

King of Shadows Study Guide

King of Shadows by Susan Cooper

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

King of Shadows Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	7
Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.....	9
Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.....	10
Chapter 7.....	12
Chapter 8.....	13
Chapter 9 and Chapter 10.....	15
Chapter 11.....	17
Chapter 12 and Chapter 13.....	19
Chapter 14.....	21
Chapter 15.....	23
Chapter 16 and Chapter 17.....	25
Chapter 18.....	27
Chapter 19.....	29
Characters.....	30
Objects/Places.....	32
Themes.....	36
Style.....	39
Quotes.....	42
Topics for Discussion.....	44



Plot Summary

King of Shadows by Susan Cooper is a tale about a young boy's journey to overcome his devastating past in exchange for a hopeful future. Nat is an orphan who escapes into the world of the theatre to avoid his sadness. Nat is magically transported back to Elizabethan England, where he becomes apprenticed to William Shakespeare, who helps Nat learn to face his emotions and properly grieve his parents.

King of Shadows is a thoughtful tale of discovery set in one of the most exciting times in the history of the theatre. The year is 1999, and the Company of Boys gather in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to rehearse productions of William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and A Midsummer Night's Dream. The company's director stresses the importance of the group functioning as a family, and the company spends a lot of time playing theatre games to build trust amongst the group. The Company of Boys will rehearse in the United States for three weeks, and then will travel across the Atlantic to London, England, to perform their plays at the Globe Theatre.

In London, Nat falls suddenly ill during rehearsal, and goes to bed to fight off the sickness, which turns out to be bubonic plague. Nat wakes up the following morning, four hundred years in the past, in 1599. Nat slowly starts to piece everything together and realizes he may have traveled to Elizabethan England. Nat is taken to the Globe Theatre, where he learns he has been borrowed from the St. Paul's School to play the role of Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Nat is introduced to Shakespeare, who is one of his idols, and learns he will be playing opposite Shakespeare in the performance. Nat joins the other apprentices in Shakespeare's acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, in their daily classes, and Nat has a chance to show off his incredible tumbling skills.

Nat unintentionally makes enemies with Roper, one of the apprentices, who is envious of Nat's privilege as a St. Paul's School student. Roper makes Nat's life difficult, and gets him in trouble with Richard Burbage, one of the senior members of the Chamberlain's Men. When Roper challenges Nat to come with him to watch a bear fight, Nat has no choice but to attend. When Nat sees the blood spilling on the floor during the fight, he has a flashback to finding his father's body after he committed suicide, and he runs away from the fight. Roper continues to tease Nat for being a wimp for leaving the fight.

Nat rehearses with Shakespeare for their scenes in A Midsummer Night's Dream, and during rehearsal Nat breaks down crying. Nat explains to Shakespeare how he lost both his parents, and Shakespeare offers him a shoulder to cry on. Shakespeare decides to take Nat in as an apprentice and Nat moves into Shakespeare's house. Shortly after Nat moves in with Shakespeare, a nameless lord comes to visit Shakespeare, urging him to cancel the upcoming performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Shakespeare refuses, and the man leaves. Shakespeare tells Nat that Queen Elizabeth I specially requested the performance, and was planning to attend in secret. Nat is sworn to secrecy of her plans to come to the theatre.



At the theatre later that day, Roper chokes on an apple, and Nat performs the Heimlich maneuver to save him. The members of the company are shocked because the Heimlich maneuver has not yet been invented. Because of this, some of them begin to think Nat is a white witch. Later that night, Harry, one of the apprentices, tells Nat about the political climate of Elizabethan England. Nat starts to worry for the safety of the Queen if she attends *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Before Nat goes to bed that night, Shakespeare gives him a poem about the everlasting power of love. Shakespeare tells Nat that his father still loves him, even though he killed himself.

The next day is the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and everyone is nervous with anticipation. Soldiers arrive to inspect the theatre, indicating that the Queen will in fact attend the performance. The play commences and goes according to plan. At the end of the play, Shakespeare has decided to dress the character of Queen Hippolyta to look like Queen Elizabeth I. The audience loves the costume and cheers in support of the Queen, who they do not realize is at the theatre watching this. The Queen loves the performance, and asks to Chamberlain's Men to perform at her palace the following month. After the successful performance, Nat joins the rest of the Chamberlain's Men to celebrate at the local tavern. Nat asks Shakespeare if he can stay in the Lord Chamberlain's Men instead of returning to St. Paul's School. Shakespeare tells him he must return to school, but that he will save him a place in the company for when he graduates.

