

Jim the Boy Study Guide

Jim the Boy by Tony Earley

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Plot Summary

Jim Glass is turning ten years old as the story opens. His mother's name is Cissy and the two of them live with one of Cissy's brothers. Cissy's other two brothers live nearby in the town of Aliceville. Jim's father, who was also named Jim, died a week before Jim was born.

He rises with his uncles and is pleased when he's allowed to go with Uncle Zeno and Uncle Al to the fields that day. Once there, Jim is amazed at how difficult the hoeing is. He's soon bored and chops down a couple of cotton stalks. When his Uncle Zeno asks Jim about them, Jim lies. Uncle Zeno uses the situation as a lesson and Jim, knowing he's disappointed his uncle, goes home. There, he encounters an adult friend named Ralph Whiteside, better known as Whitey, who is a feed salesman. Whitey and Jim look over the building that will be the new school and Whitey gives Jim a baseball for his birthday. The day passes and Jim believes he hasn't gotten any birthday gifts other than the baseball. Then his mother produces a birthday cake, complete with candles, and Jim finds that his uncles and mom have bought him a baseball bat and glove.

When school begins, Jim and his friends are suddenly thrown into a class with boys from Lynn's Mountain because several small districts have consolidated. Jim and a boy named Penn Carson quickly emerge as the best in sports and the leaders of the "town boys" and the "mountain boys." When the two teams face off for their first game of baseball, the score is tied and Penn is headed for home. Jim throws the ball and strikes Penn in the back. Penn is angry but some of the boys point out that Penn is a Quaker and, as such, doesn't believe in fighting. Jim can't decide even for himself why he'd hit Penn with the ball. The stage is set for a rivalry that continues for some time though the boys do pair off when they happen to meet up in the nearby town of New Carpenter.

Jim and Penn learn that a famous baseball player is aboard a train that's stopped in their small town and the boys begin playing catch near the train, hoping the man will take note of how good they are. The boys argue over who should have Jim's glove and Jim eventually grows so angry that he throws too hard and the ball lands in a puddle. As Penn turns to retrieve it, Penn falls and is unable to get up. It's soon discovered that he has polio and the town is quarantined. Jim is housebound until it's certain he doesn't have the disease as well.

Jim and his uncles go onto Lynn's Mountain to visit Penn. While they're there, they also go to visit Jim's grandfather, Amos, who Jim has never met and who is nearing death. Jim sees the old man, but only through a window and his grandfather is unable to grasp Jim's identity. As Jim turns away from his grandfather's house, he's struck by how big the world is. He points it out to his uncles, adding that he's only one small boy. Jim's Uncle Zeno responds that Jim is right, but "You're our boy."



Breakfast, A Day of Work

Breakfast, A Day of Work Summary

As the story opens, Zeno McBride is writing a letter to Amos Glass. In the letter, Zeno tells Amos that Amos's son, Jim Glass, has died and that Amos has a new grandson, named Jim Glass, Jr. The letter indicates that Jim Glass, Sr., died while working in the fields and that it was the apparent result of a weak heart. Zeno goes on to say that Jim's wife, Elizabeth - known to the family as Cissy - had requested that Amos not be notified prior to the burial because he and Jim had not spoken to each other in years. The letter goes on to say that Jim Glass, Sr., will be fondly remembered and that the family will raise Jim Glass, Jr. as his father would have wished.

The first book is titled "Birthday Boy." In the first chapter, "Breakfast," Jim has turned ten years old and is excited about the date. His mother is cooking breakfast and asks Jim how he came to be ten years old. Jim himself can't believe he's reached the milestone age and "feels the weight" of a double digit age. Jim's uncles, Coran, Al, and Zeno, tease him, pretending they don't know him. Uncle Zeno is the oldest of the three and Jim believes him to be in his forties. Uncle Coran and Uncle Al are twins. Al runs the family farm and Zeno works with him except on Saturdays when Zeno runs the grist mill. Uncle Coran runs the family store and the grist mill. The family spends a great deal of time together though Uncle Al and Uncle Coran have their own homes. At breakfast this particular morning it's decided that Jim will go to the fields to work with Coran and Zeno.

In "A Day of Work," Jim sets out with Uncle Zeno and Uncle Al to the fields while Uncle Coran goes to open the store. The sun is just coming up as they drive on the highway to the field. They are met there by five field hands, including an older black man named Abraham. Jim immediately lays claim to a brand new hoe but Uncle Zeno instructs him to give it to Abraham. Jim argues and Abraham offers to use the hoe that's intended for Jim's use though it has a broken handle. Uncle Zeno says the hoe with the broken handle is for Jim's use and they set to work. Though Jim is still upset, he knows he shouldn't argue with Uncle Zeno.

Every man stands at the end of a row and each will hoe to the end of that row and return down the next until the entire field is cleared of weeds. Uncle Zeno offers to help Jim hoe at first but Jim argues that he already knows how. He sets out but almost immediately chops a cornstalk down. Uncle Zeno promises that's "one lick" for Jim but Jim knows that Uncle Zeno never really whips him. When Jim argues yet again, Uncle Zeno asks if Jim wants to go home. He says he doesn't and watches as Uncle Zeno demonstrates how to remove the grass without chopping the corn. Jim sets to work and carefully clears out the first ten stalks of his row. When he comes upon a particularly stubborn clump of grass, he has to pull at it with his hands and the hoe. When he finally dislodges it, he turns to shoe the others but they are far up their own rows. Jim is upset that he's made so little progress compared to the others and feels like crying. He is more upset that he's about to cry and chops at the ground, chopping through another



corn stalk. He knows Uncle Zeno will be disappointed in him and he digs a hole, burying the stalk so it appears to be standing.

Jim pulls himself together and decides he'll keep working his best until dinnertime. He can't think of a reason to go home or a way to get there until then, but he knows Uncle Zeno won't make him return to the fields in the afternoon if he doesn't want to. Jim continues to be distracted, throwing rocks toward the end of his row to measure the distance he's hoed then using his hoe as a bat and rocks for baseballs. He sees a rock sticking out of the ground that resembles an arrowhead and stops to dig it up but discovers it isn't. He knows his Uncle Coran has found many arrowheads and other Indian relics and wonders if the rock he's found might be part of an arrowhead. He takes two rocks and scrapes them together, watching the sparks but unable to set a small clump of grass afire.

Jim is getting hotter and beginning to sweat. He wants to go to the truck for water but knows his uncles don't believe in "wasting steps," and that he should hoe his row and return to the truck down his second row before going for a drink. Jim is looking at a praying mantis he's chopped in half when Uncle Zeno returns to him. Uncle Zeno says that praying mantises kill other insects and that Jim shouldn't kill them. Uncle Zeno then walks back along Jim's row, pointing out some morning glories he missed when he was hoeing. He then picks up the second cornstalk Jim had chopped down. When Uncle Zeno asks what happened, Jim says he doesn't know. Uncle Zeno is obviously disappointed, saying the broken cornstalk was only a mistake until Jim tried to hide it, making it a lie. Uncle Zeno then asks Jim if he lies a lot and Jim says he doesn't. Jim then says he doesn't feel well and Uncle Zeno instructs him to go home and tell his mama he's sick. When Jim reaches the road and makes the turn toward town, he looks back at the field and sees his uncles and the hands spread out across the field, Uncle Zeno working on the rows Jim had left unfinished and Uncle Al working well ahead of the others, as always.

Breakfast, A Day of Work Analysis

The story doesn't refer to Jim Glass, Jr., by his full name - including the "junior" - more than a couple of times. The fact that both Jim and his father have the same name can become confusing. For the sake of clarity in his study guide, only the first letter includes references to Jim Glass, Sr., and Jim Glass, Jr. The remainder of the guide refers to Jim Glass, Jr. only as "Jim." Jim's father will be referred to as "Jim Sr."

