says he agrees.

Bessie also says that Lane believes the root of all the problems is the book that Franny is carrying around that she got out of the school library. Zooley calls his mother stupid for not realizing that the book didn't come from the library. It came from Seymour and Buddy's old room. When Bessie mentions that she never goes into that room, Zooley apologizes, and she says that he is being unkind. This leads to a big blowup by Zooley, who goes on to blame Seymour and Buddy for turning him and Franny into "freaks" that are unable to connect with people, because they've been made into intellectuals by their older brothers' teachings.

After arguments about why he isn't married and the possibility of hiring a psychiatrist, Zooley tells Bessie about the books Franny has been reading, *The Way of the Pilgrim* and the sequel, *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*. He tells her about the Russian peasant who learns how to pray incessantly by reciting the Jesus Prayer, and that the Jesus Prayer is probably what she has been mumbling all this time.

Bessie asks Zooley one more time if he is planning on talking to Franny. He says he isn't sure. Bessie then sighs and laments the fact that the children used to be "so sweet to each other."

### Zooley (pgs. 91-118) Analysis

The reoccurring theme of ego reappears in a passage about Zooley dressing and shaving. Buddy writes that Zooley did not look at his face while shaving or look in the mirror when combing his hair. The narrator mentions Zooley has been fighting against narcissism since he was young. The irony is that despite trying to avoid ego, Zooley attacks Lane, calling him a fake and a "little bastard." Without saying it, Zooley thinks he's a better person than Lane, a sign of ego.



Like Franny, though, Zooney shows that he's conflicted about his penchant for criticizing everyone. When Bessie points out that he doesn't know how to communicate with people, he is silent. He shows regret for the way he thinks, saying that he can't even sit down to a simple lunch with anyone. Instead of feeling guilty about his feelings, like Franny, Zooney is angry. The older brothers' lessons, he argues, has turned them into "freaks." He says he could murder both of them.

Furthering the theme of the siblings' complicated relationships, the reader learns that the *Pilgrim* books Franny is reading didn't come from the library; they came from Seymour and Buddy's room. It's a room that Bessie hasn't visited since Seymour's suicide. Franny, on the other hand, has been in their room enough times to find something that will help her through her difficult times. Seymour, despite being dead, and Buddy, who is living in upstate New York, still appear to have a strong connection with Franny and Zooney.

Along with family relationships, the continuing theme of religious philosophies is brought up. Franny first mentioned it in talking about the Jesus Prayer and its different versions, followed by Buddy's mention of "no-knowledge" in his letter. This time, it's Zooney telling his mother about the Jesus Prayer. Like Buddy, he mentions Eastern and Indian religions. He mentions *charkas* and the belief that there is a "third eye" that opens when one makes a spiritual connection to God.



## Zooley (pgs. 119-147)

### Zooley (pgs. 119-147) Summary

The narrator goes into a long description of the family's den, which is crowded with furniture, photos and mementos. Included in the room are newspaper clippings about the children's time on the radio. The furniture has nicks and marks from where the boys played football. It's in this room that Franny lies on the couch, asleep with a cashmere afghan covering her.

Zooley walks in and wakes her up. She's startled and a bit annoyed, but she tells him about a nightmare she just had. In her dream, she kept being forced to go down into a pool to retrieve a can of coffee. People from school surround her, and every time she comes up for air, two of her classmates try to hit her with a paddle. A professor that she dislikes is also there. Zooley asks why she dislikes this professor, and Franny says it is because he is a phony that probably musses up his hair just for the look of someone who is disheveled.

Franny then changes the subject and asks Zooley about the script that he was reading. He says he doesn't like it and goes on to tell her how he judges people the second he meets them. He tells her that when he met an associate for drinks the night before, he spent the night telling him everything that was wrong with him. He says that he wants to leave the country for an acting project, because he's tired of going to bed furious at everybody and everything. Franny opens up and tells him that she did the exact same thing with Lane. Every time he said something, she says, she would argue the opposite or find something to criticize.

Zooley, as he did in the bathroom with his mother, starts a diatribe about his older brothers. Once again, he claims that Franny and he are "freaks." He says that their older brothers, with all the lessons and education they gave them as kids, ruined other people for them, because they set such high standards. Again, Franny tells her brother that she has the same problem with people. She acted similarly destructive with Lane over the weekend. She tells him about how much she dislikes college, because it is one more place where people try to pile up treasure; the treasure being knowledge. During their conversation, Zooley catches Franny mouthing something under her breath.

### Zooley (pgs. 119-147) Analysis

The main characters are finally in the same room, and they find a connection with each other through their critical viewpoints, and the conflict it causes inside of them. Once again, the notion of ego is brought up. Franny mentions it when talking about a professor from her college that she believes messes up his hair before class. It's also another example of irony. She's putting someone down because of ego, and showing her off her own ego by pointing it out. When it comes to Lane, though, Franny feels



guilty for criticizing him. She refers to Lane as "poor Lane," because she feels she ruined his weekend with her endless negativity.

Zooey practices this same hypocrisy. He talks about TV scripts that he finds are silly and appeal to the wrong kind of people, putting him above those kinds of people. The irony is that he's putting down his own profession. Like Franny's conflict with her feelings, Zooey accepts that the way he treats people is wrong. He says that a writer friend of his would have been in his rights to punch him in the face. However, like he did in the bathroom with his mother, Zooey lays the blame for his personality not with himself, but his brothers. It's almost as if he's complaining that they're too smart, a problem that afflicts the two oldest and youngest members of the family

During their talk, Zooey catches Franny reciting the Jesus Prayer and makes fun of her for it, foreshadowing the problems they're about to have.