Nat goes to sleep feeling hopeful, and wakes up back in 1999, fully recovered from the plague. Nat is devastated to lose a second father figure, and becomes emotionally volatile. Nat returns to rehearsal for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Company of Boys, but is dissatisfied with the contemporary production. Nat argues with Arby, the director of the production, and runs from the theatre in tears after the director speaks badly of Shakespeare. Nat tells his friends Gil and Rachel about his trip to 1599, and they believe him. The three of them do research and discover that Nat must have switched with another Nat Field from 1599, who had bubonic plague, in order to save Shakespeare from catching the disease. Arby tells Nat that he intentionally cast Nat in the Company of Boys so that the swap could take place. With this new understanding, Nat is able to find significance in his past and can finally address his grief properly.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

King of Shadows by Susan Cooper is a tale about a young boy's journey to overcome his devastating past in exchange for a hopeful future. Nat is an orphan who escapes into the world of the theatre to avoid his sadness. Nat is magically transported back to Elizabethan England where he becomes apprenticed to William Shakespeare, who helps Nat learn to face his emotions and properly grieve his parents. King of Shadows is a thoughtful tale of discovery set in one of the most exciting times in the history of the theatre.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1999, the Company of Boys is playing a series of theatre games on their first day of rehearsal for Julius Caesar and A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare. Nat thinks some of the games, including tag, are childish for the group of teenagers. The company's director, Arby, leads the group through the games to help the boys become acquainted with one another and build trust. Arby explains that the Company of Boys must function as a trusting family in order for their plays to be successful. When one of the boys plays a trick on Nat pretending to drop him during a trust exercise, Arby kicks the boy out of the company and sends him home.

The Company of Boys has twenty-four members, including the actors and the rehearsal staff. Arby and his staff selected the boys through a series of auditions in schools and youth theatres around the United States. The Company of Boys will rehearsal for three weeks in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and then will fly to London to continue rehearsals and perform their plays at the new Globe theatre, which is celebrating its inaugural season.

Throughout the first week of rehearsals in Cambridge, Arby continues playing games with the group to strengthen the company's bond. During the first reading of the play, Arby points out Nat's bad acting habits, including speaking too quickly and speaking with a southern accent. After the reading, Nat and some of the other actors discuss with Arby's assistant, Rachel, how strict his methods are. The conversation changes direction and the group discusses why they like being actors. When the group learns that Nat's parents are dead, Nat becomes uncomfortable talking about his past and receiving sympathy. As Nat excuses himself to go to the bathroom, he explains that he will feel better when he is in London pretending to be his character instead of being himself.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The main character is introduced here. Nat is a quiet and thoughtful boy who does not cause trouble or put up a fight. When a boy plays a trick on him, Nat apologizes for the



boy's actions. Then, when his director, Arby, is hard on him in rehearsal, he easily is overwhelmed. Nat is good at repressing his emotions and true opinions. He is thankful for the help of Rachel, the voice coach, because she is young like the rest of the boys in the company, and easier to relate to. Nat is a smart actor who is pleased to be in the Company of Boys and eager to learn from the other actors around him.

Nat is an orphan being raised by his aunt. Nat tries to hide his sadness, but is still grieving the loss of his parents. Nat's refusal to talk about the death of his parents foreshadows his struggle to properly grieve their deaths. He escapes from the troubles of his life by acting on stage. When Nat tells some of the other members of the Company of Boys that his parents are dead, he immediately wants to change the subject, and ultimately walks away to escape the reality altogether. The reader should note that Nat's denial to grieve will only become more complicated as rehearsal continues and he suppresses his feelings.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The Company of Boys fly to London. Some of the boys live in a hostel, and the rest, including Nat, are placed in individual homes. Nat lives with the Fisher family along the Thames River. The Fisher's do not inquire of his parents' whereabouts when they learn he lives with his aunt, which puts Nat at ease. The Fisher's enthusiastically support the work being done at the new Globe Theatre, and think of the Company of Boys as professional actors.

Nat remarks at how much he learns about his character, Puck, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by rehearsing with the talented and older Gil Warmun, who plays his master, Oberon. Rachel, Arby's assistant, is Gil's girlfriend as well as the voice coach, and tells Nat that his southern accent is actually closer sounding to Elizabethan English in Shakespeare's time it is to modern day English.

The Company of Boys is not allowed to rehearse on the stage of the new Globe until a couple days after arriving in London. Arby also forbids the boys from seeing any performances at the new Globe, so as to not be influenced by other actors. Nat explains that Arby's strict nature is a little scary. He remembers being nervous about first meeting Arby when he auditioned for the Company of Boys, and that Arby's behavior was confusing. Arby particularly likes Nat for his excellent acrobatic skills.

As Nat and the other boys run toward the theatre on the first day of rehearsals on the stage, Nat stumbles and becomes momentarily dizzy with a headache. He hears distant music, and smells both a sweet and putrid odor. Nat recovers and continues into the theatre, only to feel a buzzing in his head and another sour stench a few moments later. Once the rehearsal officially begins, Nat forgets about his ailments and escapes into the world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

During the first rehearsal, Nat notices that Eric Sawyer, the meek boy who follows Nat around, is quite animated when he is acting. He also comments that Gil Warmun carries himself like a real-life king on stage. When Arby orders Nat to jump off the stage and make an exit through the audience, Gil challenges Arby's direction. Arby chillingly asserts his dominion over the production, and the rehearsal continues without interruption. Suddenly, near the end of rehearsal, Nat becomes dizzy for a third time and stumbles over. Gil anticipates the fall and catches Nat.

Gil and Rachel escort Nat home after rehearsal. Later than night at the Fisher's, Nat leaves the dinner table to throw up. He spikes a sudden fever, and goes to bed. Mrs. Fisher assures Nat that it is probably just a twenty-four-hour virus.



