

Independence Day Study Guide

Independence Day by Richard Ford

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Plot Summary

Independence Day takes place in the fictional town of Haddam, New Jersey, as well as in upstate New York and Connecticut during the year 1988. The main character, Frank Bascombe, is a middle-aged divorced realtor. The novel occurs over Fourth of July weekend and Frank struggles to sell a house to the Markhams before embarking on a weekend getaway.

He visits his girlfriend on the Jersey Shore first, and then heads to Connecticut to get his son Paul. Fifteen-year-old Paul is troubled and has recently gotten into trouble for shoplifting. Paul lives with Frank's ex-wife, Ann, and her second husband, Charley. Bascombe and Paul share a commonality in that they both dislike Charley. Frank hopes to help the troubled teen by connecting with him during their weekend to the Basketball and Baseball Halls of Fame in New York. Their trip is interrupted when Paul is involved in an unexpected incident.

The weekend trip allows Bascombe to partake in a new outlook of his life as he coaches his son to become an independent civilized young man. Frank learns the importance of connections and the complexity of independence itself.



Chapter 1

Summary

The novel begins early on a Friday morning during Fourth of July weekend in Haddam, New Jersey. It is 1988 and the protagonist and narrator, Frank Bascombe, is a middle-aged divorced realtor. His son and daughter live with his ex-wife, Ann, in Connecticut. Frank and his son Paul have plans to go away for the weekend. First, Frank decides to visit his girlfriend Sally who lives at the Jersey shore, as he feels their relationship is struggling and they have not been seeing eye-to-eye.

Frank is also concerned about his son, Paul, because of his recent arrest for shoplifting condoms and for assaulting a security guard who apprehended him at the store. Bascombe has planned a father-son trip to the basketball and baseball halls of fame, and will return with his son before Paul's court date on July 5th.

Analysis

Independence Day, written by Richard Ford, was first published in 1996, and won the Pulitzer Prize. It is the second book in the Frank Bascombe trilogy, with other novels published in 1986 and 2006, respectively.

The reader learns a great deal about the narrator and protagonist of the novel, Frank Bascombe, in Chapter 1. Frank has had many life changes including a divorce and a career change. As a realtor, he seems to be very focused on work, but is still bothered by his divorce from his ex-wife Ann. The reader might find it ironic that Frank bought his ex-wife's home when she moved to Connecticut and remarried her second husband, Charley. Perhaps this was a way for the main character to hold onto her and a bit of the past.

The reader also gains insight into some of Frank's relationships. He is currently involved with a girlfriend, Sally, but things seem to be a bit rocky and he is concerned about where that relationship is headed. He visits her at her place on the Jersey Shore in an attempt to fix things between them, and to let her know where he thinks their relationship stands. Bascombe is also worried about his son Paul who has gotten himself into trouble for shoplifting. He stole condoms, and when apprehended, he assaulted the female security guard who was questioning him. Perhaps the reader may wonder if the lack of a father figure in Paul's life might have something to do with Paul's actions. Frank sees his two children sometimes, but they live in Connecticut with Ann and Charley.

The reader can understand Frank has undergone many changes in recent years. His life is completely different than what it was just a few years prior. He has lived in Florida, Italy, and then returned to Haddam. The reader might wonder how this journey has affected him, and what is yet to come.



Vocabulary

mingling, azaleas, cyclical, apprehension, realization, contingencies, incongruities, kaleidoscope, secular, surfeit, metaphorically, embroiling, stranglehold, stoicism, clambered, campaign, skittishly, nostalgia, melancholy

Chapter 2

Summary

Bascombe owns two rental homes, adjacent to one another in a quiet black neighborhood. Frank starts his day off by going to collect the rent for one of them. The McLeods, a mixed-race couple, are the tenants. Often times, Larry McLeod acts somewhat aggressively to Frank when he comes to collect their money, and sometimes the McLeods do not answer the door, even though it is clear they are home.

He makes a stop at his office, and then goes to pick up the Markhams to show them a potential residential property. Joe and Phyllis Markham are moving from Vermont, but are unable to afford the kind of house they really want. Up to this point, they have already looked at forty-five homes, but Frank is hoping the home he has in mind today is the right one. Upon arrival, Frank notices Joe is in a bad mood, as the couple has just been fighting, but they agree to go look at a home in nearby Penns Neck.

Analysis

The reader learns Frank also holds rental properties that seem to cause him a slight bit of trouble at times. Frank is aware Larry McLeod does not seem to like him, although Frank rescued the McLeods by buying the property, allowing them to still live there. The reader observes Frank is slightly bothered by the way Mr. McLeod treats him, especially when Frank ultimately rescued his family from their troubles, allowing them to live in their home.

Frank seems discouraged when he arrives at the motel room of the Markhams, and can tell they have been squabbling. Although he might be able to relate to this as a formerly married man and understands buying a home can be stressful, his optimism about showing them the farmhouse he has in mind is diminished. Frank realizes they are under great stress, living in a motel, and unable to agree on a new home that suits them. Bascombe does his best to be patient and ignores the awkwardness of this couple that has obviously just finished feuding.