## Zooley (pgs. 147-173)

### Zooley (pgs. 147-173) Summary

Zooley finally confronts Franny about the Jesus prayer. He asks her what she hopes to accomplish by doing it. He points out that she's complaining about ego and people trying to build up treasure. Yet, she seems to be doing the same thing with her prayer. Instead of money, she's trying to build a treasure of enlightenment. Franny gets angry with Zooley, telling him that she has already thought about all of that. She admits that she's being hypocritical, which is the main reason she's feeling so terrible about herself. Zooley asks her if she wants him to try and call Buddy, but she shakes her head. She says she wants to talk to Seymour, the older brother that committed suicide.

The talk turns to religion. With the mood lightened, Zooley tells Franny that he wants five minutes of uninterrupted silence so he can tell her something. This leads to a long speech by Zooley about why he thinks Franny is wrong. First, he tells her that *The Way of the Pilgrim* touched him when he was younger, too. However, he says that she is wrong for having this breakdown at home, because it is worrying their parents. Secondly, he says that her attack on college and the phoniness and egos of people is pretty much correct, but that she's making it too personal. He says, for example, that the professor she dislikes might be a bad person, but that she shouldn't dislike him because of his hair.

The last point Zooley makes is about the Jesus Prayer. He argues that Franny is not being genuine about the Jesus Prayer, because she's not really praying to him. He reminds her of an incident when she was 10-years-old. Franny was upset after reading a passage in the Bible where Jesus essentially said that people were on a higher level than animals. Therefore, he argues, Franny is not praying to Jesus, because she doesn't really believe in him that strongly. He says she's praying to St. Francis of Assisi or Seymour, or some other idealized person or belief that she hopes will take away all the bad people in her life.

Before he's finished with his speech, Zooley stops mid-sentence and looks over at Franny. His sister is face down and crying uncontrollably. He apologizes, which only makes her cry even more. He then leaves the room.

### Zooley (pgs. 147-173) Analysis

The issue of ego is brought up again, and Franny admits her hypocrisy. In fact, she admits it's what behind her breakdown. Again, the complicated feelings among the siblings are touched upon. Despite saying that he could murder Buddy, Zooley offers Buddy as someone Franny might want to talk to. Instead, Franny asks for Seymour. While Zooley holds bitter feelings toward his older brothers, Franny wants to talk to them.



As foreshadowed in the earlier sections, Zooney's penchant for criticism is turned loose on his sister. The irony is that he criticizes her for many of the same things that he is guilty of. First, he says that she is worrying her parents, even though he just spent the majority of the bathroom conversations putting down Bessie. Then, he tells her not to get personal with people. Yet, Zooney called Lane a "little bastard," and he bitterly criticized his own acquaintances and colleagues.

Once again, despite Buddy saying it is not a mystical story, the theme of religion and mysticism is brought up again. Zooney is trying to tell Franny that her praying to Jesus is wrong, because she doesn't understand him or the prayer. The prayer, he says, is supposed to give the person "Christ-consciousness," that is, the ability to feel Jesus in everything. It's not supposed to take Franny away from the "bad" people in her life; it's supposed to let her see God in all of them. This sounds like the earlier mentions of "Christ-consciousness" and the third eye that allows people to see God in everything.



## Zooley (pgs. 174-202)

### Zooley (pgs. 174-202) Summary

After leaving the den, Zooley goes to his room to get a fresh cigar, and then into Seymour and Buddy's old room. It's the first time he has been in the room since Seymour's suicide, seven years ago. Zooley reads some of the quotations that are tacked to the wall, all coming from classic novels or philosophers, and sits down at Seymour's old desk. He sits there for 20 minutes, motionless, before opening up a drawer in Seymour's desk and reading half a page of his dead brother's diary. It's a sweet entry about an old birthday party. Zooley puts it away, and after 30 minutes of meditation, he opens Buddy's desk and pulls out his private phone. Zooley puts a handkerchief over the receiver and makes a call.

Meanwhile, in the den, Bessie makes one more attempt at getting Franny something to eat, but she angrily declines Bessie's offer of chicken broth. Just then, the phone rings. Bessie answers and comes into the room to tell Franny that it's Buddy and that he wants to talk to her. She also mentions that he sounds like he has a cold. Franny grudgingly gets up and goes to her parents' room to talk. Buddy asks her how she's doing and Franny tells him about Zooley and how he is driving her crazy. When Buddy makes a smart remark about Zooley's need for cigars, she realizes it is not Buddy, but Zooley pretending to be Buddy.

Franny is annoyed, but the conversation continues. Zooley goes on to tell her that he doesn't necessarily disapprove of her reciting the Jesus Prayer. He then tells her that he and Buddy went up to see her act last summer, unbeknownst to her, and that she was very good. Zooley tells her that she was wrong to quit just because she thinks everyone else at the theatre was sub par. He says that she should forget all of those people and the annoying professors. She should just act, because she wants to. He tells her that, if nothing else, she should act for God.

Zooley's mention of God leads to the novel's climatic conversation. He tells Franny that when they were kids, Seymour told Zooley to shine his shoes before a radio performance, and to do it for the "Fat Lady." Franny says Seymour used to tell her the same thing. He tells her that everyone is Seymour's Fat Lady. The big secret, he says, is that the Fat Lady is Christ and that Christ is everywhere and is everyone. Franny is so happy, that she is speechless for a half minute. After Zooley says he's done talking, they hang up. Franny gets in her parents' bed and falls asleep with a smile on her face.

### Zooley (pgs. 174-202) Analysis

After his failed talk with Franny in the den, Zooley's actions reveal a caring and sensitivity that hadn't been evident before. First, he goes to his older brothers' room for the first time in seven years, or, since Seymour's suicide. It's here that his feelings about



his brothers come to a head. Physically and emotionally closer to his brothers, Zooney doesn't show any anger toward them. He's meditative and overwhelmed with emotion.

When he makes the fateful call to Franny, he uses his brother's private phone and pretends to be his brother. It's a clear symbol of Zooney's feelings. In order to dispense knowledge and the right message, he channels his brother. Zooney didn't know the right things to say, but by using Buddy's phone and his voice, the message finally gets through.