Chapter 2 Analysis

Nat is particularly attuned to the details of the world around him. He notes specific differences between other US cities he has visited and London. When the Fishers do not ask about his parents, Nat wonders if maybe all British people are just less nosy than Americans are. While he does not outwardly express his thoughts, Nat is very certain about his opinions. For instance, Nat is certain Gil will be a professional actor and is certain he will attend the same drama school as Rachel. Nat is still intimidated of Arby in rehearsal, and does not always perform to the best of his ability.

It is important to note Arby's behavior when he first meets Nat backstage of *Henry V*, for it foreshadows an important puzzle piece at the end of the book. Arby sees Nat's performance as the small role as the boy, and is impelled to meet him. When Nat tells Arby his name, Arby acts oddly toward him. Nat is puzzled by Arby's, "weird laugh, sort of triumphant" (p. 20). The reader should take note of Nat's name and Arby's feeling of success here, because Nat is in the Company of Boys for a very critical reason.

Also important to note in this chapter are the dizzy spells Nat has on his first day at the Globe. He not only has a headache, but also smells a sour odor and hears a distant bell ringing. Nat is not aware of it, but he catches a glimpse of Elizabethan England, which will become very important to him in a few short hours.



Chapter 3 and Chapter 4

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 Summary

In chapter three, Nat dreams of flying high above the earth. In the dream he is guided by an unseen hand back down to the earth, through the clouds, into the next day.

In chapter four, Nat wakes up in a different bed, wearing different clothes than the night before. He is greeted by a boy named Harry who seems to know who Nat is, but who Nat has never met before. Nat does not recognize anything around him, but no longer feels ill. Harry remarks that he feared Nat had been suffering from the plague. He explains to the confused Nat that he is a student at St. Paul's School and is on loan to William Shakespeare's company for the week. Harry quickly dresses Nat so they may join Richard Burbage, with whom the two boys are living, on his way to the new Globe Theatre.

Nat begins to fear he has traveled back in time to 1599. Nat notices that the way Harry speaks sounds more like his southern accent from back home in South Carolina than it does modern day English from 1999. At breakfast, Nat meets Richard Burbage, a leading actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men who, like Arby, has a muscle that twitches under his left eye.

On the way to the new Globe, Nat is amazed by the filthy sights and smells of Elizabethan London. He is particularly disgusted by the site of decapitated human skulls atop tall poles near one end of London Bridge and throws up in the street.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 Analysis

In chapter three, the author intends for the reader to assume that Nat is having a dream that will be explained in the next chapter.

In chapter four, Nat wake up four hundred years in the past. Everything around him is different than he remembers from the night before in the Fisher's apartment. His bed is hard, his clothing is old fashioned, and the sound of everyone's voice is a strange mix of Southern and British. When Nat hears that Harry feared he was suffering from the plague, Nat begins to suspect he may have traveled back in time because of all the Elizabethan references. Nat is scared, but no longer feels sick, and continues to learn about his new environment. When Nat meets Richard Burbage, he notices a muscle twitching under his left eye. The reader should take note that Arby also has a similar twitch under his left eye as well.



Chapter 5 and Chapter 6

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 Summary

In chapter five, Nat's fever worsens throughout the night. Mrs. Fisher becomes worried and calls for an ambulance. Nat is taken to the emergency room at Guy's Hospital in London where his symptoms confound the nurses. The doctor on duty believes Nat is suffering from a case of the bubonic plague, and calls a tropical medicine specialist.

In chapter six, Nat sees the new Globe for the first time. He notes that the building is quite similar to the old Globe he knows in 1999, but that the surroundings beyond the theatre are much sparser. Nat learns that the new Globe was finished only four months earlier, and the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's company, has recently christened the new theatre.

Inside the theatre, Nat walks in on an argument between William Shakespeare and Will Kempe, an actor in the Chamberlain's Men, who dramatically quits the company. Nat finds Shakespeare's voice comforting, even in the heat of the dispute. With Will Kempe gone, Richard Burbage woefully will assume his role of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Richard Burbage introduces Nat to Shakespeare, whom Nat reveres as a god. Nat learns that the Queen has requested a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the Chamberlain's men are in a frenzy to prepare for her Majesty's attendance later in the week. With this information, Nat is sworn to secrecy of the Queen's plans to visit the new Globe. As Nat leaves to attend classes with Harry and the other apprentices in the Chamberlain's Men, he is sad to leave the comfort of Shakespeare's presence.

As Nat waits for class to begin, he notices that everything is louder than he imagined Elizabethan England would be. Henry Condell, an actor in the company, arrives to teach a tumbling class. He tells Nat to try to follow along the best he can. Roper, one of the most talented and cocky apprentices, doubts Nat's ability, since he is merely a St. Paul's Boy. Throughout the class, Nat performs acrobatic tricks that surprise Henry and the other apprentices. Roper continues to belittle Nat, but with each exercise, Nat continues to excel, fueling Roper's dislike of him.

After the tumbling class, Richard Burbage returns to teach a speaking class where each boy recites a monologue for the class. Nat wants to do a speech from *Hamlet*, but cannot remember if it was written before or after 1599. Instead, he recites Oberon's speech from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the role that Shakespeare will play when the play is performed for the queen later in the week. Shakespeare overhears Nat saying the speech and congratulates him on his recitation.