Vocabulary

seminarian, catamite, franchise, commonweal, efficiency, merchants, prestige, infrastructure, vicious, spectrum, corrosive, embittering, enticement, emporium, easements, louvered, blundered



Chapter 3

Summary

Bascombe introduces the couple to Ted Houlihan upon their arrival at the house. Ted, an engineer, owns the remodeled farmhouse. He has recently been widowed and is considering selling the farmhouse. Upon inspection of the house, Joe is not at all impressed, but Phyllis loves what she sees. However, her enthusiasm for the property diminishes quickly when she finds out it is located next to a minimum-security state prison. Ted insists it is more like a country club than a prison, and presents no threat to the locals. Phyllis is not convinced, especially because they have a twelve-year-old daughter named Sonja who will be living there as well. Joe changes his mind and decides he now likes the home. Frank takes the couple back to the motel where they are staying and encourages them, emphasizing the home is a good fit for them and an excellent value for the money.

Analysis

The reader perceives Frank is frustrated as he shows the Markhams yet another potential property. The Markhams are not seeing eye-to-eye with one another, or with Frank on realistically priced properties any of which would be an excellent investment. Mrs. Markham likes the property, while Mr. Markham does not. Then their opinions change, and yet again they do not see eye-to-eye.

The weekend Frank had such high hopes for is not starting off well. The reader might wonder if this is a foreshadowing of things to come. The reader contemplates if Frank is able to relate to the stress and marital troubles of the Markhams, since he is now divorced himself. The reader might also wonder if Frank's own independence and lifestyle makes it difficult for him to relate to this couple as a whole, although it is obvious he is indeed hoping to make a sale soon.

Vocabulary

alienation, conventional, farmsteads, enticing, conceptualize, unpretentious, curvaceous, pergola, schoolmarm, alderman, bereaved, imminent



Chapter 4

Summary

Frank recalls events from his past that have in turn led to his becoming a realtor. Prior to real estate, Frank was a sportswriter. His son Ralph passed away from Reye's syndrome. This caused great heartache and stress and according to Frank, is what eventually led to the crumbling of his marriage. At that point, Frank quit his job, moved to Florida and then to France, where he had a short affair with a woman much younger than he. When he returned to New Jersey, he decided it was time for a fresh endeavor, and took up real estate.

He wanted to attempt a reconciliation with his ex-wife Ann in 1984, but she unexpectedly told him she was remarrying an architect, fifteen years her senior, and they would be moving to Connecticut. Bascombe was distraught and surprised because they had remained so close after their divorce. He sold his own house, bought hers, and trained to become a realtor with the Lauren-Schwindell firm in Haddam.

It is still Friday, and Frank goes back to the McLeod's address to attempt to collect their rent once again. He stands on the porch waiting, and a neighbor sees him and calls the police because she thinks he is attempting to break into the house. He speaks with Betty McLeod who tells him her husband is not home, but Frank knows this is not true. When the police officer arrives, Frank explains he was there to collect the rent.

Analysis

As the reader learns a bit more about Frank's past, it is clear he has been through quite a lot in a relatively short amount of time. Losing his son led to his divorce from Ann. It appears when this happened, Frank fled and left New Jersey for Florida. This shows a great deal about his character and the way he handles his problems. The reader might wonder if this was a mid-life crisis for Frank, and also learns about the relationships Frank has and had tried to keep.

Bascombe mentions being with another woman in Florida and then ends up in France. Clearly, while in France especially, Bascombe is not seeing his children. This also lets the reader digest the fact his involvement with Clarissa and Paul might have been minimal at times. Perhaps the reader will see this come into play a bit later in the novel. Again, the theme of independence is evident. Frank is worried and thinking about only himself and his own personal needs. This seems to have been a rebuilding period for Bascombe.

Vocabulary

perplexed, dismally, perturbations, brandishing, diplomatic, aspiring, intercession, commiserate, consolingly



Chapter 5

Summary

Bascombe goes to visit a local hot dog stand he co-owns with an older gentleman named Karl Bemish. Frank went into partnership with Karl, a widower, to help the business out of a financial mess. He had literally driven into a picnic table at the restaurant after falling asleep at the wheel after a late night out, and ended up meeting Karl. Upon beginning a business relationship with him, Bascombe changed the name of the stand to “Franks” and decided to sell only root beer and good Polish wurst-dogs. He makes small talk with Karl and checks inventory before leaving and heading up to the shore.

During his drive, Frank recalls the female realtor from Lauren-Schwindell who was killed while out showing a property. He also thinks about his friend Sally, and their relationship, and what he needs to do to show her he cares.

Analysis

The reader learns Frank has again rescued someone by buying property. He had met Karl inadvertently, and the hot dog shop seemed to fall into his hands. It is clear Frank is a smart businessman, but one might wonder if Frank’s interest in and time spent with real estate might be making some of his relationships suffer.