Zooney's talk with Franny also mirrors Buddy's letter to Zooney. Buddy told Zooney to forget about everything else. He mentioned the lesson Seymour gave him about unlearning everything to see the truth. In the end, like Buddy told Zooney, Zooney tells Franny not to worry about the people that she dislikes, even though her feelings for disliking them might be valid. Zooney tells her not to let those people get in the way of living her life and doing what she truly loves, which in this case is acting.

All the religious themes are boiled down to one story and image. Just like Buddy mentioned unlearning everything, Zooney tells Franny to forget about all the people who she disagrees with. It's "none of her business," he says. She should act and do her best, even for the Fat Lady, the unattractive people who might sit on their porch listening to their radio all day. Even those people, Zooney argues, represent Christ. Franny can only do this through detaching herself, seeing God in everything and all the other religious themes that are mentioned throughout the novel.

Interestingly, that Fat Lady, overweight and not intelligent as the Glass children, is found in their own house. Bessie is referred to as fat several times by Zooney. That's the irony and the conflict inside of Zooney that doesn't seem resolved. His advice puts Franny at peace, but he still insults his mother and holds people in contempt. Then again, maybe the meditation in his brother's room and his talk with Franny was a reminder of the same advice that might finally put his mind at ease, too.



# Characters

## Franny Glass

The baby of the Glass family, and apparently the most sensitive, Franny goes from a seemingly loving and affectionate girlfriend to the victim of a nervous breakdown within a couple of days. The 20-year old is an intelligent, attractive college student at Yale, struggling with her cynical and critical way of thinking. During a trip to Harvard to visit Lane, her boyfriend, her mental problems soon bubble to the surface. She attacks or puts down every one of Lane's ideas and opinions. She tells him that she quit the theatre program that she was glowing about earlier that year, and that she dislikes most of her teachers and classmates. She later faints.

Franny goes to her parent's New York City apartment to recover, and lies on the couch, crying and refusing to eat anything. She confesses to her brother, Zooey, that she hates college and wants to drop out, because everyone is a phony or doing things just because of ego. Later, she admits that she's having a breakdown in large part because she feels like a hypocrite. She's acting like someone with an ego, herself, and doesn't like the person she has become.

Trying to cope with her inner chaos, Franny recites the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me") over and over, a prayer she learned in a book called *The Way of the Pilgrim*. It takes a fake phone call from her brother, Zooey, to snap her out of her funk. He tells her that she should be an actress, if for no other reason than for God. He tells her to do it for, as their older brother told them, the "Fat Lady," or, Jesus Christ. Finally seeing a way to cope with her cynical view on life and people, the novel ends with Franny happily falling asleep in her parents' bed.

## Zooey Glass

The youngest of the five glass men, Zooey is also possibly the smartest, a condition that leads to anger and bitterness instead of personal satisfaction. He is 25, thin and very handsome. Zooey is a successful and sought-after actor on television. In his youth, along with his older brother Seymour, he was considered the most popular and wittiest member of the Glass children on the radio show "*It's a Wise Child*." Later, when he was 12, several child psychologists tested him and determined he was indeed a genius with an extremely advanced vocabulary.

This high IQ, though, is something Zooey blames for his inability to connect with people. He admits that he is either bored or dismissive of people, or talks them into submission. During conversations with his mother, he uses this intelligence for bitter sarcasm and mean-spirited jokes.

Like his sister, he can't help feeling negative and cynical. The difference is he doesn't feel guilty about it; he feels anger. He's conflicted about his brothers, who gave him



early lessons on literature, the arts and philosophy. It's the older brothers, Seymour and Buddy, who he blames for his elevated intelligence, and, consequently, the problems he has with people. Still, he holds onto a four-year old letter from Buddy and finds inspiration in Seymour's words. In addition, when Zoey needs someone to talk to, he advises her, just as they supported him.

## Buddy Glass

The second eldest of the Glass children, Buddy is a writer in residence at a girl's junior college in upper New York. He is also the narrator of the Zoey section of the novel. It's his long, rambling, but ultimately supportive letter that Zoey has kept for four years.

Along with Seymour, Buddy gave Franny and Zoey their adolescent lessons on the arts, literature and religion. It's also Seymour and Buddy that Zoey blames for turning him and his sister into "freaks."

During Franny's breakdown, Buddy is never actually heard from, but his influence is felt. It's Buddy that Bessie, the children's mother, wishes she could reach, and it's Buddy's phone and persona that Zoey uses in a fake call to Zoey.

## Seymour Glass

At the time of the Franny's breakdown, Seymour has been dead almost seven years after committing suicide while on vacation with his family in Miami. He was the eldest of the Glass children, and by several indications, the smartest and most influential. According to the narrator, Buddy, he was also the favorite of Bessie and the most kind-hearted.

Along with Buddy, it was Seymour who gave Franny and Zoey their adolescent lessons on the arts, literature and religion. He also gives Zoey the key piece of advice of the novel. He tells Zoey to shine his shoes for the "Fat Lady." Later, Zoey figures out Seymour was talking about Jesus Christ. During her breakdown, it's Seymour that Franny says she wants to talk to after Zoey asks her if she wants to talk to Buddy.

## Bessie Glass

Bessie is the Irish half of the Irish-Jewish Glass parents. Like her husband, Les, she was a former singer and dancer. Now, she is a chain smoker and hangs around the house in a blue Japanese kimono that she keeps her cigarettes and random household items in. Physically, she's described as stout, but possessing surprisingly attractive legs.

Bessie has a complicated relationship with her children. Like a normal mother, she worries and dotes on them, but they seem to treat her with contempt. At separate times, Zoey calls her fat and stupid, but she never seems to take the attacks personally. It's clear she annoys her children as much as they bother her. She also provides much of



the book's comic relief, asking Zooney when he's going to get married and believing that the key to Franny's recovery is chicken soup.