After the speaking class, another company member named John Heminges teaches a fencing class. Nat has no training in fencing, and cannot out-compete Roper, who is an excellent fencer. Roper knows he can make a fool of Nat in front of everyone. When



John Heminges sees that Nat cannot defend himself against Roper, he steps in to stop him, which makes Roper resent Nat even more.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 Analysis

In chapter five, Nat becomes rapidly sicker. The bubonic plague is eradicated from the modern world, so Mrs. Fisher is baffled by Nat's condition. The doctor is shocked to discover the cause of Nat's sickness because it is so rare.

At this point, the author still has the reader believe Nat is dreaming his experience in Elizabethan England.

In chapter six, Nat is first introduced to the new Globe of 1599. Nat notes that much of the theatre is the same as the replica he is familiar with in the twentieth century. It is important to note that the only person who knows Nat Field from St. Paul's School from where he is on loan is Will Kempe. Will Kempe is an actor in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, but he abruptly quits the company just as Nat arrives at the theatre. The two never cross paths, so Nat's true identity is never compromised.

It is important to note that Nat is sworn to secrecy that the Queen will attend the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The safety of the Queen is a huge priority, and there will be larger ramifications surrounding her visit that will come to light later in the novel.

Nat unintentionally makes an enemy of Roper. Roper is envious of Nat's privilege as a St. Paul's Boy. Roper is an arrogant showoff, and when Nat's talents match his, Roper feels challenged. Nat does not want to make enemies with anyone, especially being a stranger in a Timeless world, but he also has pride as a performer that he cannot ignore. Nat is not pleased to have an enemy in Roper.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

After classes are finished, the senior apprentice, Sam Gilbourne, takes the rest of the apprentices to lunch. As the boys eat meat pies and drink beer, they talk about the play that will be performed in the afternoon, *The Devil's Revenge*. After lunch, Nat and Harry are assigned to work the trapdoor of the stage during the performance. Roper is assigned to be their signalman, indicating when to pull the door open to drop an actor through the floor onto a cushion below. The first two cues to open the trapdoor are successful, but Roper sabotages Nat and Harry on the third cue, and calls the signal intentionally early. Richard Burbage falls through the trapdoor prematurely and scolds the boys. Roper denies the whole thing, and Sam Gilbourne urges all the apprentices to put the whole incident behind them after the performance.

Roper suggests that the apprentices go to the bear pit, since he knows a way to sneak in without paying. He specifically challenges Nat to join, making fun of his bravery since he is a sheltered St. Paul's Boy. Nat has no choice but to attend. Inside the bear pit, crowds cheer on a brown bear, tied to a pole in the center of a theatre-like space, as it fights dogs. The bear kills several of the dogs. To Nat's horror, he discovers that the bear is blind. The bear kills another dog, and the blood on the floor triggers a memory that sends Nat running from the bear pit to escape the memory.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The notion of blood is important in this chapter. The discussion of blood begins early in the chapter during lunch, when Sam Gilbourne talks about the blood pack he uses during *The Devil's Revenge*. From the discussion, it becomes clear that Roper has an infatuation with blood. After Roper trick Nat into pulling the trapdoor open early, Roper challenges him to join the rest of the group at the bear pit, a place where a blinded brown bear fights dogs for sport. It is clear that Roper think Nat is a sissy boy, and Nat knows it. Nat feels no choice but to attend. At the bear pit, Nat is horrified to find the audience taking such pleasure in the blood sport. As the bear kills dog after dog, spilling their blood and guts on the floor, Nat has a flashback to another instance of blood that upsets him. It is important for the reader to notice this memory, written in italics, since it will be connected to Nat's father's suicide later in the novel.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Roper continues to make Nat feel miserable. Nat feels like he doesn't belong, and equates it to the culture shock of leaving a first world country to camp in a third world country. As days go by, Nat fights off feelings of panic, and wonders what his friends and family back home are thinking of his disappearance. He does not let himself cry, because crying reminds him of when his father died, and he does not want to relive the terrible memory.

The apprentices attribute Nat's differences to the fact that he is a sheltered student at St. Paul's School. Everything from his clothes to his accent are slightly different from everyone else's. Nat realizes that Roper dislikes him because he is envious of his privilege, being a St. Paul's Boy. However, this makes Nat feel even worse. Roper continues to provoke Nat by teasing him about leaving the bear pit. Nat becomes angry and is about to hit Roper, when Shakespeare and another actor step in to stop the altercation. Shakespeare orders everyone to leave the stage except Nat, with whom he intends to privately rehearse a scene for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Nat uses Arby's stage direction from his production in 1999 and plays out the scene with Shakespeare. However, Shakespeare does not let Nat make an exit through the audience, which challenges what Arby adamantly ordered Nat to do when they rehearsed the same scene at the old Globe in 1999. When Shakespeare assures Nat that, despite Roper's displeasure for him, the Chamberlain's Men is a tight-knit family by resting his arm on Nat's shoulder, Nat starts to cry. Shakespeare patiently lets Nat cry into his shoulder until he is able to compose himself again. Nat tells Shakespeare that his mother died of cancer and his father killed himself shortly after. Shakespeare tells Nat that his son, Hammet, died three years earlier. Nat mishears him, and thinks Shakespeare's son was named Hamlet. Shakespeare tells Nat that he has a play in mind called *Hamlet* that he is writing for Richard Burbage. He also then tells Nat he has a poem for him that will make him feel better. When their rehearsal is interrupted due to time constraints, Shakespeare asks Nat if he would like to come live with him for the rest of the week so they may rehearse together at home. Nat gladly accepts the offer.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Nat has been in Elizabethan England for a few days now, and he is starting to worry that he may be stuck in 1599 forever. Nat is a kid of the twentieth century, accustomed to the luxuries and amenities of modern day living. He is struggling to make do with the rudimentary living, which he equates to camping in a third world country. He worries about his friends and family back home.