In the first chapter, Jim refers to his mother "pulling her sadness behind her like a plow." He indicates Cissy is sad because her husband died though it's been ten years since his death. Jim talks about her sadness as if it's a tangible thing that can be seen and indicates that it weighs her down. Everyone seems to sense the sadness and Jim says they walk around the furrows she leaves behind her. This metaphor for Cissy's grief is important because it's compared to one of the most difficult chores on a farm. Jim's key that Cissy is having a particularly bad day is her clothing. Jim points out that she's wearing her "mother's long clothes" on this particular day and that he doesn't do



anything to upset her. Jim apparently feels a responsibility toward his mother when she's feeling this sad but he says it's as if he's stepped into an old photograph and doesn't exactly know what to do. It seems likely that Zeno, Al, and Coran feel the same and want to help. They will later try to arrange for Cissy to remarry, probably with the hope that another man in her life will help her forget her husband.



An Unexpected Gift, Baptism, After Supper

An Unexpected Gift, Baptism, After Supper Summary

In "An Unexpected Gift," Jim doesn't want to confront his mom. He knows she'll make him lie down and will be worried about him. He arrives in Aliceville, the town where he lives, and finds the town abandoned. Jim knows most of the women are preparing lunch for the men who'll return home from their work soon. He sees Pete Hunt who is the town's railroad station agent seated at the depot. Pete had wired houses in town for electricity though the power has not yet come to Aliceville. As he walks through town, he's feeling a bit sorry for himself because his birthday has been awful.

When Jim is walking by the hotel, Whitey Whiteside, a traveling salesman for Governor Feeds, calls out and asks Jim to wait. Whitey's real name is Ralph but he says he is called Whitey because his customers are more likely to remember that name. Whitey points out that Jim has dirt on his face and he says he's been hoeing corn. Whitey approves, saying hard work is good for a person. Whitey says he has some time before the train arrives that will take him on to his next stop selling feed and asks Jim to walk with him to the new school building. The building is on top of a nearby hill and is made of red brick. When school resumes in the fall, there will be students from several area schools attending, including students from Lynn's Mountain where Jim's grandfather lives. Jim has never seen his grandfather and is worried there might be kids who know him, though he hasn't revealed that fear to anyone.

Jim and Whitey look through the window and Jim sees the building is wired for lights though there's no electricity yet. They look toward the town and Jim knows Zeno and Coran will soon arrive home from the fields. Whitey says he heard it's Jim's birthday and asks if Jim has gotten any presents yet. Jim says he hasn't and feels horrible about it. Whitey makes a show of feeling around in his pockets and asks Jim if he chews tobacco. When Jim says he doesn't, Whitey asks if Jim has any use for a receipt book. Jim says he doesn't and Whitey reaches into another pocket, producing a baseball. Jim is thrilled and Whitey says he'd bought it for his grandmother but she didn't want it. They head toward town together.

In "Baptism," Jim and his uncles arrive at home where his mother has lunch waiting. Uncle Zeno tells the story of the time Al and Coran "baptized all those chicks." Uncle Zeno had been baptized when he was twelve. Al and Coran were five and had watched the baptism. Later, they'd caught some baby chicks and dunked them in a rain barrel, one at a time, to "baptize" them as they'd seen happen to Zeno. Zeno says he'd known the boys would be in trouble if their mom found out so he'd buried the chicks in an effort to keep them from a spanking. Zeno says their father saw Zeno carrying the hoe and had retrieved the dead chicks, then confronted Zeno about it. Zeno, still trying to protect the youngsters, said he'd "found" the chicks in the rain barrel. Al and Coran had broken



down and told the truth. Zeno's father didn't whip the twins but warned them to never put another chick in a rain barrel. He did, however, whip Zeno for not telling the truth.

In "After Supper," everyone gathers on the porch at Uncle Zeno's house where Jim and his mother live. Mama says she needs a sweater and heads inside. Jim isn't paying attention when she returns until she calls his name, then he sees she has a cake with candles. There is a great deal of teasing with someone saying there's a birthday cake and Coran responding that he'd thought "Cissy was on fire." Jim is about to cry and says he'd been afraid the uncles were angry over his performance in the field.

Jim says that Whitey had given him a baseball though he'd come to the conclusion that it probably wasn't alright to accept the gift and that he should return it. They go inside to have cake and Jim sees gifts on the table. He has a glove and bat and Uncle Zeno points out the bat is a Louisville Slugger. Uncle Zeno says the bat is probably too large but that Jim will grow into it. Jim's mama says the gifts are from all of them and that they love Jim very much. Coran begins the teasing again, saying "I can take him or leave him." Al chimes in, calling him a "knothead" and Zeno says Jim is "no bigger than a poot."

An Unexpected Gift, Baptism, After Supper Analysis

Jim says that his uncles often "rescue" him from his mother's "tender care." It seems natural that Cissy would worry about Jim more than normal because of the way she lost her husband. The doctor who examined Jim's father's body declared he'd died of a heart condition and during this time there was little to be done for serious illnesses and ailments. There was discussion that Jim's grandmother also died of a heart condition which would likely make Cissy worry that the ailment runs in families. The role of Jim's uncles are much like that of a father and Cissy seems to let them have that authority over Jim, probably realizing that Jim needs the teaching the men can offer in order to grow up into the man she hopes he becomes.

The story about Al and Coran "baptizing" the chicks is obviously meant to teach Jim that lying is wrong and to explain Zeno's displeasure over Jim trying to hide that he'd chopped through another corn stalk. There's an interesting piece of conversation at the end of that story when Al and Coran say they'd had to lock the mama chicken in the chicken coop and that she'd spent a great deal of time looking for the missing chicks. Jim's mama says "that's sad." It could be that she relates to that chicken who is missing someone so horribly.

There is a great deal of teasing among the uncles and Jim is often called names such as "knothead." These are obviously not meant to be derogatory and are actually signs of affection among the men. Uncle Zeno calls Jim "Doc" a great deal of the time. There's no explanation and the nickname seems to be used only by Uncle Zeno.

Jim comes to feel a little strange about accepting the baseball from Whitey and decides he will put the ball away and return it once Whitey comes back into town. Jim doesn't



say exactly why it feels wrong to accept the gift. When his mother learns of the gift, she asks if Mr. Whiteside gives presents to all the little boys along his sales route and Uncle Zeno indicates that's not the case. There isn't a great deal said about the gift but it seems evident that this is related to the fact that the uncles hope Cissy will marry Mr. Whiteside.



Jim at Bat, The Wide Sea

Jim at Bat, The Wide Sea Summary

In "Jim at Bat," Uncle Zeno is pitching for Jim while Uncle Coran and Uncle Al play outfield. Jim imagines making a mighty hit, sending the ball a long distance. Instead, he continues to hit each pitch but barely sends the ball any distance at all. Uncle Zeno continues to retrieve the ball without complaint. Uncle Al and Uncle Coran remain in the outfield though it's evident Jim won't hit it that far. They know if they move forward to the area where Jim is hitting the ball, it will seem they don't believe in his ability to hit it a long way. From the field, Al and Coran sing-song chants, "batter, batter, batter" and "whatta-say, whatta-say," which sounds like music to Jim's ears. Uncle Zeno continues to pitch though he hates that he'd bought a bat so much too large for Jim.

Book II, Jim Leaves Home, contains only the chapter, "The Wide Sea." Jim and Uncle Al set out on their trip late in the evening when the weather is cooler. They have ham and biscuits, food packed by Cissy for the trip, along with water in a jug, thermoses of coffee, and clean clothes. Jim doesn't know where they are going and he doesn't mind the "mystery" of not knowing. Their travel takes them immediately to Shelby, a town Jim has visited only twice before. He's amazed to see stores still open for business though it's almost dark. They continue through the town, following the sign that points the way to the city of Charlotte. Jim has heard the story of his mother's trip to Charlotte when she was bought her wedding dress, rode an elevator, and was "almost run down by a streetcar."