## Lane Coutell

Lane is Franny's boyfriend. He is a Harvard student, and it's clear from his introduction that he is trying to set himself apart from his classmates, an endeavor that includes dating Franny. While picking up Franny, he waits out on the platform instead of inside the office at the train station. He also picks Sickler's restaurant for lunch, because it's a restaurant most people don't go to. Later, he thinks to himself that he's at the right place with the right-looking girl.

At lunch, he dominates conversation, and in an indirect way, seems to brag about a paper that he wrote. He largely ignores Franny when she tells him about the book she is reading. Later, he is taken aback by Franny's verbal attacks and negativity and gets upset with her attitude. He seems genuinely concerned when she faints, though, calling the Glass house to check up on her. Franny feels some affection for him, even though she criticizes people just like him. However, Zooney makes no secret of his feelings for him, calling him a "charm boy" and a "fake."

## Boo Boo Glass

Based on what the reader is told, Boo Boo, the oldest daughter, is the Glass child leading the most normal life. She is married with three kids. In recollections, though, she appears to have as sharp a wit as the rest of the children.

## Walt Glass

Walt is one of the Glass twins, with Waker being the other. At the time of story, Walt has been dead 10 years after an explosion in Japan during WWII.

## Waker Glass

Walt's twin is a Catholic priest. He is on a Jesuit mission in Ecuador during Franny's breakdown. It's Waker who Bessie wonders if Franny should talk to, an idea put down by Zooney.

## Les Glass

Les, the patriarch of the Glass family, was a former vaudevillian. He is not heard from in the novel except in passing. His wife, Bessie, says that he cannot deal with Franny's breakdown and that his plan to help her out involves offering Franny a tangerine. With the children described as half-Jewish and half-Irish, he is the Jewish half.



# Objects/Places

## Sickler's

Sickler's is the restaurant where Franny and Lane have their disastrous lunch, ending with Franny fainting. Lane picked this restaurant, because it wasn't a popular destination for his Harvard classmates. It was in his opinion the "right place," not too well known and unique enough for his tastes.

### *The Way of the Pilgrim*

*The Way of the Pilgrim* is the novel that Franny reads that partly leads to her nervous breakdown. The book is about a Russian peasant who wanders the countryside, trying to find out what the Bible means when it says people should pray incessantly. He learns that you must recite the Jesus Prayer over and over, until it becomes in tune with one's heartbeat. When the Russian learns how, he teaches other people how to do it. Franny claims the book came from her school library, but Zoey tells his mother that it came from Seymour and Buddy's room.

## The Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer is what the Russian peasant learns he must recite over and over. The prayer is "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." It's the prayer that Franny starts reciting to herself. Later, Zoey chastises her for it, saying it's a nice prayer, but claiming she doesn't really like Jesus.

## "It's a Wise Child"

While growing up, all seven children from the Glass family appeared on the radio program, "It's a Wise Child." It's a show in which the children answered trivia questions and displayed their above average intelligence. It's this show that made them famous and successful. According to Buddy, the oldest boy (Seymour) and the youngest (Zoey) were the most popular and impressive. The show is also where Zoey was first told by Seymour to shine his shoes for the "Fat Lady."

## The Glass' Den

Filled with vintage wooden furniture, the Glass' den is where the kids played as youngsters, the parents hung newspaper clippings about their famous children, and where Franny lies on the couch during her nervous breakdown. The den is also where Zoey makes his attempts to talk to Franny, both of which fail.





## The Glass' Bathroom

The bathroom is the site of the verbal battles between Zooney and his mother, Bessie. It's in the tub that the reader first meets Zooney, reading a letter that Buddy wrote to him four years earlier. When his mother interrupts, the pair gets into a series of arguments.

## The Heart is an Autumn Wanderer

*The Heart is an Autumn Wanderer* is the manuscript that Zooney reads while in the tub. He reads a few lines from it before his mother, Bessie, interrupts him. Later, he dismisses the manuscript as sub par.

## Buddy's Private Phone

According to Buddy, his private phone is one of his prized personal possessions. Instead of taking it with him to the college he works at in upstate New York, he leaves at the Glass apartment in New York. It's also the phone Zooney uses as a last, and successful, attempt to get through to Franny.

## "The Fat Lady"

The Fat Lady is the person that Seymour says Zooney should shine his shoes for when Zooney says everyone associated with the "It's a Wise Child" radio show is a "moron." Zooney says he imagined the Fat Lady sitting on a porch, listening to the radio for hours on end, and that she had cancer. Franny admits Seymour told her about the Fat Lady also, and that she imagined her indoors, but with cancer, too. Zooney later reveals that the secret is that the Fat Lady is everywhere and that it's Jesus Christ.



# Social Sensitivity

The social concerns in *Franny and Zooey* might be posed in the form of a question that the novel asks, but never quite answers—can long-held ideals of family and religion survive in a cynical mid-twentieth-century America? These concerns represent J.D. Salinger's own, as revealed through his multiple works of highly successful short fiction. Because many of those works center on members of the Glass family and their relationships to one another, the viability of family receives much attention. Within the consideration of family and its usefulness to its individual members, Salinger also emphasizes issues of spirituality. The basic questioning of family and religion leads to an interrogation of how humans choose to react to life's conflicts.

Through examples presented by his characters, Salinger offers two basic choices.

Through Seymour, the elder Glass brother, Salinger reflects on suicide as a viable choice for those too emotionally fragile to survive life's challenges. Through Franny and her brother Zooey, Salinger reflects on acceptance and endurance as a second choice, a choice that may be buoyed by an embracing of others or the practice of a personal spirituality. He identifies in the younger Glass siblings the various conflicts which overcame Seymour, but which the Glass survivors choose to face and champion. Although many questions regarding the "proper" application of spirituality arise, no pat answers are forthcoming, either to Salinger's characters or, by extension, to his readers.