However, Nat is not willing to address his emotions directly, instead opting to escape into the world of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He uses rehearsals as a



way to avoid his fear of living in the sixteenth century forever and to avoid the reality of his father's suicide. By not letting himself cry, he thinks he is addressing his feelings by being strong. In fact, he is doing the opposite by ignoring them. This becomes painfully obvious when Nat breaks down crying in front of Shakespeare. Nat is vulnerable, though he does not realize it, and Shakespeare's fatherly presence causes him to break down. Shakespeare happily listens to Nat's problem, and Nat feels better having a father figure to rely on. When Nat moves in with Shakespeare, Nat is set on a track that will eventually lead him to properly grieve his parents, though he does not know it.



Chapter 9 and Chapter 10

Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 Summary

In chapter nine, Nat is semi-delirious and half-conscious in an isolation room at Guy's Hospital in 1999. The nurses on duty do not notice that he looks and sounds different than other boys his age because they have never seen him before. The duty nurse, Nurse Stevens, hums a sixteenth century lullaby, which calms Nat and lulls him to sleep.

In chapter ten, Nat moves into Shakespeare's home. Mistress Fawcett, who tends to Shakespeare's home, greets him. She shows Nat to his bedroom, which has a real bed and pillows, to Nat's surprise. Mistress Fawcett informs Nat that when he is working upstairs, no one is to disturb Shakespeare.

Shakespeare lives only a few short minutes from the new Globe, and Nat remarks again at how different Elizabethan London is from modern day London. Mistress Fawcett warns Nat not to go outside alone, since the streets of Elizabethan London are very dangerous. Nat has a memory of his father, who was also a writer, like Shakespeare. Nat notes that this is the first time he has not cried when thinking about his father.

A nameless lord arrives to speak to Shakespeare, and Mistress Fawcett is unable to stop him from going upstairs to talk to him. Nat and Mistress Fawcett quietly listen to the conversation through the wall of Nat's bedroom. The nameless lord asks Shakespeare to cancel the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that the Queen specially requested and plans to attend. The lord believes the Queen is foolish to attend and therefore put herself in harms way because of political unrest. Shakespeare refuses to bow down, insisting the show must go on because the Queen requested it. Shakespeare also asserts that he is not political and has no stake in the matter. The nameless lord leaves, and Nat and Shakespeare leave for the new Globe.

At the theatre, Roper and another apprentice, Thomas, are reviewing lines for *Henry V*. Roper does not speak his French lines correctly, and makes a snide comment about it not mattering since no one in the audience will understand anyway. When Thomas asks Nat if he can speak French, Nat responds by saying "yes" in French. This annoys Roper, and he calls Nat's fluency a girly talent. The Chamberlain's Men perform *Henry V* that afternoon, starring Richard Burbage in the title role. During the performance, Roper chokes on an apple backstage, and Nat performs the Heimlich maneuver to save him. Everyone is astounded because the maneuver has not yet been invented. Nat claims that his aunt taught him how to do the maneuver. Nat steps in to play Roper's role since he has played the role once before. When Nat exits the stage, Roper thanks him for saving his life and tells Nat he is in his debt. Nat is proud to have helped his new theatre family. Watching the rest of the show from backstage, Nat is surprised when Shakespeare adds a compliment about the Earl of Essex during a speech. Richard Burbage appears frightened by the compliment Shakespeare inserts about the Earl.



Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 Analysis

In chapter nine, it is important to notice that the nurses have never met Nat before, and therefore do not recognize him. This foreshadows the switch between Nat Field of 1999 and Nat Field of 1599. None of the nurses have seen Nat before, and therefore cannot see that - as we will learn later - he is a different boy. It is also interesting to note that the sixteenth century tune that the nurse hums to soothe Nat may be a song that Nat knows from life back in 1599 at St. Paul's School.

In chapter ten, Nat references some parallels and comparisons that are interesting. Most fascinating is that both his father and Shakespeare are writers. Both men had private studies in which they worked, and neither is to be disturbed when they are working. Not only does Shakespeare fill a fatherly void for Nat, but he has similar characteristics, as well.

The nameless lord's cryptic visit is another important element of this chapter. The lord warns Shakespeare to cancel the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* requested by the Queen. The lord argues that in the current political climate, the Queen's safety is uncertain because she has not yet selected an heir to the throne. Shakespeare refuses to cancel the performance, arguing he has no political investments. It is important to note Shakespeare's political stance in this chapter, because he will ultimately take actions during several upcoming performances that will defy his supposed political indifference. One of the instances is in this chapter, when Shakespeare inserts a compliment about the Earl of Essex into *Henry V*. The crowd cheers in support of the Earl.