Jim falls asleep and wakes to the noise of a textile mill near Gastonia. Jim is scared by the loud noises of the mill and says he doesn't ever want to go inside, prompting Uncle Al to say he hopes Jim never has to. Uncle Al wakes Jim when he pulls over, trying to get awake after driving all night. While they are stopped, Uncle Al asks if Jim has ever wished for another father. Jim, knowing his mother would never tolerate such a question, says his father is dead, but Al asks again. Jim responds that having the three uncles is like having three fathers, and Al laughs, then teases Jim a little.

When Jim wakes again, Al is reciting the story of the days following Jim's birth so soon after his father's death. Al tells of Zeno's letter saying Amos shouldn't come to see Jim but says Amos came anyway. When it became clear he was very sad and upset, Amos was allowed to look through the bedroom window where Jim and Cissy were asleep together. Jim wakes again when the car stops and Al says he's going to take a nap. He asks Jim to keep watch and wake him if he's needed. Jim agrees and wanders around while Al sleeps for awhile.

They make the final leg of the journey to the home of Mr. Harvey Hartsell and find it without a problem. There, Jim and Uncle Al find a man standing a corral where two huge horses are dead. The man says Mr. Hartsell's property has been reposed by the bank, he is in jail, and he'd killed the horses to keep them from being repossessed.



When they leave Mr. Hartsell's house, Jim and Uncle Al travel on to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, to see the Atlantic Ocean. They are amazed at the vast body of water. They stand for awhile and watch though Uncle Al says they shouldn't get in the water because they know nothing about the ocean. They talk a little with Uncle Al talking to Jim, making points about life lessons he should remember. Uncle Al says they should wade in the water, just so they could tell Zen0 and Coran they had. They roll up their pants legs and wade in.

Jim at Bat, The Wide Sea Analysis

As Jim and Al travel toward South Carolina, Jim looks at the houses along the road. Many are small farms, probably not that much different from the homes of Jim and his friends. However, Jim is suddenly struck by the realization that people live in those houses, that he doesn't know them, and that they don't know him. This makes Jim go on to realize that he's not the center of the universe - a sign of his emerging maturity.

When a buzzard settles down on one of the dead horses at Mr. Hartsell's farm, Uncle Al shoots it. He says later he hadn't been able to stand watching the buzzard peck at the beautiful horse but is also ashamed that he'd shot the bird because it was "just doing what buzzards do." It seems that Uncle Al was more upset by the fact that the old man standing at the corral was happy over the fact that Mr. Hartsell had fallen on hard times. Uncle Al tells Jim that he shouldn't ever be pleased over the fact that someone else has encountered difficulties. He compares making fun of someone in trouble to "cussing." Uncle Al uses the situation to teach Jim another lesson that would become very important over the next few years of the depression era. He tells Jim that it's important to "pay as you go." The message is clearly that Jim should never put himself in debt as Mr. Hartsell had done. That debt would be the ruin of many over the years of the depression when many faced financial ruin and lost everything.



First Day, Big Day

First Day, Big Day Summary

In "First Day," Jim is preparing to head off for school and his mom and uncles tease him, threatening to go with him. He finally realizes they are only teasing him and heads off for the new school building. There are lots of kids at the school and Jim is relieved to find some boys he knows, including Buster Burnette and Crawford Wilson. They soon connect with Crawford's cousin, Larry Lawter, who Jim knows from church, and Larry's friend Dennis Deane who had attended Sunny View school with Larry. The five boys feel more comfortable when they are gathered together in the crowd. At eight o'clock, Mr. Dunlap - the school's principal - rings the bell. Jim and the others learn their teacher is Miss Nanney. She isn't as young and pretty as some of the other teachers and fusses at Jim and his friends for giggling in line. In the classroom, Miss Nanney separates the group, seating them well apart with Jim right up front. Jim likes school and doesn't see this as a bad thing. There is still a group of students missing and Miss Nanney predicts the children from Lynn's Mountain, who will be arriving on the school bus, will often be late because of the poor road condition. She is obviously not in favor of the consolidation of the schools.

After two hours in the classroom, Jim and the other boys head out to play baseball during recess. They don't have enough for a game until the Lynn's Mountain boys arrive. One of the boys is named Penn Carson and it's obvious he is a good athlete. The other four are Otis Shehan, Mackey MacDowell, Willie McBee and Horace Gentine. Horace immediately tells Jim they are "some kind of cousin." Jim denies it but later finds out it's true. The discussion about Penn's background becomes uncomfortable for the boys and Horace breaks in, saying Miss Nanney had instructed them to play ball. The boys naturally break into two teams, the "town boys against the mountain boys." It's Jim who suggests it but the game doesn't start until Penn gives his approval - an obvious sign that the mountain boys look up to him as something of a leader.

Jim's team scores twelve runs in the first inning with Larry Lawter getting all four outs. Jim keeps hoping Miss Nanney will call them in from recess before the mountain boys have a chance at bat but it doesn't happen. Penn has another turn at bat with the bases loaded and the town boys ahead only by three. He makes a hit and the three on base make it home, tying the score. Jim is aware he can't possibly beat Penn to home plate and instead of trying to make the throw, he strikes Penn in the back with the ball. Just then, Miss Nanney calls them in but Penn confronts Jim, asking if the throw had been on purpose. Jim assures him it wasn't and says the mountain boys won the game by one point - Penn's home run. As they return to school, no one knows what to say to Jim and he doesn't know why he made the throw.

In "Big Day," there's a celebration at the school, complete with a Ferris wheel and merry-go-round. Jim is worried that others will reach the school grounds before him, especially that Penn might get to the rides ahead of Jim. Jim is fidgety and finally Uncle



Zeno demands that they go for a walk together. They make their way to the nearby river and take a seat on a rock. Jim asks how many people Uncle Zeno expects to show up and he says it may be the biggest gathering of the town, even bigger than the day "Alice came." Uncle Zeno agrees to tell Jim the story of Alice.

Jim's grandfather had wanted a train stop in their town which was called Sandy Bottom, but the train wouldn't stop. After working on the situation for some time, Jim's grandfather came up with the idea of renaming the town Aliceville in honor of the daughter of the train's engineer. They had and the engineer had begun stopping in town each trip though the railroad hadn't yet sanctioned the stop. There was eventually a celebration held in honor of Alice who came to town for the event along with everyone from miles around. But a short time later, Alice died and the towns people were left with the question of whether they should rename the town. In the end they didn't but Alice's father had been unable to continue as engineer of the train, so distraught was he each time he passed Aliceville. He'd moved on to another job but the railroad kept the stop at Aliceville and the towns people kept the name. Jim asks how old Alice would be if she hadn't died and Uncle Zeno says she was slightly older than he, which would make her about forty-five. Jim asks if Uncle Zeno might have married her and he responds that he doesn't know. Jim then asks why none of the uncles ever married and Uncle Zeno says sometimes men just get too busy when it's time to think about marriage, and the opportunity passes. They then head back to town and Jim realizes it doesn't really matter whether he's first on the Ferris wheel.

First Day, Big Day Analysis

Jim's immediate reaction upon gathering with the five boys from school is to compare himself with them in an effort to figure out where his athletic abilities will rank. He believes he's going to be faster than any of the four and it soon becomes evident that Jim is highly competitive and wants desperately to be the best at baseball. It's not clear where Jim has gotten this competitive nature.

Penn Carson is a Quaker and when Crawford Wilson asks for an explanation, Penn says only that it's a "form of religion." When one of the boys says it's a "Yankee religion," he is obviously trying to be funny but none of the boys laugh at the joke. Immediately, Penn's friend Otis says that Penn "won't fight because it's against his religion." It's obviously meant as a warning that the boys can pick on Penn all they want but won't get a fight out of him. Readers should remember the time frame and need to understand that boys coming to blows was much more common than in modern day situations. It was largely seen as acceptable and wasn't condemned as it would be today. That makes Penn's unwillingness to fight more exceptional.