Frank does a lot of thinking in this particular chapter, showing more of his true feelings and concerns. Frank seems to understand he does have a great deal of work to do with patching up and working on his relationships with Sally and Paul. It seems Bascombe has recently realized and thought about that necessity to do this. The reader might assume Frank has high hopes for fixing both of these in a short amount of time.

Vocabulary

petunia, prospering, speling, diversify, maverick, exonerated, clearinghouse, forthright, paradigm, bespectacled, regimented, revering, armoire, projectile, encapsulate, sonority, irresolute



Chapter 6

Summary

Frank travels back up the highway. It is slow going and filled with an abundance of Fourth of July holiday traffic. Bascombe thinks about Sally, and regrets not asking her to come with him. He has begun to think of their relationship as a mutual Existence Period, and knows he must make it clear to her how much he needs her. Bascombe heads towards Connecticut, but he will stop partway at a motel, and then get his son in the morning.

He stops at a rest area to fill his gas tank and check his phone messages. He waits for a trucker to finish with his phone call at a pay phone. He has ten messages, including ones from Karl, Mr. Markham, his son Paul (a prank call), Ann, and Sally. He calls Ann back and she tells him she had hoped he could pick up Paul earlier than planned because Paul and Charley had gotten into an argument. The conversation continues and they have a lengthy talk about Paul and then Frank's happiness. Ann reveals they all wish Frank would get married, so they could all be happy.

Frank then calls the Markhams and Mr. Markham tells him they were going to make an offer hours ago, but are mad they were unable to reach Frank, so they are now going to use a new realtor or rent somewhere for a while. Frank hangs up with them and gets back into his car, deciding to take an alternate route to avoid some traffic.

He finally reaches a motel and sees police officers and an ambulance there when he pulls in. He asks what happened and Mr. Tank tells him everything is fine now, and that it's not safe anywhere anymore. Frank is disturbed by what he sees, but stays the night at the motel, and plans to get up as early as possible to be on his way to Connecticut.

Analysis

Frank's journey to get to Connecticut continues, and the reader is able to understand a bit more about the relationship he has with his former wife. Their conversation on the phone is a rather lengthy one, and it is clear Frank wishes that things had worked out between them and they had stayed married. He can understand Paul's dislike for Charley and feels badly Paul was so upset about the fight he and Charley had gotten into about the dinghy.

Bascombe seems disappointed and very irritated with the Markhams. It is clear he had worked quite hard to find them a home, and had shown them numerous properties. He seems angry they have decided to drop him as their realtor, but he is also perhaps a bit relieved and glad to be finished with them. Frank realized long ago what they wanted in their purchase price range was all but impossible to find.



When Frank arrives at the motel, he is clearly feeling quite defeated and seems eager to put the day behind him. He hopes to get a good night's sleep and then begin fresh on Saturday. However, he pulls into the parking lot and can see flashing lights and an apparent crime scene of some sort. Understandably he feels uneasy staying there, but knows it will be hard to find a room elsewhere and is absolutely exhausted anyway. Although Frank seems to appear a bit tough on the outside, the reader is learning Frank's interior feelings and thoughts do not necessarily match his actions and reactions.

Vocabulary

refinery, presupposes, dinghy, addlebrained, diphthongal, matrix, tumbler, charter, profound, odometer, effusions, hypertensive, barren



Chapter 7

Summary

Leaving a business card on Mr. Tanks' windshield, Bascombe rushes out of the hotel and gets back on the road. He stops a few minutes later for coffee and to call Sally, but her phone just rings and rings. He calls Karl to check in next, and he assures Frank things are fine and the Mexicans had not been back. Much to Frank's dismay, Karl also lets him know he has a sawed-off twelve-gauge shotgun he refers to as his "alley-sweeper," should he need it.

Bascombe also calls Ted and tells him his clients are highly interested in the farmhouse, but are taking some time to think about it. Ted tells him a few others came through to look at it also, and Frank reminds Ted Lauren-Schwindell has exclusive rights first, so the Markhams can have time to think without any pressure.

He gets back on the road and his thoughts turn to Charley and conversations they have had in the past. He begins to develop a headache, and stresses about the Markhams as well, and decides he needs to put more time into thinking about his son Paul instead.

When he arrives at Charley's home, he sees his daughter outside in the yard. They speak for a while, and he tries to get her to give him some information about Paul and how he has been acting. He sees Ann, and she tells him more about the previous day's situation between Charley and Paul. She suggests they all go to see a shrink together. She also tells Frank Paul is just like him.

Analysis

This chapter reveals a great deal about Frank's relationship with his former wife and the mother of his children, Ann. The reader easily intuits he wants nothing more than to be back together with her and thinks this would help solve many of the problems that have surrounded him and his son Paul. At one point, he even suggests this to his ex-wife, after telling her he has encountered several couples who were married, divorced, remarried, divorced again, and later came back to one another to live happily ever after. She brushes this off and clearly has no interest in this, but does hope one day Frank will re-marry, making everyone's life easier and happier.