The element of community through family in *Franny and Zooey* also prefigures ideas of postmodernism, a late twentieth-century philosophy which would follow modernism to focus on man's eternal search for Truth. Postmodernism arose in part precisely because answers to questions of human existence have not been forthcoming from man's involvement with religion or science. The consideration of organized religion remains a hallmark of modernist fiction and one that postmodern critics of the 1980s and 1990s challenged. Modernists write of the search for some transcendental "other" outside of the human being that will supply what some postmodernists term the "Truth" with an uppercase "T."

Postmodernists call those ideas, individuals, or practices, such as God, science, politics, and materialism, that claim exclusively to offer the Truth about life "metanarratives." Modernists defend metanarratives, or that "other," in some shape or form, basing their defense on the traditional belief that Truth is objective and knowable. By Contrast, most postmodernists encourage people to approach metanarratives with incredulity.

The transcendental "other" should be replaced with faith in small, local communities with shared interests including a desire to, above all, avoid inflicting suffering upon others. Salinger remains an author firmly locked within his age of modernism, but his concern with family, and his refusal to offer pat answers regarding questions of spirituality, prefigures the postmodern idea of the importance of local communities to people facing life's conflicts.

## Techniques

Franny and Zooey serves as a fine example of Salinger's penchant for placing the importance of characterization before that of plot. The entire novel takes place over a few hours on two different days and correspondingly is structured in two uneven sections. The stand-alone quality of the two sections is due to the fact that "Franny" first appeared as a short story in *The New Yorker* in 1955, while "Zooey" appeared in the same publication in 1957.

The names of the two sections correspond to the names of the two main characters. Salinger apparently incorporates some autobiographical features into Franny and Zooey, but it should not be termed a "memoir". The introduction in the novel's second part of its apparent narrator, Buddy, and his subsequent disappearance as a named presence in the novel is a type of narrative experimentation. The success of that experiment remains a subject of debate for literary critics.



# Themes

## Themes

Salinger offers a new look at time-tried themes. While some critics believe that organized religion exists as the main theme of *Franny and Zooey*, others claim that personal spirituality, with its failures and its successes, dominates. The theme of the American family exists throughout, offering a framework on which discussion of spirituality and religion hang.

Through conversations between Franny and her brother Zooey, and between Zooey and their mother, Mrs. Glass, readers may piece together incidents from the family's past that figure into the formula that equates to the Glasses. The highly symbolic nature of the family surname indicates the fragility of its members, who may be shattered by the challenges of their environment. While their attempted emotional support of one another finds basis in an obvious affection the family members share, the glib egoism reflected in their diction, a problem Zooey admits he would like to overcome, presents barriers to honest communication and interchange.

In addition, Salinger emphasizes the American higher educational system as a theme. Franny is a college student at the time of the story, and she comments frequently on the effect of classes and certain professors on her life and thoughts. Zooey remains one of the few.

Glass siblings who lacks a higher degree; he chooses acting as a career instead.

Salinger draws parallels between the actor's life and that of the academician, separating college professors into two different types. Those who offer knowledge for knowledge's sake represent accomplished but uninspired actors on a ready-made stage before a captive audience, spouting rhetoric that falls flat and becomes stale over time. The other, more rare, type of professor encourages knowledge as a tool for gaining wisdom and, like the occasional gifted actor, draws the audience into that search for wisdom.

This second type of professor, according to Zooey, remains preferable. As a professional actor himself, Zooey has the credentials to support his opinions.

Such pronouncements on education and knowledge allow the introduction of irony regarding the whole concept of wisdom, yet another theme of the novel.

While all seven of the Glass siblings participated during childhood as contestants on a popular television show featuring young geniuses, called "The Wise Child," none seem to have gained much wisdom themselves. The paradox suggested by the show's title lingers throughout the novel. A child, by definition, cannot be wise. She or he may be knowledgeable, but only time and an application of knowledge provides wisdom.



Salinger also superficially investigates the theme of psychotherapy. He introduces tension by revealing that Seymour's suicide followed psychoanalysis and, thus, Zooey feels psychoanalysis to be dangerous. He discourages his mother from seeking psychiatric help for Franny, telling her that a psychiatrist would attempt to help Franny accept and adjust to the mundane in life, an acceptance that would eventually drive her insane. The list of those adjustments includes, in part, "the joys of television, and Life magazine every Wednesday, and European travel, and the H-Bomb, and Presidential elections, and the front page of the Times".

The only way a psychoanalyst could help Franny, according to Zooey, would be if he believed that "it was through the grace of God that he'd been inspired to study psychoanalysis in the first place." Yet Zooey, also a product of his age, later attempts to interpret Franny's dream, a very Jungian approach to self-discovery.

The contradiction between Zooey's statements and his actions cannot be ignored, nor can Salinger's reminder of our hypocritical tendencies.

## The Battle Against Ego

Franny and Zooey find fault with almost everybody and everything, usually because people are guilty of big egos. The irony, and the conflict that leads to their misery, is that they are victims of ego as well. It's their battles against their own egos that drive the novel.

It doesn't take Franny long to tell Lane why she dislikes her college professors, classmates and others. It's all about their ego. Specifically, she dislikes people who try to make themselves look better by putting everything down. She also finds ego in rich kids who try to seem smart and take summer vacations to Italy. Franny goes on to say that everyone is trying to build up some kind of treasure, whether it is knowledge or material treasure.

The irony is twofold. First, Franny's boyfriend, Lane, exemplifies all of these egotistical personalities. Lane tries to eat at the right restaurant and eat the right things (snails and frog legs). Also, in putting other people down, Franny displays her own ego. She seems to think that she is better than her classmates and her peers at her theatre group, which she quit because of their "phoniness." It's this conflict that leads to her breakdown.

Zooey suffers from the same dislikes and hypocrisy. He is constantly putting down everyone and everything. He doesn't like Lane, or his colleagues and fellow writers. He considers all the material he is doing for TV to be inferior. He also insults and puts down his own mother. Of course, all these views make him appear to have an ego. Instead of feeling guilty, however, Zooey is angry at his brothers. He blames their teachings for turning him into a "freak." Like Franny, his conflicted feelings have affected him physically. Franny had a nervous breakdown, and Zooey suffers from an ulcer.