An Unexpected Guest, News from the Mountain, A Victory of Sorts

An Unexpected Guest, News from the Mountain, A Victory of Sorts Summary

In "An Unexpected Guest," Jim and Uncle Zeno arrive home and Jim immediately senses there's something wrong. Uncle Zeno says that Whitey Whiteside is going to Big Day with them and it seems clear that Cissy isn't happy. She accuses her brothers of "ganging up" on her and of humiliating her. Coran says they meant no harm by inviting Whitey along but Cissy is still angry. At the school, Jim takes his mom, uncles, and Mr. Whiteside to his school room where they meet Miss Nanney. Miss Nanney says Jim is "mostly a good citizen" though she'd sometimes like to "thump his ears." All three uncles tell Miss Nanney she should thump Jim's ears if he needs it.

In "News from the Mountain," Jim grows tired after eating dinner, riding the Ferris wheel many times, and running around with the other boys. He wanders into his classroom and is there when Penn arrives with his dad, Radford Carson. Mr. Carson tells Jim he'd known Jim's dad and his grandfather. He says Jim's grandfather, Amos, is ill and near death. Jim has never met his grandfather and his mother has never said anything good about Amos, but Jim still doesn't want the man to die. Mr. Carson says Jim looks like his father and Jim uses the opportunity to ask about his dad. Mr. Carson says Jim's dad was a fair ballplayer and an excellent hunter and fisherman. Mr. Carson tells the story of sneaking near the spot where Amos had a moonshine still and shooting a hole in the still. Amos had begun shooting back and the boys ran. Jim's dad had asked Mr. Carson for a shell to replace the one he'd fired into Amos' still. That night Amos put a gun to his son's chin while he counted the shells. Finding none missing, Amos left his son's room but Mr. Carson seems to believe Amos would have killed his son if there'd been a shell missing.

In "A Victory of Sorts," there is a dollar bill atop a tall pole that is slick with greasy sap. The person who is able to climb the pole will get to keep the dollar. Penn is the first of the bigger boys to get a chance to try. He takes a run and gets farther than any of the younger boys had. Jim takes a clue from Penn's technique and is able to climb the pole, retrieving the bill. Once down, he's shouting that he'd done what Penn couldn't but Uncle Zeno points out that Penn's efforts had removed at least some of the slick sap from the pole, making it easier for Jim to make the climb. Mama points out that she and Jim would have nothing in the world if not for Jim's uncles.



An Unexpected Guest, News from the Mountain, A Victory of Sorts Analysis

When Whitey goes with the family to the Big Day event at the school, Jim senses there is discord between his mom and the uncles and he knows that Whitey is the cause. However, he can't figure out exactly what the problem is. There is foreshadowing in this scene and it's later revealed that Whitey hopes Cissy will marry him though Cissy remains devoted to her marriage with Jim's father and can't abide the thought of marrying another.

Jim's competitive spirit comes out again when he's climbing the pole for the dollar bill. He's anxious to win and when he reaches the top he pauses. He sees Penn Carson below him and Penn is cheering for Jim. It seems that Jim should have taken a lesson from Penn at that point but Jim can't keep from bragging that he'd beaten Penn. It's not enough for Jim to have won the dollar. When Cissy warns Jim that he's taking his bragging a bit too far, Jim responds by calling Penn a "hillbilly." The term is derogatory and seems only to be an effort on Jim's part to continue the bragging in the most hurtful way possible. It's not clear whether Penn heard the comment but it seems likely it would have hurt his feelings if he had. Jim is obviously struggling with his emerging maturity. He knows that he wants to be the kind of person his uncles will be proud of but he's also a little overly proud of himself and what he sees as his accomplishment.



King

King Summary

In "King," Jim and Uncle Zeno are headed to New Carpenter. On the way, they pass a pair of convicts working at digging holes along the side of the road. The holes will be used for standing poles that will hold the electric lines to Aliceville. The holes stand empty to a point and Uncle Zeno stops by the last empty hole. Abraham passes by, slowing to ask if they need help. Uncle Zeno assures him they are alright and he goes on toward New Carpenter. Uncle Zeno removes a scrap of lumber covering the hole and suggests to Jim they see if the convicts are "doing a good job." Uncle Zeno says a good hole will be about the same size at the bottom as at the top and that "a lazy man" will make the hole larger at the top. Uncle Zeno believes the hole to be about eight or nine feet deep. Jim, holding his arms above his head, is lowered into the hole by Uncle Zeno. Jim is afraid Uncle Zeno is about to drop and, when Uncle Zeno turns loose, Jim expects to fall a long way but drops only a few inches. Uncle Zeno asks Jim what he's doing and Jim says "nothing," though he's noted the hole has more room than he'd imagined. Uncle Zeno asks what he's supposed to tell Cissy about their adventure and Jim suggests Uncle Zeno tell her he put Jim down a hole. Uncle Zeno says Cissy probably wouldn't approve and says they'd better not tell her. Jim agrees and Uncle Zeno pulls Jim back up.

They return to the truck and soon arrive in New Carpenter. Jim compares the town to Aliceville and says his home town is almost like a church next to the busy town of New Carpenter. When Uncle Zeno parks the truck on Trade Street, he tells Jim he can go off on his own but to be back to the truck by one o'clock. This is the first time Jim has been allowed to wander around town on his own and he's excited. Uncle Zeno gives him a dime and Jim sets off. He soon sees groups of kids around town, all gathering together and obviously spending time with friends. Jim feels left out of those groups and hates that he allows that to keep him from enjoying himself. He doesn't approach any kids and he doesn't go anywhere there are groups already gathered. He doesn't go to the soda fountain for this reason. Then he sees Penn and the two begin wandering around the courthouse lawn together. They find their way to a basement door and enter, discovering a jail cell. A man jumps at them, yelling "boo" so they are frightened and run away. When they are some distance away, they laugh at their fears.

Next, Jim finds an alley and the boys begin exploring there. Someone has written the word "King" on the walls with chalk and has drawn a skull and crossbones. They find a message warning people away and threatening death but keep going. They are beginning to be a little afraid when they are confronted by a group of boys. They are quickly surrounded and Jim warns Penn they'll have to fight their way out. The boys back up toward each other and the boy who calls himself King makes it apparent there is about to be a fight. Jim knows he and Penn have no chance but just then Abraham walks into the alley. When the boys tell him to leave, he shows them a knife in his hand and demands they leave Jim and Penn alone. The boys run and Abraham takes a seat



on the ground with his back against the wall. Jim and Penn take a seat with him. Abraham's hands are shaking. He pulls an apple from his pocket and peels it, then begins cutting slices off for the boys.

While they are eating, a police officer arrives with King. Abraham, Jim, and Penn say no one was threatened with Abraham's knife and the officer tells King to go away. When the boys are gone, the officer tells Abraham to never "do that again." He then says he's going to "take a walk down to Trade Street" and suggests the three follow him. They do.

King Analysis

The situation with Abraham and the boys in the alley is more serious than might initially be apparent. The story is set in the 1930s. Race relations are poor at best. A black man who threatens a white boy would likely be in serious trouble, even if the man were protecting someone, as is the case here. What Abraham did would have been cause for arrest or a vigilante justice from whites during this time. Abraham is fully aware of the seriousness of the situation as is evident when he tells Jim and Penn to sit down, then begins reciting a portion of the Lord's Prayer. It's evident that Jim is also aware. He says he almost feels like crying and he asks Abraham what's going to happen. It's likely the officer doesn't take any action because King and his group are troublemakers.

There's an interesting point to be made about Jim and Penn and their explorations. The boys talk about the convicts they'd seen on the way from Aliceville to New Carpenter. Jim had been a little scared to realize the two men were chained to each other but not restrained in any other way. He and Penn compare notes on this and realize they are both a little afraid. Then Jim and Penn explore the basement of the courthouse and are scared by the man there. They then head into the alley, looking for more excitement. In this time period, there weren't a lot of opportunities for entertainment and the boys were obviously seeking some thrills the same way movie-goers are happy to be frightened by a scary scene.