The reader can also readily perceive Frank and Paul share a commonality in that they both disdain Charley. Frank feels bad Paul has to live with and spend so much time with Charley. He did not realize until this point how bad the relationship between Paul and Charley really is, although ironically, his own relationship with his son might not be all that much better.

Bascombe knows at this moment his son is truly lost, and Frank needs to step in to make things better for him. He hopes their time together this weekend will allow him to



get inside his son's head and help Paul learn he is becoming an adult and needs to act more like one.

Vocabulary

hydrologists, lusterless, uninhibited, scammer, perplexed, boathouse, shysters, irrespective, protocol, sanctuary, tetherballs, lunacy, maladies, leukemia



Chapter 8

Summary

Before they depart, Bascombe sees his daughter Clarissa slip something into her brother's hand. Paul holds it in his hand and Frank begins the prepared speech he has come up with about the founding fathers convincing the colonies to seek independence. Frank hopes to teach Paul although his life has many small fragmented pieces, it is possible to unify them to create an independent and complete whole. The speech does not go as planned, as Paul mocks Frank, causing the speech to become ineffective and a bit twisted.

Finally, Paul shows Frank Clarissa had given him a yellow ribbon, and he grins, swallowing it. He tells Bascombe a twisted version of his previous conversation with Clarissa. Frank is clearly surprised Clarissa has lied.

They stop to eat and Frank sends Paul to go play some arcade games while he calls Sally. The conversation does not go the way he had hoped, and his invitation for her to come up and join them is denied. He returns to find Paul who is playing a basketball shoot-out game. He tries to be funny and make Paul laugh, but he is unsuccessful. He continues to try to make conversation with Paul as they continue on their journey, but his son is disinterested and often sarcastic in a disturbing way.

Analysis

Paul is making things quite difficult for Frank as he tries his best to get through to his son. Up to this point, the reader sees Paul as a "typical" teenaged male who tries to be witty and tough, with an uncaring attitude. Bascombe's lecture about independence has been a complete flop, and he knows this, but seems unsure how to make any headway with his son. Frank attempts to be humorous, but Paul does not think he is funny. He is realizing he does not know a lot about his son, evidenced by the tattoo he spots on Paul's wrist. He seems disappointed, and hopes somehow he can get Paul to relate to him.

Bascombe is also feeling defeated with Sally. He genuinely hoped she would fly up and join him and Paul on their trip, although the reader might be thinking this is not such a good idea. Paul's reaction to Sally might not be a positive one, and the goal of this trip is for Frank to "fix" Paul and the troubles he has been recently encountering. Nonetheless, Sally refuses, and alludes to the fact Frank seems to have had a complete change of heart from the night before. She seems confused and tells him it would be best for her not to join them.

Vocabulary

facilitating, tantamount, pillaged, intimidator, industrial, gimmicky, repertoire, spewing, emitting, conveyor, displacement, halcyon, entombed, unpretentious, hardscrabble, platitude, travelogue



Chapter 9

Summary

Frank and Paul arrive at the Deerslayer Inn. Frank is pleased with what he sees, but displeased dinner is served only until seven o'clock and there is no bar. He falls asleep, and when he awakes, Paul is not there. He hopes Paul might have made friends with the boys that were playing Hackey Sack in the front when they arrived. This reminds him Paul lacks friends, and thinks he might be better off in Haddam instead.

He gets ready and heads downstairs so he and Paul can find somewhere to eat. He stops to check his messages and has one from Mrs. Markham who tells him they have reconsidered and would like to put in an offer on the old farmhouse. He dials Ted's number to let him know to expect an early morning offer, but he gets no answer.

He calls Sally next and tells her that he loves her. She is surprised, but he explains times are changing. She lets him know she called her ex-husband's mother and demanded to know where Wally is. Her ex-mother-in-law told her she didn't know, and began crying to Sally in the phone. Sally tells Frank maybe he is lucky he at least can see Ann if he wants to or needs to.

After some time, Frank finds Paula and asks him if he wants to call his mom to tell her he arrived safely. He tells him no, and then asks Frank if he used to think it was weird Paul had pretend friends. Frank tells him no, and Paul asks Frank if he thinks there is hope for him. Frank finally feels like he might be getting through to his son and they are actually having an adult conversation.

Analysis

During this chapter, the reader is left pondering what might become of Frank and Sally's relationship. Things seem to be taking a turn for the better for Frank as the Markhams have decided to put in an offer on the farmhouse, and Frank and Sally have seemed to make some headway and might be seeing more eye-to-eye.

Although for much of the chapter, it is unclear exactly where Paul is, when Frank does find him, he actually talks to his dad and asks him some deep questions that have clearly been bothering him for some time. The sarcasm is still evident, but perhaps Frank is feeling his son is opening up to him a bit.

The reader might realize Frank is feeling guilty for his lack of a solid relationship with his son, and might also be realizing he does not really know much about his daughter either. It is at this point in the book Frank seems to really know that he needs to do his best to connect with Sally and make her trust and understand him. Frank is making a wholehearted effort with fixing their relationship and making his relationship with Paul more complete.