It's through religion and spirituality that the pair can get past their problems. Although, it appears that Zooey doesn't follow his own advice. In the climactic conversation of the



novel, he tells Franny to forget all those people that seem inferior, even if they really are. He says she must detach herself and not let anyone get in the way of what she loves to do, which is, coincidentally, the same thing for both. They both want to act. The advice calms Franny, but whether it will have the same effect on Zoey is not known.

## Education and Intelligence versus Wisdom

The Glass children are smart, educated and possess above-average intelligence that likely puts them head and shoulders above their peers. The irony is that instead of providing a rewarding life, this education appears to weigh some of them down. In simple terms, they seem almost too smart for their own good.

Seymour Glass was the first-born and, by many accounts, one of the smartest and most influential. Yet, he committed suicide at the age of 31 while vacationing in Florida with his wife. The reasons for his suicide are never touched upon or explained, but it's clear that his smarts didn't shield him from life's difficulties. Buddy, the second-oldest, appears to be the group's best writer, but he lives in relative seclusion as a teacher at a junior college in upstate New York. He is not married and doesn't seem to be reaping the rewards that someone of his intelligence should.

It is Zoey who provides insight on the unexpected side effects of education and intelligence. In a diatribe about his upbringing, he says that he is unable to hold a decent conversation with a man, because he either gets bored or preachy. He goes on to say that their education has given them high standards that no one would be able to live up to. Franny suffers from the same elevated state of awareness. Everywhere she turns, she finds someone who is unintelligent, below average or infuriating, because they are "phonies" or full of ego. It's this condition that leads to her nervous breakdown. Is it the same feelings that led to Seymour's suicide? It's a subject that's never discussed, but it's a logical conclusion.

Franny first brings up the notion of wisdom. She says that in her four years at college, she didn't hear anybody talk about wisdom, just knowledge and facts. Later, Zoey brings up the wisdom, telling Franny about one of the few wise things Buddy said to him, a notion that a man, even if he's injured, should help others. While Franny was railing against the lack of wisdom to go along with knowledge, it seems her, and her brothers were guilty of the same.

## Using Religion for Resolution

In the introduction to the second section, Buddy Glass says the following story is not a mystical one; it is a complicated love story. The facts are, however, that the youngest Glass children, Franny and Zoey, are having trouble coping with a world they find boring or ripe for ridicule. It's only through religion, or spirituality, that they find a way to cope with that world.



Franny, who suffers a nervous breakdown because of her negative outlook on people and life, turns to a religious novel for guidance. She reads *The Way of the Pilgrim*, a story about a Russian peasant who learns to pray incessantly, as the Bible instructs, using the Jesus Prayer. The prayer reads, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." However, the prayer doesn't seem to be working for Franny.

Zoey maintains that the reason the Jesus Prayer isn't helping Franny is because she is not genuine in her prayers. She's not praying to Jesus, he says. She is wishing that someone or something would come along to help her and only using Jesus as someone to pray to. Franny, Zoey states, never really liked Jesus because her interpretation of the Bible was that Jesus believed man was better than animals. In contrast, Zoey professes his admiration for Jesus. He says that Jesus was the only one who was smart enough to realize that there is no separation between man and the Kingdom of God that all the answers are found inside. In an earlier conversation with his mother, he mentions that he wrote five college papers on the crucifixion.

However, it's not just Christianity that Salinger brings up over and over again. Several Eastern and Indian philosophies are mentioned. In fact, as Franny mentions, the Jesus prayer is another version of other chants used by religions, all of which try to clear the mind and connect the person with God. In Buddy's letter, he mentions the Buddhist idea of a state of "no-knowledge." It's the same idea Zoey mentions when explaining the book to his mother. Zoey mentions Eastern ideas such as the *charka* and the third eye.

In the novel's conclusion, religion is the only thing that puts Franny at ease. Zoey says that Franny's notion that everyone is deserving of some criticism isn't wrong; it's the effect it has on her. He tells her that if she has had a "freakish education" that she should at least use it to realize that there must be some detachment between her and other people. Zoey tells her that if she can't find a reason to be an actress, to do it for God. "What could be prettier than that," Zoey says. Zoey, in a continuation of his earlier advice, tells her about Seymour telling him to try his best for the Fat Lady. The Fat Lady is everywhere, and it's everyone, he says. He tells her that the secret of the Fat Lady is that it is Jesus Christ. As Buddy mentioned in the introduction, the story is about love. However, it's a love for all things that is learned through religion/spirituality.

## The Dysfunctional Glass Family

The Glass children are learned in religion, philosophy and literature, but, apparently, they were not taught about a traditional parent-child relationship. Zoey doesn't just argue with his mother, Bessie, he bullies her. On several occasions, he calls her "fatty" and "stupid." The more surprising element, though, is that these rude, personal attacks never seem to truly hurt Bessie. In fact, she has little or no reaction to these insults at all. Her only retorts come when Zoey gets overly sarcastic. She tells him to please "button that tongue" or "kindly lower that voice of yours." On other occasions, she seems irritated, but never angry.



Instead of being hurt, the narrator suggests that at one point, Bessie almost feels proud of her son's verbal ability and wit when talking back to her. Similarly, Zooney is impressed by his mother's ability at seeing the truth. When Bessie says that Zooney is too quick to dislike people, he turns from the sink and stares at her with what the narrator says is a look of admiration, affection and gratitude. Later in the novel, Zooney shows genuine concern for Bessie and Les, his father. He says one of the reasons it is not right for Franny to have a breakdown is because it's upsetting their parents. They might act as if they can't stand each other, but there seems to be some basic understanding between Zooney and Bessie.

The only time Bessie seems genuinely hurt is when Zooney brings up Seymour, the oldest sibling that committed suicide. This is the first clue that the relationship between the sons in the family is complex and sensitive. Bessie says she hasn't been in Seymour's room since his death. Zooney brings up Seymour, often. Usually, it's to blame him for turning him and Franny into "freaks." During one conversation with his mother, he says that he is tired of Buddy and Seymour's name being brought up, saying "I'm so sick of their names I could cut my throat."