Blackbirds, Christmas Eve, At the Tenant House

Blackbirds, Christmas Eve, At the Tenant House Summary

In "Blackbirds," a huge flock of blackbirds lands in a tree. Cissy watches, amazed as the flock turns as one and lands in a group. Jim joins her and asks how many there are. Cissy says she doesn't know and guesses hundreds, thousands, or a multitude. Jim then asks how many birds would likely be killed if Uncle Zeno were to fire a shotgun into the tree. She's upset and asks why he should think of that and why he believes Uncle Zeno would want to kill the birds. When he guesses Zeno could kill a hundred or more with one shot, she begins to cry. Then she rushes toward the tree, waving her apron and scaring the birds away.

In "Cold Nights," Cissy is writing a letter to Whitey. The letter is addressed December 12, 1934, and she begins by informing him that her brothers have called her selfish because she won't consider his marriage proposal. She says her brothers claim Jim needs a father but she feels he has three father figures who fill the gap better than any one person could. She says that because of her brothers' arguments, she's willing to listen to his proposal but warns him that she doesn't expect anything he can say would change her mind.

In "Christmas Eve," Jim wakes with someone holding a hand over his mouth. Uncle Zeno tells Jim he has to be completely quiet. Jim dresses quickly and doesn't give any real thought to the fact that he and Uncle Zeno are sneaking out of the house on New Year's Eve. Once he's dressed, he goes to the open window and leans out. Coran is there and whispers that he and Al are "waiting for Jim Glass." Jim whispers back that his name is Jim Glass and Uncle Coran says Jim is to jump out of the window. Jim does, into Uncle Coran's waiting arms. His weight knocks Coran to the ground and even after Jim gets up, Coran and Al are laughing, barely able to keep their laughter quiet to keep from waking Cissy. At one point Uncle Coran is singing a Christmas carol but he's singing it wrong and Uncle Al corrects him. Jim asks if they've been drinking and they all say they haven't, but that they have a surprise for Jim. They walk to the highway and stand there, looking back toward the homes of the three uncles. Jim points out they are standing in the road but the uncles assure him that it's alright and that they're where they need to be. Jim asks what they're looking for but they tell him to wait.

The uncles have a funny argument about what day Jesus was actually born, and Coran's argument is complex so that Jim says he doesn't understand, prompting Coran to say Jim hasn't been paying attention. The bantering continues and Uncle Al says, "Let there be light," several times. Finally, when he says it for the last time, the lights in all the houses in town go on. Electricity has arrived in Aliceville. Uncle Coran, pretending that Al had really caused the lights to go on, asks him to "do something



else." Al teases back, saying he'd better not. Jim suggests they wake Cissy but Uncle Al says Cissy would make them go inside out of the cold.

Jim notices the school house, which is also lit up. They walk toward the building and are amazed that, from the school yard, they can read the face of a watch in the bright light. Jim notices that the darkness is intense outside the ring of light cast from the school house. Jim realizes things are changing dramatically and wonders if he's up to the challenge.

The final section of this chapter is a letter from Cissy dated December 26. The letter is addressed to her dead husband and pleads for his understanding at her decision to hear Whitey's proposal. She tells him she'll harm him if she marries again. She also says she'd pledged to remain true to him and to their wedding vows, and that listening to Whitey's proposal makes her "vile."

In "At the Tenant House," Jim is invited to spend the evening with the uncles as they play checkers at the store. This is not typical and Jim soon grows tired of watching. He knows that Whitey is in town and decides to stop in at the hotel to see him. When he reaches the hotel, he sees Whitey headed in another direction. He follows Whitey to the old tenant house Jim's parents lived when Jim's father was alive. There, Jim watches as Whitey stops near the front door, talking to someone inside. Jim realizes Whitey is talking to Jim's mother. Jim sees Whitey get down on one knee and knows he's proposing. Jim can't hear the conversations but sees Whitey realize that Cissy wasn't going to change her mind. Whitey walks away and Cissy later leaves the house. She collapses onto the ground and cries for awhile. Jim wants to go to her but believes he shouldn't.

Blackbirds, Christmas Eve, At the Tenant House Analysis

The story of the blackbirds is filled with imagery and there is a great deal of the meaning left to the imagination of the reader. Cissy sees the birds as they land in the tree and is she awestruck by the sight. In Cissy's mind, the birds are on the tree as thick as the leaves were earlier in the fall. She compares the birds to leaves and says their presence is like a sign that winter is a little farther off still. When she shoos the birds away, she tells Jim that it's winter again. Her anger seems to be directed at Jim for his talk of killing the birds when she'd compared them to an extension of the summer. But it's more likely that she's only dreading the onslaught of another winter season. It's not likely that Zeno would have fired into the tree, killing any of the birds, and it's not clear why Cissy chose to chase the birds away rather than explaining herself to Jim.

The coming of age theme is seen clearly when Jim and the uncles watch the electricity come on for the first time in Aliceville. Jim notes that he's never really known how dark the landscape can be until he compared that to the light from the school house. When Uncle Zeno points out how different the town looks with many of the buildings shining with light, Jim is overawed. He feels the need to stand closer to the uncles, as if seeking



protection. Jim says the town would require more than he's been asked in the past. He feels the need to be stronger and smarter in order to live in such a town, and isn't certain he's ready for the task. The reader should be aware that nothing more will be demanded of Jim just because the electricity has arrived. It seems more likely that Jim has suddenly realized the world is a bigger place and that he's living in an age when things are changing rapidly. He is feeling the challenge which shows an emerging maturity but he is still longing for the uncles' protection, meaning he's clinging to his youth.



A Game of Catch, An Afternoon in the Sun

A Game of Catch, An Afternoon in the Sun Summary

In "A Game of Catch," the spring takes a long time to come and many become cross with each other because the weather keeps them cooped up inside so much. Finally, in April, Jim is outside one day when he hears the arrival of the Carolina Moon, a fast passenger train that never stops in town. He rushes to the depot and discovers the train had struck a cow, prompting them to stop and make repairs. At the depot, Jim and the uncles encounter Penn and his father.

They are standing around, just watching, when the conductor calls Jim and Penn over. He tells them baseball great Ty Cobb is onboard. Jim and Penn want to get his autograph but the conductor refuses to impose. Uncle Zeno tells Jim to get his baseball and play catch with Penn. He says Ty Cobb might look out the window and see them playing. Jim rushes home and retrieves the baseball. Jim's first throw is high but Penn catches it anyway. After a few pitches back and forth, Penn asks to use the glove. Jim refuses, saying it's his glove. They argue and the adults become involved but the boys are each determined to have their way. Penn screams at Jim, calling him a baby. Jim throws the ball much too hard in Penn's direction and Penn misses. The ball rolls into a puddle. Jim is certain Penn is going to fight him then but he turns toward the ball instead. After taking a step, he falls, face-first, into the puddle. Penn struggles and all the adults rush to his side.

In "An Afternoon in the Sun," Jim is confined to his house because Penn has polio. The town is under quarantine and Jim himself says he's sitting around, "waiting to die." Abraham drops by to talk to Jim as Jim is sitting at his bedroom window. Abraham has brought Jim a fried apple pie. Abraham reassures Jim that he's going to be alright and that both he and Penn are "in God's hands," which is a safe place to be. Pete, the manager of the depot, arrives at Jim's window to visit later and brings a lump of coal that has imprints of delicate leaves - fossilized from millions of years ago. Pete echoes Abraham's comment, that Jim will be alright. Whitey stops by as well and gives Jim a piece of lead, "grooved at one end, flat and misshapen on the other," and tells Jim it's the bullet that hit his grandfather in the leg. Whitey says he's lost his job as a salesman and will likely be headed west. As Whitey is leaving, he urges Jim to "take care of your mama," and Jim promises he will.

A Game of Catch, An Afternoon in the Sun Analysis

Polio in this time period was very serious, often causing death. Those who experienced the disease were sometimes crippled, though the degree of the affliction varied from one case to the next. With this in mind, the fact that Penn has polio is a sobering



thought for Jim. There's no indication how his mother and uncles coped through this time but they are bound to be sick with worry that Jim will also contract polio. The town is quarantined with no one allowed to come or go until the disease runs its course.