Vocabulary

slumberous, yammering, uniformity, insubstantial, nonchalantly, reminiscent, postdoctoral, anatomically, pivotal, emblematically, synchronicity, chandeliers, aversion, audible



Chapter 10

Summary

Sunday morning, Frank wakes up and gets ready. It is his last day with Paul, and he sends him down to breakfast so he can make a few phone calls. He first dials Ted, and is disappointed and angered Ted has already accepted a full price offer on his home. He tells Frank he will reconsider if the Markhams offer a bit more, and he wants to split the home's commission with Frank. Frank calls the Markhams but is unable to get through to them. Frank suddenly has the urge to call Cathy, a former flame, and gets her machine. He leaves her a message telling her hello and he's glad she is now a doctor, as she had dreamed of becoming. He also says he will beat her husband Steve up any day he can find the time. He hangs up and then goes to find Paul.

They depart the hotel and go to get something to eat. Paul tells Frank he wishes they had another day and more time together. Frank takes a picture of Paul to prove he was really there.

They go to the Baseball Hall of Fame and to the batting cages. Frank bats first, and Paul becomes annoyed because he doesn't hit well. He tells him to bunt, but Frank refuses and tells him he is there to hit, and that Paul can bunt when it is his turn. Frank becomes agitated with Paul and they get into a small argument. Paul goes up to bat and gets hit in the head with the ball. People come over to help and the medics arrive. Paul has been hit in his left eye, and they leave to go to the hospital.

Analysis

Just when the reader might be thinking things for Frank are changing in a positive way, Chapter 10 is filled with quite a few negative situations. Frank is completely disheartened to learn his dreams of selling the farmhouse to the Markhams have most likely been squashed. He is angry, but hopes to make the best of the rest of the day with his son.

When they arrive at the batting cages at the Baseball Hall of Fame, the reader can tell Paul is irritated with his father. Perhaps he is embarrassed that Frank has not hit well during his turn at the batting cages. The two converse back and forth, and things get heated between them. When it is his turn, Paul is angry and ends up getting hit in the face with a ball perhaps because he was so preoccupied with the discussion he was having with his father. Frank becomes frightened and scared, and rushes to Paul right away. The reader sees Frank's worry immediately, and understands how a father might feel when his son becomes injured. He immediately feels terrible about their small fight and is wishing he could backtrack and his son would not have been injured.



Vocabulary

malodorous, dismay, purgatory, transfixed, liquefying, probation, indistinct, overzealous, canny, grandstand, monogamous, grandstand, contraptions, putative, adjudicating, mesmerizing, cranium



Chapter 11

Summary

Irv talks to Frank the entire time in the car, and tries to keep Frank's mind off of Paul. He tells Frank that he tried to find him many times, and that he and Frank's mom were lucky to have found one another. He also tells Frank his mom had confessed to Irv she has wished she and Frank could have been much closer to one another after she had remarried. Frank suddenly wishes his mom Erma were there now, because he misses her and then he would not have had to continue chatting with Irv. Irv tells him he is thinking of moving back to Chicago.

When they arrive at the hospital, Paul has already been taken in. The doctor approaches Frank shortly after, telling him that Paul suffered a very bad blow to the left eye, which flattened part of his eye into his retina. She recommends fixing it as soon as possible, and Frank tells her he is going to contact his ex-wife Ann to let her know the situation.

He explains the situation to Ann and she decides to fly up on one of the helicopters Charley uses. She promises to be there in two hours, but has still not arrived four hours later.

Frank and Irv walk out of the hospital to talk for a bit. They go to get some ice cream while they wait for Ann, and discuss Frank's mom. Frank looks at a picture from when he was little, but says he doesn't really remember the time it was taken. He tells Irv he respects him and Irv tells Bascombe someday they will have to go fishing together.

Analysis

Paul suffers a serious injury during the chapter, and the reader can see Frank's fatherly instincts come out. Although he and Paul have an awkward relationship, Frank immediately runs to his rescue and is understandably very upset and worried about his son.

It is quite ironic that Frank ends up seeing Irv, who he has not encountered for years. Irv had recognized Frank from afar, and ultimately comes to Frank's rescue in his time of need. He steps up and offers to take Frank to the hospital where Paul is headed. Along the way, they reconnect a bit, although Frank is quite distracted by his own son's needs.

The reader can perceive Frank's past family relationships were not necessarily very strong either, and it is now evident his parent's marriage was not a successful one, as his mom had remarried. The relationship between Frank and his mom was strained, and something seems to click for him when he hears from Irv that she regretted not being closer to her son.



Frank is disheartened to overhear Paul talking to the doctor about him, and seems to understand now their relationship cannot be fixed in one weekend. Frank has shown the reader his independence in this chapter has been shadowed by the need to rely on others in a time of need, but this is also acceptable to do.