The most out of place Nat finds himself in is when he performs the Heimlich maneuver on Roper to save him from choking on an apple. The maneuver was not formalized into the late 1970s, so when Nat performs the procedure on Roper, he stuns the members of the Chamberlain's Men who witness it. Without stepping in, Roper could have easily died, so many company members assume Nat performed magic on Roper. Nat has no way of explaining his actions, and the rumors that he is a witch - albeit a benevolent one - begin to circulate.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Nat starts to fill with worry. He is worried because Shakespeare and Richard Burbage are frightened by the political unrest surrounding the Queens visit. Nat also remembers from Arby's history lessons about Elizabethan England that the Queen had the Earl of Essex executed. Nat also begins to worry about what will happen when he returns to St. Paul's School and nobody recognizes him. Instead, Nat tries to force the worry from his mind, and immerses himself into rehearsal for A Midsummer Night's Dream later that night.

Everyone in the Lord Chamberlain's Men is more interested in Nat having saved Roper from choking than from having assumed Roper's role. Nick Tooley, an apprentice, asks if Nat's aunt is a wise woman. Not understanding the question, Nat answers yes. After rehearsal, Nat and Harry join Shakespeare and Richard Burbage at the nearby tavern. Harry explains to Nat that a wise woman is a witch, and calls Nat naïve. Harry explains the political climate of England in 1599 to Nat, and Nat covers his tracks by saying that St. Paul's Boys are sheltered from current events of the outside world. Harry continues to explain to Nat that because the Queen does not have an heir apparent, Shakespeare, Burbage and the rest of the company is worried that someone will try to harm they Queen when she attends A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Shakespeare and Nat leave the tavern and are escorted home through the dangerous streets by a hired bodyguard. Once home, Nat asks Shakespeare if he may stay with the Chamberlain's Men instead of returning to St. Paul's School. Shakespeare tells him he must return to St. Paul's, and gives Nat the poem he promised to give him earlier in the week. Nat cannot read Shakespeare's handwriting, so Shakespeare reads the sonnet aloud. Shakespeare explains that the sonnet's message suggests that the love between two people cannot be broken no matter how far apart they are from one another. Shakespeare kisses Nat goodnight and puts him to bed as if he were his father.

Chapter 11 Analysis

While Nat grows accustomed to the way of life in 1599, he also grows increasing concerned about his predicament. In the wake of the compliment about the Earl of Essex, Nat remembers from a history lesson given by Arby that The Queen had the Earl of Essex executed for treason in 1601. The dangerous political climate worries Shakespeare and Richard Burbage, and Nat shares their worry - and then some - because he knows what the future holds politically. Nat also continues to worry about returning to St. Paul's School at the end of the week where nobody knows him. As he usually does, Nat uses the rehearsals for A Midsummer Night's Dream to escape from his fears instead of addressing.



When Nat and Harry talk at the local tavern, Harry comments about Nat's lack of knowledge of current events. Nat makes an excuse that he is kept very sheltered at St. Paul's, but knows that he cannot keep up the act for much longer. Harry tells him that people talk about how odd he is, and explains to Nat what it means to be a white witch. When Harry explains the reason everyone is afraid for the Queen' safety, Nat continues to feel the weight of worry on his shoulders.

A hired bodyguard called a linkman, a precaution that vastly differs from the security of modern day London, escorts Nat and Shakespeare home from the tavern. In an effort to avoid returning to the foreign halls of St. Paul's, Nat asks Shakespeare if he can stay with him at an apprentice. Shakespeare tells him he must return, but the rest of the evening treats Nat as if he were his own son. Nat comments that perhaps Shakespeare is thinking of his own son, Hamnet, who recently died. Shakespeare acts very fatherly for the rest of the chapter, reading Nat a poem before he falls to sleep and kissing him on the head goodnight.



Chapter 12 and Chapter 13

Chapter 12 and Chapter 13 Summary

In chapter twelve, Nat's aunt, Jennifer Field, arrives at Guy's Hospital in London after flying overnight from South Carolina. She is told by Nurse Stevens that she cannot see Nat, but that his health is improving and he may be released from the hospital in a few days. Back in the isolation room, Nurse Stevens wonders why Nat, who is very disoriented, is acting and speaking so strangely. Nat speaks with a strange Elizabethan dialect and is confounded by the modern technology around him.

In chapter thirteen, Shakespeare nervously dresses himself the morning of the performance for the Queen. Nat and Shakespeare walk to the new Globe, where a flag is already flying, indicating a performance is to take place in the afternoon. Shakespeare tells Nat that if there are soldiers in the theatre, the Queen will be attending the performance. In the theatre, a day laborer flashes a sign to ward of the evil eye in Nat's direction at the suspicion he is a witch. By late morning, soldiers arrive to inspect the theatre, confirming for everyone in the Chamberlain's Men that the Queen will indeed be at the afternoon's performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Richard Burbage spends the afternoon painstakingly painting Nat's body with green paint in the shape of leaves to transform him into his character, Puck. Shakespeare comes to watch Burbage paint and says that the show will be sold out. When Burbage is finished with Nat's body paint, Nat puts on his Puck costume, and feels completely transformed into Puck. He is no longer Nat Field. Nat listens to the crowd becoming louder inside the theatre, and Shakespeare joins him in his anticipation of the impending performance. A pick-pocket grabs an audience member's purse, and the crowd captures and hustles the thief. A drunk man almost kills the adolescent cutpurse when Richard Burbage steps onstage and asks the crowd to show the boy mercy. In the chaos of the robbery, The Queen slips into the theatre unnoticed.