There's a very typical reaction on Jim's part while he's confined to the house waiting to be sure he doesn't have polio. Jim thinks back on all the things he's done and said to Penn and regrets every negative comment. With the seriousness of the disease, it seems possible that Penn will die and Jim may never see him again. This prompts the regret that Jim is feeling.

The actions of Abraham and Pete are interesting in that Jim doesn't realize that both men are his friends. Jim sometimes looks around in the coal pile for treasures and says that Pete sometimes allows it, but sometimes tells Jim to go away. What Jim doesn't realize is that Pete only tells him to go away when Jim is with another boy. Both Pete and Abraham give Jim a small gift and that gift is dear to each of them. However, both try to make it appear that the gift means nothing to them. In Pete's case, he says he'd found the slab of coal in the coal pile though Jim has seen it many times on Pete's desk. Pete says he has too much junk lying around already and that he doesn't want the piece of coal, though it had obviously caught his attention before this and he's kept it for some time. Abraham says that he'd gotten the pie but is now too full to eat it. He assures Jim that the pie will just go to waste if Jim doesn't accept it. These conversations seem very typical of the day. Children would not typically accept gifts from adults, especially if those gifts might hold real value, during this time. Another important aspect of this is that both men are giving Jim a gift because they are afraid he might die.



Our Boy

Our Boy Summary

In "Our Boy," Jim and the uncles head up Lynn's Mountain. They plan to stop in to see Penn for a little while and then to go on to see Amos. Jim and Uncle Zeno ride up front and Uncle Al and Uncle Coran ride in the back of the truck. Jim asks Uncle Zeno what he's supposed to say to Penn and Uncle Zeno assures him the right thing to say will come to him. Jim asks Uncle Zeno more about his father and Uncle Zeno says that Jim's dad was a good hunter. He says the creek that runs near Jim's grandfather's house is called "Painter Creek," which is how the mountain people say "panther." Jim asks if Uncle Zeno has ever seen a panther and he says he hasn't but that Jim's father had, though he thought it might have been "something else." Uncle Zeno recounts the story.

Jim's father was just a youngster, about ten or so, when he and a cousin were coon hunting. The dogs rushed back to where the hunters were and refused to go back into the night. Then there was a scream and the hunters were also afraid. They could see the eyes of the thing - which they assumed was a panther - roving at the edge of the firelight. The hunters remained as near to the fire as they could get but the creature continued to roam at the edge of the light until the fire was about to die out. Uncle Zeno says that Jim's father claimed the creature spoke, prompting the hunters to go running for home. The following night, several men went looking for the creature but they found no sign of it. Jim asks why he's never heard that story and Uncle Zeno says it's because Cissy believes it to be too scary for Jim. Uncle Zeno also says that Uncle Al believes it was a haunt rather than a panther, and that it tracked Jim's father to the field where it "got him." Uncle Zeno says he doesn't believe that's true. When Jim asks why Uncle Zeno has told him all this now, Uncle Zeno says he figures if Jim is man enough to face Amos Glass, he's man enough to hear that story.

They continue up the mountain and arrive at the Carson place. They encounter Mr. Carson first and he thanks them for visiting, saying that Penn "thinks the world" of Jim. They continue to the house and Jim is asked to wait for a few minutes before going inside. The uncles wander back down the road to look at Mr. Carson's mill and Mrs. Carson invites Jim inside. Mrs. Carson takes Jim to the back porch and tells him Penn is waiting for him there. Jim finds Penn in a rocking chair. They greet each other but then Jim finds himself staring down at Penn's leg. Penn slaps the right leg and says he can't feel that leg, as if it's asleep. He says the left leg is "fine."

Jim tries to talk about the day Penn fell ill in order to apologize but Penn is upset and begins to cry. He says that Ty Cobb saw him fall but Jim says he doubts Cobb was even on the train. They talk on for a little longer and Penn asks that they stop talking to rest for a few minutes. In the silence, he falls asleep. Jim wanders around the yard a little and is startled when he encounters a wheelchair. He leaves his glove with Penn when he returns to the truck where the uncles are waiting.



As they continue their journey, Jim asks Uncle Zeno why Amos is so mean. Uncle Zeno tells how Amos pushed the boundaries of moonshining - manufacturing liquor illegally - until the officials came down on him, eventually arresting him and taking him to jail. Uncle Zeno says Amos was meaner when he got out of jail and that he'd taken it out on his wife and son. Just then Uncle Zeno asks Jim if he's afraid of Amos and Jim lies, saying he isn't. Uncle Zeno says that's good that he's not afraid because they've arrived.

There are two girls in the creek near the house and they scamper inside when they see the visitors. They are cousins who are being made to stay with Amos because he is so ill. Jim wanders around the property a little, looking at the remains of the shed where Amos had manufactured his illegal liquor. The shed has been burned and there is little left standing.

The girls tell Uncle Zeno and the others they have been instructed to let no one in the house but agree that Jim can look at his grandfather through the bedroom window. Jim peers through the window and immediately realizes his grandfather is going to die soon. Jim speaks to him but says he doesn't think Amos understands. One of the girls says he no longer recognizes anyone. Jim and the uncles take in the view from the mountain. They can see town and Uncle Coran points out the moment Cissy turns on their porch light. Jim realizes that he's a very small part of the world and he tries to convey that to Uncle Zeno. He says the world is too big and that he's "just a boy." Uncle Zeno responds that it's alright because Jim is "our boy."

Our Boy Analysis

Jim is more than a little amazed at Penn's house. He admits to himself while he's waiting to go inside that he'd expected Penn to live in a small house. Instead, he discovers the house the Carsons live in is nicer than the house Jim lives in. This is a lesson Jim hasn't yet learned - not to judge others. Once Jim is in the house that lesson becomes more apparent. He sees photos on the walls of Penn and Mr. Carson standing somewhere very high. Mrs. Carson says it's the Empire State Building. In another photo, Penn is on the steps of Independence Hall. Jim is struck by the fact that Penn has been to these places - which seems exotic to Jim considering his limited travels.



Characters

Jim Glass

Jim is about to celebrate his tenth birthday as the story opens. He lives with his mother, Elizabeth, known to family and friends as Cissy. His father died a week before his birth but Jim has grown up knowing all about his father and hearing stories of his father's life and death. Cissy's three brothers and Jim's uncles are Zeno, Al, and Coran, and they have devoted themselves to providing for Cissy and Jim. Jim is very conscious of his uncles' actions and pays close attention as they teach him about life and work. He wants to be like them and greatly fears letting them down. When Jim isn't able to keep up with the adult men in the field and tries to hide his mistake, he realizes he has disappointed his uncle and that worries him much more than the mistake. Jim is somewhat insecure at times and wants to be the best ball player in the school yard. When he and a group of boys from town are pitted against a group of boys from "the mountain," Jim wants to win the game so badly that he makes an unfair play, striking another boy in the back with a baseball. He later feels sorry for his action. Jim comes to realize he has been guilty of making assumptions about people, including his friend, Penn, who Jim had assumed was poor because his family lives on the mountain. As Jim's grandfather nears death and Jim continues to learn from his uncles and others, he realizes that he's actually a very young boy still and has a lot of growing up left to do.