Vocabulary

aeronautical, caricatures, undercoating, hitchhiker, trousers, conceivable, emerging, unbeknownst, comradeship, primeval, kibbutz, communes, unambiguous, primordial, coterminous



Chapter 12

Summary

When he enters the emergency room once again, Ann is there and explains she is late because she has brought another doctor with her, who is recommending Paul be flown to Yale to have the surgery there instead. Ann worries Paul is going to give her a hard time about being flown to Yale, and convinces Frank this is his best option. He tells them it is possible Paul got hit on purpose.

Frank goes in to see his son and he tells Frank if his mother will let him, maybe it would be a good idea for him to stay in Haddam for a while. He also tells him he will never be hall of fame material. He tells Paul he loves him.

Ann leaves in the helicopter with Paul and the doctor. She tells Frank she will leave a number on his machine where she can be reached. He tells her he'd like to connect more with Paul and he's almost lost everybody, but Ann reassures him that he hasn't.

Analysis

Bascombe has come to terms with his relationship with his ex-wife. He understands he and Paul do not see eye-to-eye, but is grateful to hear he might want to move down to Haddam to live with Frank. Bascombe is hopeful he has made some sort of progress during their weekend together, even though it ended so suddenly.

Once again, Frank's independence shows through.

Ann comes to get Paul and take him to a better hospital for a more successful surgery. She and Frank seem to be seeing things more clearly now, and perhaps she is grateful her ex-husband wants to be more involved with his son's life. She also suggests he and his daughter can build a good relationship as well. The reader might be impressed with how Frank handled the entire injury situation with his son, with Irv, and with his ex-wife.

Vocabulary

karmic, drawl, grimace, emanation, resolute, commencing, indestructible, impoundment, uncannily



Chapter 13

Summary

It is Independence Day, and Frank waits for the Markhams to meet him. They are interested in Bascombe's rental property, and Mr. Markham apologizes for getting angry over the phone with Frank earlier in the weekend. Paul's surgery has gone well, although he might one day develop glaucoma and will most likely eventually need glasses.

He speaks with Ann on the phone, and she tells Frank Paul told her a lot about what he saw on their trip, and it seems like he had a great time. She tells Frank he should call his son later.

The Markhams finally arrive, and Joe seems impressed with the neighborhood. They like the place and agree on a month-to-month rental with Frank. His old friend, Carter, also divorced, comes up to him and asks how he is doing. He tells Frank he should once again go back to writing stories.

Analysis

As the novel comes to a close, the reader can see Frank is more comfortable with his own life and the relationships around him. He finally is able to please the Markhams, and also solves the problem of finding a renter for his property. He is pleased Paul raved to Ann about the weekend trip, and all the things he saw and enjoyed at the Baseball Hall of Fame.

The time span of the entire novel is only a few days, but it has been an important weekend in Bascombe's life. He has been challenged and has come to terms with suppositions how many individuals from both his past and present perceive him. He has learned from his own mistakes and actions, and seems to know what needs to be done moving forward.

Vocabulary

foolhardy, lamentable, hovering, arsons, glaucoma, suppressed, adventuresome, astonishing, mulishly, recurrent, imperatives, subterfuge, famine, sycamore, abode, proprietary, spur, assemblage, amble, servant, conservative, temporal, contingency, verandas, ludicrous, cinches, conquering



Characters

Frank Bascombe

Frank is the narrator and protagonist of the novel. He is a former sportswriter, and a divorced father of three, although he lost one of his sons to an illness. Bascombe is currently a realtor and businessman in Haddam, New Jersey, who hopes to reconnect with his son Paul, among other characters in the novel.

The McLeods

Mr. and Mrs. McLeod rent a property from Frank. Mr. McLeod does not like Frank for whatever reason, and Bascombe often has trouble getting their rent money on time.

The Markhams

Mr. and Mrs. Markham are planning to buy a home and Frank is their realtor. They are unable to agree on a place that fits into their budget, even though they have been shown numerous properties by Frank.

Karl Bemish

Karl runs Franks, a hot dog shop that Bascombe bought from Karl to help him keep it from closing. Karl and Frank have a positive business relationship.

Paul Bascombe

Paul is Frank's fifteen-year-old son, and the reason for his Independence Day trip. Paul has gotten into trouble for shoplifting recently. He dislikes his stepfather, Charley, and Frank plans on taking Paul away for a few days to help him sort out his problems and to create a better father-son relationship.

Clarissa Bascombe

Clarissa is Frank's daughter. She and Frank do not have a very close relationship, and she does not see him all that often. She tells Frank about the problems Paula and Charley are having.



Ralph Bascombe

Ralph is Frank's third child, but he has passed away previously from Reye's Syndrome. He is the supposed reason for his divorce from his wife and Ralph's mother, Ann.

Ann Dykstra

Ann was married to Frank and had three children with him. They divorced and she moved to Connecticut and married her second husband Charley. Ann and Frank have a decent relationship, but he is still distraught that Ann remarried.

Charley Dykstra

Charley is Ann's second husband. He lives in a beautiful home in Connecticut with Ann and the Bascombe children.