Yet, it is clear that Zooney still has deep and positive feelings for his older brothers. He keeps a four-year old letter from Buddy with him, and regularly reads it. When he goes into their room to make a fake phone call to Franny, it takes him nearly an hour to collect himself. The passage suggests he hasn't visited the room since Seymour's suicide, either. When it comes to dispensing the critical advice of the novel, it's Seymour that Zooney uses to help Franny. He tells her about the Fat Lady, a reference that she should do things, if for no other reason, than for God. Given Zooney's success in his profession, it's clear that his brother's advice and support, which came in a four-year-old letter, has had the same positive effect on him.





# Style

## Point of View

In many ways, *Franny and Zooey* almost reads like a three-act play, with the majority of the novel made up of conversations between Franny and her boyfriend, and the Glass family. As such, the majority of the novel is told in the first person, with the characters speaking directly to each other. However, because of their intelligence and tendency to ramble on, the conversations by the Glass children fill up pages and pages. In fact, the second section, *Zooey*, is almost all conversation, with only a few pages devoted to third-person narration.

Salinger changes things up a bit by writing the *Zooey* section as if it were a short story written by Buddy Glass, the oldest living Glass child. It's Buddy who provides the section's introduction, and in some ways epilogue, by talking directly to the reader in second-person voice. It's a peculiar device, but it works in firmly establishing the role of a narrator in the second section.

The first and shorter section, *Franny*, also heavily makes use of first-person conversation, but with a narrator taking a more active role. Roughly half of the first section is third-person narration, compared to about one-tenth in the second.

## Setting

The entire novel takes place over three days in November of 1955. It starts on a Saturday, with Franny meeting her boyfriend, Lane, for a football game at Harvard. Later, Zooey is said to be reading a letter from his brother Buddy on a Monday morning. During his conversation with his mother, Bessie, the reader is told that Franny has been on the couch for two days. As such, the reader can logically conclude, although it is not said, that Franny arrived at her parents' New York City apartment on Saturday night and had her long, eventually successful talk with Zooey by Monday afternoon.

However, Salinger's use of a narrator within the novel clouds the timeline a bit. The second section is told as if it's a story told to an audience by Buddy. It doesn't say how long after the events Buddy is telling the story.

Also, despite the novel's relatively short timeline, there is constant reference to the past. Buddy's letter to Zooey is four years old. The letter details their brother's suicide that happened three years earlier. In addition, much of the family's background is given in Buddy's introduction and an accompanying footnote that gives a general family overview.



## Language and Meaning

Just because the novel is largely a series of long conversations doesn't mean it's an easy read. The people having the long conversations happen to be an ultra intelligent, well-read New York City family. In fact, some of the most difficult passages to decipher are speeches and letters by Zooey and Buddy Glass. As the narrator, Buddy, notes, the entire Glass family features several capable verbal stunt pilots. This means that a simple conversation can take several readings to properly understand. For example, in talking about their older brothers' effect on their personalities, Zooey says, "We're the tattooed lady, and we're never going to have a minute's peace, the rest of our lives, until everybody else is tattooed, too." Earlier, in a letter to Zooey, Buddy uses a mixture of metaphors, double-meanings and complex turns of phrases. It's the same verbal style the Glasses use in normal conversation.

The reader will also likely have to do some research to catch all the references within the conversations. The Glass children's education leads them to referencing different religious philosophies and classic works of literature that are far from obvious. Late in the novel, Zooey says he will always have his "Yorick's Skull," a reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. There's also reference to Eastern philosophies and philosophers. Several other obscure people and books appear in the novel.

Salinger also makes ample use of italics in his conversations. If read correctly, it gives the reader a sense of how the Glasses talk to each other, along with some emotional insights. During her long bathroom conversation with Zooey, Bessie's dialogue includes italics at the beginning, end and middle of words. At one point, she says, "You could use a *haircut*, young man. You're getting to look like one of those crazy Hungarians or something, getting out of a *swimming pool*." When Zooey, talking about a psychologist Bessie mentions, says, "*Phillip Byrnes*," it's clear italics are supposed to indicate a feeling of disapproval, or sarcasm.

## Structure

The novel was originally a two-part series for New Yorker magazine, which explains its untraditional structure. First, there are no chapters in the novel. The first section, *Franny*, is only 44 pages long, so, the lack of chapters really isn't an issue. However, the second section, *Zooey*, is more than 150 pages, and the storyline really doesn't call for many breaks. Essentially, the novel takes place at three settings: a restaurant, a bathroom and a den. There are, however, one-line breaks and new paragraphs start with a capitalized word every 20-30 pages. This provides natural stopping points.

The novel's original medium, a magazine, also explains its relatively short length. At just over 200 pages, it's a brisk read that could easily have been a short story in a longer work.



## Quotes

"Let's just try to have a marvelous time this weekend. I mean not try to analyze everything to death for once, if possible. Especially me. I love you." - Pg. 8, Franny.

"I'm just so sick of pedants and conceited little tearer-downers I could scream." - Pg. 17, Franny.

"Maybe there's a trapdoor under my chair, and I'll just disappear." - Pg. 18, Franny.

"It's everybody, I mean. Everything everybody does is so - I don't know - not wrong, or even mean, or even stupid, necessarily. But just so tiny and meaningless - and sad-making. And the worst part is, if you go bohemian or something crazy like that, you're conforming just as much as everybody else, only in a different way...I feel so funny. I think I'm going crazy. Maybe I'm already crazy." - Pg. 28, Franny.

"Seymour once said to me - in a crosstown bus, of all places - that all legitimate religious study must lead to unlearning the differences, the illusory differences, between boys and girls, animals and stones, day and night, heat and cold." - Pg. 67, Buddy.