Penn Carson

Penn lives on Lynn's Mountain with his parents and, because Penn is a "mountain boy," Jim feels superior. Jim assumes he lives in a nicer house than Penn and that Penn's family is probably very poor, but he comes to realize that's not the case when he visits Penn's house for the first time. Penn's family are Quakers which means he takes a passive approach to situations, seeking to avoid confrontations and especially physical violence. When Jim and Penn meet the first time at school, the two are pitted against each other in a baseball game. Both are natural leaders but Penn seems to be the more mature and forgiving of the two in some ways. When Penn fails at climbing the pole in an effort to win a dollar prize, Jim takes a clue from Penn's technique and wins the prize. When Jim is flaunting his win, his uncles point out that Penn had actually helped him win. Penn and Jim are arguing in the moments prior to Penn falling in the street. He is later diagnosed with polio and there's a scare that others will also come down with it. Penn is well-traveled but doesn't brag about it. Compared to Jim's personal experiences, Penn is much more knowledgeable and this realization makes Jim realize he has behaved poorly toward Penn. It seems likely Jim and Penn would have been much closer as friends if they had lived nearer each other. When the two meet up in town, they are immediately drawn to each other and get into mischief together. Penn is naturally upset after being diagnosed with polio and he cries in front of Jim at one point, but is embarrassed by his weakness.



Elizabeth Glass

Better known as "Cissy," she is Jim's mother and the younger sister of Zeno, Al, and Coran. Cissy is devoted to Jim and has lived her life with only his best interests at heart. She is strict with Jim and very protective which prompts the uncles to caution Jim against telling her when they've done something that would upset her. Cissy is urged by the uncles to consider marriage to Whitey but she argues that she's devoted to her marriage vows though her husband died and that she would harm Jim by taking him away from his uncles.

Zeno McBride

Jim's uncle and Cissy's brother, Zeno is the more vocal of the three uncles. Jim says that Zeno is probably in his forties, the oldest of the four siblings. Zeno is somewhat strict with Jim and probably plays more the role of a father than Al and Coran. Zeno is the one who hushes Jim and the twins when they sneak out of the house on Christmas Eve in order to see the electric lights come on for the first time.

Al McBride

Coran's twin, Al manages the family farm. Al takes Jim to Charlotte with him when he's considering the purchase of Belgian horses for the farm. When Al discovers the man who'd owned the horses had killed the animals, he's upset. He takes Jim on to see the Atlantic Ocean after their discovery about the horses and asks Jim whether he's ever considered he needs another father, indicating for the first time that the brothers are working at getting Cissy to marry Mr. White.

Coran McBride

Al's twin, Coran manages the feed store and the cotton gin. Coran often laughs and is as quick to tease Jim as the others. It's Coran who catches Jim when he jumps from his bedroom window on Christmas Eve to wait with the uncles for the electricity to come on for the first time.

Jim Glass, Sr.

Father of Jim "the boy," he dies as a young man before his only son is born. The older Jim was in the fields when he died and it's assumed he has a bad heart but Jim the boy learns that some people believe that some sort of "haunt" had followed Jim from the mountain and taken his life. Uncle Zeon says he doesn't believe that to be true.



Amos Glass

Jim's grandfather, he sees Jim only one time when Jim is an infant. Amos is known for making illegal liquor and for being extremely mean. Amos is dying as the story comes to a close and Jim gets his one look at his grandfather through his bedroom window.

Whitey Whiteside

A traveling salesman who works for Governor Feed, he tries to get Cissy to marry him but she rejects him. He seems genuinely fond of Jim and gives him a baseball for his birthday but it seems possible that Whitey may have been trying to earn Cissy's approval. Whitey is fired from his job, a result of the depression, and he tells Jim that he will be moving on in search of another job.

Miss Nanney

Jim's fourth grade teacher, she seems very strict but also seems to be doing her best as a teacher. She hates that the schools have consolidated.

Abraham

An old black man who saves Jim and Penn from being beat up when they are accosted by some bigger boys in town. Abraham seems genuinely fond of Jim and stops in to see him when Jim is quarantined because of the polio scare.

Pete

The man who runs the train depot, he is obviously fond of Jim and brings him a present when there is a fear that Jim might have polio.



Objects/Places

South Carolina

Where Jim goes with Uncle Al in search of a pair of horses.

The Atlantic Ocean

The huge body of water Uncle Al and Jim see in South Carolina.

The panther

The animal that "talked" to Jim's father on the mountain, and that some people believe was something evil that followed him and caused his death.

Governor Feeds

The company Whitey works for.

Polio

The disease that causes Penn to lose the use of one of his legs.

Lynn's Mountain

Where Jim Glass, Sr., lived as a youngster and where his father, Amos, is living when his death grows near. It's also the home of Penn and his family.

New Carpenter

The town where Penn and Jim meet up with the ruffian named King and are saved by Abraham.

Aliceville

The name of the town where Jim and his family live.



The big day

The day everyone gathers at the school for a look inside the building and a carnival on the grounds.

Doc

What Uncle Zeno calls Jim.



Themes

Coming of Age

Coming of age is a recurring theme in the story, made more important because Jim is realizing for himself that he is young and has a lot of growing up to do. An example of this is seen when Jim and Uncle Al are traveling to Charlotte. During the trip, Jim is looking at the farms they are passing and suddenly realizes there are people living in those houses who don't even know Jim exists. This is an important sign of his emerging maturity because Jim is treated like the center of the universe by his mother and uncles. While they don't overly spoil him, he is aware that they are all protective of him and they provide him a comfortable life. Many young boys Jim's age would be required to work in the fields but Jim is allowed to work only when he wants. There are two other scenes in which this theme is clearly seen. When Jim and the uncles are standing outside on Christmas Eve to watch the electricity come on for the first time, Jim is struck by the way the world is changing. He realizes that he plays only a small role in the events of the world, a revelation that is more intense because he's been raised under the protection of his mother and three uncles. In the final scene of the story, Jim and the uncles are on a peak on Lynn's Mountain. They can see a great distance, all the way into Aliceville. The vista from the mountain is such that Jim is again struck by how small he is compared to the world. The fact that he realizes he is so tiny in comparison is another sign that he's maturing.

The Importance of Family

Jim has been raised in the loving arms of his mother and three uncles. They are all very protective, especially his mother, and are probably more so because Jim has been raised without a father. At one point in the story, Jim asks Zeno why he, Al, and Coran never married. Zeno says that it's easy for a man to get caught up in what he's doing to the point that opportunities for marriage simply slip by. He doesn't mention the fact that the three have devoted themselves to caring for Cissy and Jim, and that their duties on this front have probably played a part in keeping them from forming families of their own. The dedication of Al, Coran, and Zeno toward Cissy is seen in their actions to her. It's noted that Cissy had taken care of all three of their homes for awhile but, when she said the duties were too strenuous for her alone, the brothers had hired a woman to help. When the three uncles take Jim to Lynn's Mountain to visit Penn Carson and Amos Glass, they stand together on the edge of the mountain. They see the moment Cissy turns the front porch light on for them and one of the uncles says they shouldn't have left her alone all day. This is just one of many signs that the family takes their responsibilities toward each other seriously. Another is seen in Uncle Zeno's letter to Amos Glass, written soon after Jim's birth. Zeno promises to help raise Jim to become the kind of man his father would want him to be. Yet another is seen when Jim asks Uncle Zeno if he has to visit Amos Glass in the final chapter of the book. Uncle Zeno says Jim doesn't have to, but that he'll always regret it if he doesn't. The message is



obviously that Jim has never met his grandfather and that he should have at least one memory of the man before he dies.

Misconceptions and Judgments

Jim has a preconceived idea of what the boys from Lynn's Mountain will be like, formed not from personal knowledge of the boys who live on the mountain but from the way others view the people of the mountain. Jim and some of the others refer to the boys from the mountains as "hillbillies," a term obviously meant to be derogatory. Though Jim and Penn become somewhat friendly over the course of time, it's not until he goes to visit Penn after Penn contracts polio that Jim realizes how wrong his opinions had been. He expects Penn to live in a small, dilapidated house but discovers that Penn's house is actually larger than his own. He is amazed to discover that Penn and his parents have done a great deal of traveling, much more than Jim has even imagined. Jim's next misconception comes from believing that he has nothing to say to Penn now that he knows these things about Penn. Another example of this theme is seen in the situation at New Carpenter. Jim and Penn are surrounded in an alley by a group of bigger boys when Abraham interrupts. Jim has not been fond of Abraham but Abraham steps in to save Jim from a beating at the hands of the bigger boys. The boys are guilty of prejudice, calling Abraham a derogatory name. When Abraham shows the boys a knife, they run off but Abraham knows he'll be in trouble for his action, simply because he's a black man. This level of prejudice is common to the period and creates misconceptions about the blacks who are generally seen as ignorant and without feelings.