Sally

Sally is Frank's current girlfriend. He visits her during the novel to try and make their relationship better. He also has many phone calls with her while away on his trip with his son, Paul. Sally is also divorced and seems to be struggling with this in the same way Frank is.

Irv

Irv was married to Frank's mom, and meets up with Frank after seeing him from afar. He tells Frank his mom was saddened by the fact that her relationship with Frank suffered when she remarried.



Objects/Places

Franks

Franks is the hot dog and root beer shop Frank owns, which is run by Karl.

Lauren-Schwindell

Lauren-Schwindell is the real estate firm where Frank works. He came to Lauren-Schwindell after deciding to stop sports writing.

Haddam

Haddam is located in New Jersey, and is the town where Frank has spent much of his life. His three children were born there, and it is where his son Ralph is buried. Frank sells residential real estate in the local area. He hopes to be able to have his son Paul move back there to live once again.

Deep River

Frank refers to Deep River, Connecticut as “Deep Water.” This upscale town is where Ann, Charley, Paul, and Clarissa live.

Baseball Hall of Fame

Frank and Paul take a trip there. At the batting cages outside, Paul gets hit by a ball in his left eye and has to be rushed to the local hospital.

Sleepy Hollow Motel

The Markhams are staying at the Sleepy Hollow Motel while they continue looking for a property to buy and live in. Frank picks them up there to take them to see potential homes.

The Jersey Shore

Sally lives at the Jersey Shore. Frank stops there on his way to Connecticut to visit her before picking Paul up for their weekend trip.



Themes

Independence

This is the main theme of the novel. The reader can clearly see the main character's form of independence as a divorced middle-aged man that has been able to survive his son's death and his wife's remarriage. Bascombe also ties this theme into the speech he tries to give Paul during their weekend trip.

His understanding of how to achieve independence is that of being unified, and he explains to Paul the small fragments of his life need to be unified to become complete. The novel takes place over Independence Day weekend. Bascombe still struggles partly with this theme, while still in his "Existence Period," and reflects on his past choices and his journey to becoming an independent man.

Family

Although he is divorced, Frank realizes the importance of relationships with his family. He has struggled up to this point to have a decent relationship with his son Paul. Throughout the novel, he has high hopes of reconnecting and mending it.

Bascombe also knows it is crucial to keep things positive with Ann, and still yearns to be married to her. Bascombe also has a minimal relationship with his daughter, Clarissa, and the reader learns his relationship with his mother was not the best. Throughout the book, Frank seems to gain an understanding of how important these people are in his life, and it is not too late to make things more positive with most of them.

Love Lost

Frank clearly still struggles with the divorce from his wife, Ann. He is saddened she has chosen to remarry, and has their kids living in Connecticut with her new husband, Charley. At points in the novel, the reader can possibly identify with Frank's sadness and disappointment that he and Ann are no longer together. Ironically, Frank has chosen to buy Ann's old home from her and he now lives there.

Identity Crisis

Frank's divorce led to him fleeing to Florida and also to France to find himself and figure things out. He was without a wife, and she eventually had taken his kids to live in Connecticut with her. He also had lost his son, Ralph. This combination led him to search for who he really was as an individual, and what his role should be in the scheme of life. He ended up quitting sports writing and began to sell real estate as a

new career. He embarked on a mid-life crisis, but eventually found where he should be in life.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told from the first person point of view, by the narrator and protagonist, Frank Bascombe. Frank is often witty and is usually even-tempered and shares many ideas about his past through his personal thoughts. While the reader is able to clearly understand Frank's thoughts and feelings, at times this can be a disadvantage. The reader is unable to clearly tell how other important characters such as Bascombe's son Paul, or his ex-wife Ann, are feeling. Assumptions can be made about their own personal thoughts by analyzing their actions and conversations with Frank. The reader often learns things about Frank from the other individuals within the novel.

Setting

The novel begins and ends in Haddam, New Jersey. Frank takes the reader to upstate New York and to Connecticut as well. The towns are all typical American places, and he visits rest stops, restaurants, and well-known sightseeing spots throughout his journey.

The novel occurs in the late 1980's during Independence Day weekend, over the span of three days. The setting is quite appropriate with the plot and works well, allowing the characters and actions to take place over three separate states in a small amount of time.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is easy to understand, and the characters thoughts and conversations are usually simple to follow. The reader can identify the places and events by the clear descriptions Frank offers.

The words spoken are fairly modern and typical of the 1980's in the Northeast United States. The author's chosen vocabulary is suitable for a well-educated character, but it is not too difficult to make reading the novel less enjoyable.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirteen chapters, the last one entitled, "Independence Day." The chapters range in length from about twenty to fifty pages each. The novel is primarily told from the main character's point of view, and is set up over the course of one long weekend.

The main plot of the novel centers on Paul and Frank, and their trip away together. Several subplots occur in the novel as well, including Frank's relationships with his

girlfriend Sally, his ex-wife Ann, and his children. Another subplot centers around Frank's real estate relationships, including selling the Mr. and Mrs. Markham a place, and taking care of rental properties that seem to give Frank some difficulties at times. One other minor subplot is Franks, the restaurant Frank owns and Karl manages.