"(Seymour) said cleverness was my permanent affliction, my wooden leg...As one limping man to another, old Zooey, let's be courteous and kind to each other." - Pg. 69, Buddy.

"Phooey, I say, on all white-shoe college boys who edit their campus literary magazines. Give me an honest con man any day." - Pg. 98, Zooey.

"You can't live in the world with such strong likes and dislikes." - Pg. 98, Bessie.

"We're freaks, that's all. Those two bastards got us nice and early and made us into freaks with freakish standards, that's all. We're the tattooed lady, and we're never going to have a minute's peace, the rest of our lives, until everybody else is tattooed, too." - Pg. 139, Zooey.

"You take a look around your college campus, and the world, and politics, and one season of summer stock, and you listen to the conversation of a bunch of nitwit college students, and you decide that everything's ego, ego, ego, and the only intelligent thing for a girl to do is to lie around and shave her head and say the Jesus prayer and beg God for little mystical experience that'll maker her nice and happy," - Pg. 167, Zooey.

"The only think you can do now, the only religious thing you can do, is act. Act for God, if you want to - be God's actress, if you want to. What could be prettier? You can at least try to, if you want to - there's nothing wrong in trying." - Pg. 198, Zooey.

"An artist's only concern is to shoot for some kind of perfection, and on his own terms, not anyone else's." - Pg. 199, Zooey.



## Key Questions

Discussion of Franny and Zooey will, by necessity, center on the Glass characters.

Beginning with Franny, each Glass sibling should be considered for her/his effect on every other character. Because Mrs. Glass remains such a strong presence, her effect on her children may also be analyzed. Mr. Glass, while present in the apartment during the second part of the novel, never appears; he is heard from in a secondhand manner by way of his wife.

This indicates something about his character that also offers a basis for discussion. Those who choose to read all of the Salinger stories focusing on the Glass family may discuss the revelations in other novels that lead to an understanding of Franny and Zooey.

1. Why or why not is Lane, Franny's supposed-boyfriend, a sympathetic character?
2. Why does Franny lie to Lane regarding the origin of the book she carries with her?
3. Defend the realistic nature of Franny's emotional reaction to her reading.
4. Analyze Mrs. Glass's role as a major or minor character, and explain your classification.
5. Defend or dispute Zooey's claim that Seymour and Buddy transformed him and Franny into "freaks," and address the topic of personal responsibility for one's thoughts and actions.
6. Explain your initial reaction to the concept of the Fat Lady.
7. What, if anything, is symbolic about Zooey pretending to be Buddy during his phone call to Franny?
8. Explain why you believe Franny does or does not experience an epiphany.
9. Predict the future for Franny and for Zooey, describing their possible activities and Franny's choice of vocation.
10. What is the importance of the remodeling taking place in the Glass apartment throughout the novel's second chapter?
11. How important is Zooey's profession as an actor to our understanding of his character?
12. What are Lane's motivations in meeting with Franny?



13. Critics have pointed out the importance of long lists that Salinger incorporates into his narrative. What do the items in these lists reveal about the characters?

14. Is Salinger successful in convincing us that the Glass children are geniuses?

How does he accomplish this?

15. What is Seymour's function in the story? Could his role have been eliminated?



## Topics for Discussion

Does Franny really love Lane Coutell, and vice versa? Why did she write the affectionate love letter if she does not love him?

Why did Buddy's letter mean so much to Zooney, that four years later he still reads it over and over? What parts of the letter touched Zooney the most?

When Zooney asks Franny if she wants to talk to Buddy, she says "no." She says she wants to talk to Seymour. Why? What is the connection between Seymour and Franny?

Franny and Zooney are the youngest of the Glass children. They are a lot alike, but at the same time they are different. Explain and give examples of their similarities and differences. Why does Franny suffer a breakdown and not Zooney?

After failing to get through to Franny, Zooney pretends to be Buddy. Why does Zooney resort to a fake phone call to his sister?

Before Zooney makes his fake phone call to Franny, he sits quiet and motionless at his brothers' old desks for nearly an hour. Why? Does Zooney like Buddy and Seymour, or is he bitter toward him for turning him into a "freak"?

In their final conversation, Zooney tells Franny to do it for The Fat Lady, or, Jesus. Does Zooney follow this advice himself?

What is it about Zooney's advice on doing it for the Fat Lady that cheers up Franny and snaps her out of her breakdown? Give examples on how. Although he gives pretty clear examples, what does Zooney mean by the Fat Lady?

## Literary Precedents

Salinger is clearly influenced by "lost generation" novelists such as F. Scott Fitzgerald. As Fitzgerald's characters were accomplished in repartee, so are Salinger's. Where *The Great Gatsby's* narrator Nick claims a predilection for telling the truth (1925; see separate entry), so does Salinger's narrator, Buddy. In his omniscience as an unseen narrator who knows all, Buddy's view parallels that of Dr.

Eckleberg's huge optometric-advertisement for glasses that are symbolic of God and which oversee all the events occurring in *The Great Gatsby*, . Salinger's fondness for his self-involved characters, and his lack of apology for their larger-than-life egos, also parallels that of Fitzgerald toward his flamboyant, high-society players. Naturally, as a member of the post-Lost Generation, Salinger does not share all of Fitzgerald's concerns, but concerns for the individual person's self-realization exist in works by both authors.

## Related Titles

A number of Salinger's works profile the Glass family. They include the 1953 collection of short stories, *Nine Stories* (1953), some of which feature the Glasses. The story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" chronicles Seymour's suicide, while "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" reveals Walt's death overseas. Both of those short stories were among the first three by Salinger published in *The New Yorker* in 1948. In addition, "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters" and "Seymour: An Introduction" (1963), both parts of which also originally appeared as short stories in *The New Yorker*, provide a prequel to *Franny and Zooey*. In addition, much similarity exists between the four main characters in the Glass family stories and those from Salinger's hugely successful novel about Holden Caulfield and his family, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951; see separate entry).



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