Style

Point of View

"Jim the Boy: A Novel" is written in third person from a limited perspective. The majority of the story is written from Jim's point of view though there are two letters in the story from other perspectives. Both letters are meant to provide the reader additional background to further explain the story. The first is written by Jim's Uncle Zeno and is addressed to Jim's grandfather, Amos. That letter explains the death of Jim's father and Jim's birth. The second is written by Cissy, Jim's mother. That letter is addressed to Jim's father who is already dead as Cissy writes the letter. The purpose of that letter is to explain how Cissy feels about the possibility of marrying another and the effect she fears this might have on Jim. There are other exceptions to the limited perspective. One is seen in the chapter titled "Jim at Bat." In this chapter, the perspective switches to omniscient with Uncle Zeno pitching to Jim and Jim trying to bat with his new bat. Another is the chapter titled "Blackbirds" which is from Cissy's perspective. With those exceptions, the story is limited to Jim's point of view and this limitation means the reader doesn't know what's happening until Jim knows. An example of this is seen as Jim and his family are preparing for the big event at the school. Mr. White shows up to go with them and it obviously makes Cissy somewhat angry though Jim doesn't realize why. Cissy says she won't allow her brothers to make a fool of her and the reader will likely come to the conclusion that she knows they are trying to arrange it so that Cissy accepts Mr. White's marriage proposal. Jim's perspective is that of a youngster and he makes it clear on several occasions that he feels overwhelmed with fears of what's to come, what he doesn't yet understand, and what he's called on to do. He takes solace in the fact that he is loved and protected by his uncles.

Setting

The story is set in the south in the 1930s. The time is made clear by the fact that Cissy tells Jim there's a "depression going on." The time setting is supported by the vehicles available and the lack of technology. Jim's uncles have trucks available but they still plow with mules. There is no electricity until late in the book and the first time the lights are turned on are such a momentous occasion that Zeno, Al, and Coran wake Jim in the middle of the night to see the event. There are, however, few of the very serious hardships that faced people as the depression wore on, indicating the time was probably early in the 1930s. There are several specific settings in the story. The main overall setting is the fictitious town of Aliceville where Jim and his family live. Within the town is the home Jim shares with his mother. Another is the field where Jim's uncles farm and where Jim tries to keep up with the men as they are hoeing the weeds from the corn field on Jim's tenth birthday. Another is the new schoolhouse which is made of brick and meant to accommodate several consolidated schools from the region. Other specific settings include Uncle Al's store, Amos Glass's property, the farm near Charlotte, the shore of the Atlantic Ocean where Jim and Uncle Al see the ocean for the



first time, and Penn's house. Jim and Penn meet up with the boy who calls himself "King" in the town of New Carpenter. Settings are described only to a minimum degree and the descriptions are used chiefly to help move the action. The settings are believable and realistic.

Language and Meaning

The story is written in a straight-forward manner with an overall tone of hope. The coming of age theme is prevalent throughout the story and colors some sections with an undercurrent of fear as Jim realizes he is still very young with a great deal of growing up left to do and a great many things left to learn. The story flows in chronological order with a few pieces of historical information presented in the form of stories told to Jim by others. The most important example is seen in the story Uncle Zeno tells about Jim's father's encounter with the panther. Uncle Zeno says the panther spoke to Jim's father and that some people believe the haunt followed Jim's father when he left the mountain, eventually claiming his father's life. This story frightens Jim and gives a brief undertone of fear though Uncle Zeno says his purpose in telling Jim was not to frighten him. There is a sense of hopelessness seen when Jim encounters his grandfather in person for the first and last time. As Jim watches the old man through the window, he senses that he's lost a great deal by not having a father of his own though he's grateful that his three uncles have always taken care of him. There is also a sense of lost chances as it's clear that Jim's father and grandfather parted on bad terms and never made up.

Structure

The story is divided into six sections referred to as "books." Book I is titled Birthday Boy and includes six chapters. Those are: Breakfast, A Day of Work, An Unexpected Gift, Baptism, After Supper, and Jim at Bat. Book II is titled "Jim Leaves Home" and includes only one chapter - The Wide Sea. Book III is titled "Town Boys and Mountain Boys." There are seven chapters in this book. They are: First Day, Big Day, An Unexpected Guest, News from the Mountain, A Victory of Sorts, King, and Blackbirds. Book IV is titled "Cold Nights" and includes two chapters - Christmas Eve and At the Tenant House. Book V is titled "Quiet Days." The two chapters in that book are A Game of Catch and An Afternoon in the Sun. The final book is titled "The View from Up Here." The only chapter in that book is Our Boy. The chapter titles are indications of what happens in that chapter but most of the titles are rather obscure. For example, there is a chapter titled only "Breakfast" which gives little indication of the action to come other than the fact that the family eats breakfast. In the chapter titled "The Wide Sea," Jim and his Uncle Al travel to Charlotte, North Carolina, where they expect to buy a pair of horses but find the man who'd owned the horses had killed them. The book title gives no clue about that but makes reference to the fact that Jim and Al travel on to the ocean where they are amazed by the sight.



Quotes

"Mr. Glass, it is my solemn promise to you that we will raise Jim in the heart of our family and see with God's help that he becomes the kind of man his father would have wanted him to be." Prologue

"Jim gazed up at his mother and the uncles as if he had a wonderful story to tell them but could not remember their language. Everyone seemed as happy as if they had received a bat and glove themselves, although Mama's eyes looked a little wet." An Unexpected Gift

"Uncle Al Would say only that they were going to see a man about a dog. Jim knew from experience that wasn't their true destination - there never was a dog - but he did enjoy the mystery." - The Wide Sea

"There was a depression on. Mama said depression made people mean." - The Wide Sea

"He was pleased when the other boys began to ask him what they should do and where they should go, as if they had met secretly before he got there and elected him leader." First Day

"That was the last we ever saw of Bill McKinney in this country. Seeing that sign on the side of the depot pained him so much that he got off the train at Ne Carpenter and refused to get back on it." Big Day

"But because Mr. Carson knew stories that Jim hadn't heard, Jim's father suddenly seemed close by, the way he did sometimes, as if he had left the room moments before Jim got there." News from the Mountain

"'Nobody ever gets anything all by himself,' Uncle Al said." A Victory of Sorts

"Jim had never noticed the darkness before. He felt on the verge of knowing something that he didn't want to know." - Christmas Eve

"Jim sat in his room and waited to die. He had squatted on the ground and held Penn's hand." An Afternoon in the Sun

"'Do we have to go see my granddaddy?' Jim asked. 'We don't have to, but if we don't, someday you'll wish we had.'" Our Boy

"Through the distance the light seemed to flicker, as if struggling to remain lit against the great emptiness around it." Our Boy



Topics for Discussion

Describe the young Jim Glass. What kind of character is he? Is he likeable? Is he believable? If you lived during this time, would you likely be his friend? Why or why not?

Who is Penn Carson? How does he meet Jim? Describe how the boys feel about each other as the story opens. How does that change over the course of the story? Why does it change? What do you believe will be their relationship over the next few years?

Describe the three uncles. What are their jobs? What are their roles in Jim's life? What kind of people are they? How does Jim feel about them?

What happened to Jim's father? What effect has this had on Jim's life? What is the theory Uncle Al has about the death of Jim's father?

Who is Cissy? What kind of character is she? What does she consider to be the most important role in her life? What is her reaction to Whitey Whiteside's proposal? Why does she react in this way?

Describe Aliceville and how it was named. Is the story reasonable? How did your town get its name? Compare the two stories.

Who is Amos Glass? Pete? Miss Nanney? Abraham? King? How is each connected to Jim? What is the role of each in the story?