Quotes

And so it is in Haddam, where all around, our summer swoon notwithstanding, there's a new sense of a wild world being just beyond our perimeter, an untallied apprehension among our residents, one I believe they'll never get used to, one they'll die before accommodating. (chapter 1)

What I thought I had to offer was a deep appreciation for the sense of belonging and permanence the citizens of these streets might totally lack in Haddam (through no fault of their own), yet might long for the way the rest of us long for paradise. (chapter 2)

I'm briefly bemused by Joe's belief that I'm a man who believes life's leading someplace. I have thought that way other times in my life, but one of the fundamental easements of the Existence Period is not letting whether it is or whether it isn't worry you—as loony as that might be. (chapter 2)

Not trusting your judgement—and, worse, knowing you shouldn't trust it for some damn substantial reasons—can be one of the major causes and also one of the least tolerable ongoing features of the Existence Period, one you have to fine-tune out by the use of caution. (chapter 3)

And truth to tell I hardly noticed the difference, so often had I lain awake nights in my old place or roamed the rooms and halls of hers where all were sleeping—searching, I suppose, for where I fit in, or where I'd gone wrong, or how I could breathe air into my ghostly self and become recognizable if changed-for-the-better figure in their sweet lives or my own. (chapter 4)

But best? There's no use going through that card sort. Best's a concept without reference once you're married and have loused that up; maybe even once you've had your first banana split at age five and find, upon finishing it off, that you could handle another one. Forget best in other words. Best's gone. (chapter 5)

Death, veteran of death that I am, seems so near now, so plentiful, so oh-so-drastic and significant, that it scares me witless. Though in a few hours I'll embark with my son upon the other tack, the hopeful, life-affirming, anti-nullity one, armed only with words and myself to build a case, and nothing half as dramatic and persuasive as a black body bag, or lost memories of lost love. (chapter 6)

You're one of those people who think God's only in the details, but then if they aren't the precise right details, life's all fucked up. You invent things that don't exist, then you worry about being denied whatever they are. And then you miss the things that do exist. Maybe it's you, you know? Maybe some truths don't even have words, or maybe the truth was what you wanted least, or maybe you're a woman of damn little faith. Or low self-esteem, or something. (chapter 7)



It always seemed to me enough just to know that someone loved you and would go on loving you forever... (chapter 8)

The first adult conversation a man can have with his son is one in which he acknowledges he doesn't know what's good for his own child and has only an out-of-date idea of what's bad. I don't know what to say. (chapter 9)

This is the cautionary view I took when he was small and talked to people who weren't there, a view I might've thought would protect him. I should've known, however, as I know now and as it ever is with kids and even those who're older: nothing stays as it is for long, and once again, there's no such thing as a false sense of well-being. (chapter 10)

I basically stay silent, thinking sorrowfully of my son and of this day, both of which seem bitter and bottomless losses with absolutely no hope of recovery. There is no seeming now. (chapter 11)

Though I've been him (more than once) and won't be caught again. Irv is entering his own Existence Period, complete with all the good and not-so-good trimmings, just as it seems I'm exiting it in a pitch-and-tumble mode. We have passed in daylight; we have interfaced, given each other good and earnest feedback. But ours is not life coterminous though I like him fine. (chapter 11)

And I had the feeling he was far ahead of me then and in many things. Any time spent with your child is partly a damn sad time, the sadness of life a-going, bright, vivid, each time a last. A loss. It can be corrupting. (chapter 12)

And yet despite these diminishments, I sense an earnest, almost equable acceptance is descending on both the Markhams: certain fires gone out; other, smaller ones being ignited. So that it's conceivable they're on the threshold of unexpected bliss, know it instinctually like a lucky charm but can't quite get it straight, so long has their luck been shitty. (chapter 13)

The Permanent Period, this would be, that long stretching-out time when my dreams would have mystery like any ordinary person's; when whatever I do or say, who I marry, how my kids turn out, becomes what the world—if it makes not at all—knows of me, how I'm seen, understood, even how I think of myself before whatever there is that's wild and rises and cheerlessly hauls me off to oblivion. (chapter 13)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Describe Frank's "Existence Period." What does he believe that this is? In what ways does this come into play throughout the novel?

Topic 2

Describe Frank and Paul's relationship at the early stages of the novel. Describe it at the end of the novel. How has the relationship changed?

Topic 3

What are Frank's character traits? Does he change throughout the novel? If so, in what ways?

Topic 4

What is the symbolism of Frank buying his ex-wife Ann's home?

Topic 5

Discuss the book's setting. In what ways is this particular setting important to the development of the novel?

Topic 6

How did the outcome of Claire Devane seem to affect Frank? What might his thoughts about her say to the reader?

Topic 7

Think about Frank's relationship with his daughter. What do we learn about her through their interactions? What do we learn about Frank?

Topic 8

The novel ends with a conversation between Frank and an unidentified caller? Who might this caller be? What does Frank's reaction tell the reader?