Chapter 12 and Chapter 13 Analysis

In chapter twelve, it is important to note the bizarre way Nat is acting in the hospital. His aunt has arrived from the United States, but no visitors are allowed to see him. He has an Elizabethan dialect, using words like "prithee", and is horrified at the twentieth century view of London outside his window. No one knows that the Nat in the hospital is from 1599 since he has remained in isolation since he arrived at the hospital.

In chapter thirteen, Shakespeare is very nervous the morning of the performance. His cool nature is off balance, as he changes his outfit three times before he leaves for the theatre. The author makes it very clear that there is a definite significance to how the performance is perceived by the Queen, and the reader should take note of this. Shakespeare will take a giant gamble during the performance of *A Midsummer Night's*



Dream in the next chapter, which if received well, will be very important for the Chamberlain's Men's future.

Nat joins Shakespeare in his nervous anticipation when he arrives at the theatre. The company is buzzing around preparing for the performance as the Queen's soldiers check the theatre for her Majesty's safety. It is ironic that the Queen is able to slip into the theatre unnoticed because of violence going among the groundlings below.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

As the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* begins, Nat is nervous with excitement. He cannot keep still, and Shakespeare takes hold of his shoulders to calm him down. Nat is in awe of Shakespeare when he is on stage, and regards him as king of the entire world. Nat notes that Shakespeare is not as strong of an actor as Richard Burbage, but has a natural ability to captivate his audience. As Nat goes about his business as the mischievous Puck on stage, an audience member yells to Puck to warn him of a mistake his character is about to make. The comment surprises Nat, but he recovers and continues with the scene. Shakespeare compliments Nat on his composure and professionalism when he exits the stage after the incident. As Nat continues to play his scenes, he is consumed with a high of happiness and delight.

Meanwhile, Sam Gilbourne, the senior apprentice prepares to make his final entrance as Hippolyta, dressed to look exactly like Queen Elizabeth I. His face is painted white, his lips red, and he wears pearls and a giant red wig with curls. When Sam makes his entrance, the audience gasps and audibly acknowledges Hippolyta's striking resemblance to the Queen. Then, the entire audience bursts into applause, yelling "God Save The Queen!" in support of her Majesty. Shakespeare breathes a giant sigh of relief. The play continues without incident, and as a final nod of respect for the Queen, Shakespeare directs his final speech to her private box in the gallery. Nat and Shakespeare hold hands during the curtain call, and after the performance, Shakespeare, Richard Burbage and Nat are invited to meet the Queen.

Chapter 14 Analysis

This chapter offers a look into some of the plot points of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As the performance is happening, Nat offers a basic description and context to various scenes of the play. Nat only skims the surface of the play however, and succeeds in expressing the excitement of the live performance more than offering exposition.

Nat demonstrates his natural talents as an actor in this chapter. When Nat's character, Puck, mistakes Prince Demetrius for Prince Lysander, and goes to put a love potion on his eyes, a member of the audience yells to him on stage to warn Puck of the mistake. As Nat proceeds forward with the scene, the audience member yells again, more desperately than before. Nat is startled by the interruption, but plays it cool and pretends that Puck hears a noise off in the distance. When Nat, as Puck, decides he hears nothing, he continues with the scene uninterrupted. Nat feels proud of himself when Shakespeare compliments him on his handling of the interruption.

Shakespeare takes his biggest risk at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by dressing the character Queen Hippolyta to look like Queen Elizabeth I. The costume is

not subtle, and the audience goes wild with excitement. It is important to note that Shakespeare previously makes the assertion to the nameless lord that he is not a political man. Therefore, this gesture, along with the nod to the Earl of Essex earlier in the week, is contrary to his earlier assertion.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, and Nat are escorted by soldiers to the Queen's private box. The nameless lord compliments Burbage on the idea to dress Hippolyta to look like the Queen. When Nat sees the Queen, he notes that she is not as beautiful as he expects. Only her red wig is the same. Nat is particularly disgusted by her rotten teeth. The Queen compliments Shakespeare on the play, particularly because it has no historical or political significance. Nat thinks the Queen has a flirtatious way of speaking. The Queen then congratulates Burbage on his performance and the new theatre. Finally, the Queen praises Nat, and asks if he would like to be a page in her Court. Nat declines, saying he is an actor and must stay in the theatre. Suddenly, the Queen is ready to leave, and she and her attendants immediately begin to depart. As she leaves, she tells Shakespeare that Hippolyta's wig was too red for her liking.

After the meeting, Nat tells Sam Gilbourne that the Queen thought he was pretty as Hippolyta. Sam is pleased to hear this. Then the Chamberlain's Men and the apprentices all go to celebrate at the local tavern. The Queen has asked the company to come to Greenwich to perform at her palace in one month's time, so there is even more good news to celebrate. Nat observes that he is becoming more comfortable with the lack of cleanliness in Elizabethan England. However, he is also struck with the realization that now he must return to St. Paul's School. Nat becomes forlorn and tries to pinpoint why he has traveled back in time to 1599. As Nat tries to figure out how he has been mistaken for the other Nat Field living in 1599, the other apprentices discuss how Nat is so oddly different from the rest of them. Nat wishes to tell the apprentices about all the advancements of the twentieth century, but becomes upset that he does not know how to make any of the advancements himself. Sam Gilbourne asks what Nat's father does, and Nat tells him he is dead.

As Nat and Shakespeare walk home, Shakespeare tells Nat he will miss him. He also tells him to keep the ten shillings he will pay Nat a secret from his teachers at St. Paul's School. Nat asks Shakespeare if he may return to the Lord Chamberlain's Men when he graduates from St. Paul's, and Shakespeare promises to hold a spot for him in the company. Nat decides he will translate Shakespeare's messy handwriting in the morning transcribe a copy of the sonnet for himself. As Nat falls asleep, with the poem under his pillow, he has a glimmer of hope that returning to St. Paul's the next day will be more of a mystery than a disaster.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The payoff is a huge success for the Chamberlain's Men for honoring the Queen during their performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Queen is very happy with the production, and invites the company to perform at her Palace in Greenwich the following

month. Performing at the palace will benefit the Chamberlain's Men since they will be rewarded a hefty sum for their service.

Nat is thrilled by the performance and about meeting the Queen. However, he is also very wary of what the future holds for him. Now that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is over, he will have to face the reality of returning to St. Paul's School where nobody knows him. Nat is also frustrated because he knows about advancements in modern health and hygiene, but is unable to offer the technology to his new friends in 1599. Nat becomes particularly forlorn when another apprentice asks him about his parents.

Nat is able to find a glimmer of hope when Shakespeare promises him a spot in the Lord Chamberlain's Men when he graduates from St. Paul's School. With this new hope, Nat explains that though he does not understand it fully, he knows that the sonnet Shakespeare gave him - along with his other experiences while apprenticed to Shakespeare - have helped him begin to heal some of his personal wounds. This assertion will be important for Nat when he is catapulted back into the twentieth century.



Chapter 16 and Chapter 17

Chapter 16 and Chapter 17 Summary

In chapter sixteen, Nat has a dream that he is a small child playing with his father. His father tosses him into the air and catches him. Nat rises higher and higher into the air until he is completely free from his father's reach. A woman's voice commands Nat to wake up.

In chapter seventeen, Nat wakes up in Guy's Hospital in London in 1999. He reaches for the poem under his pillow, but nothing is there. Nurse Jenkins, the new duty nurse, tells Nat he will be leaving the hospital today. Nat is confused because he has woken up in a different time for the second time in a week. Nat eats a big breakfast and takes a well-deserved shower. Nat is forced to sit in a wheelchair as he is rolled out the doors of the hospital. Aunt Jen cries when she sees Nat.

On the way back to the Fisher's apartment, Nat tries to figure out if his trip to 1599 was a dream or reality. He also tries to reconcile the fact that he may never see William Shakespeare again. Later that night, Gil and Rachel visit Nat at the Fisher's apartment. While giving Nat a hug, Rachel notices green paint on his neck in the shape of a leaf. Nat realizes that his trip to 1599 was not a dream.

When Nat goes back to rehearsals with the Company of Boys, he notices all the differences between the Globe of 1599 and the Globe of 1999. Arby is glad to have Nat back, but does not treat him special, despite having been so ill. Gil shows Nat all of the staging he missed, and Nat finds it eerily similar to Shakespeare's production in 1599. Nat does not feel a connection to Arby's production the way he had felt so passionately about Shakespeare's production the day before. In his discontent, Nat picks a fight with the costume designer over Puck's costume because it is so vastly different from Richard Burbage's leafy, green vision. During the run through rehearsal, Nat gets into another altercation, this time with the director, Arby. Arby wants Nat to exit a scene running through the audience. Nat tells Arby that Shakespeare thought it was corny to exit through the audience. Arby become irritated with Nat, and says that Shakespeare's opinion is not important since he is dead. Nat, struggling to deal with all the emotions of the past week, jumps off the stage and runs out of the theatre crying. Gil and Rachel follow after Nat, and sit with him on a bench by the Thames River as he tells them the story of his journey to 1599.

Chapter 16 and Chapter 17 Analysis

In chapter sixteen, Nat is transported back to 1999 in a dream. The dream he has about his father is a metaphor for the start of Nat's grieving process.

In chapter seventeen, Nat wakes up in 1999. Nat is confused about his experience in 1599, and cannot decide if what he experienced was a dream or was reality. He cannot



remember anything after going to bed sick at the Fisher's apartment a week ago, but has a wealth of knowledge about Elizabethan England that seems far too rich with details to have been imagined. Nat struggles to make sense of his current situation, and bears the weight of two losses now: the death of his parents, and now the loss of Shakespeare. When Nat discovers the remnants of some of the body paint Richard Burbage painted on him in 1599 for his Puck costume, Nat knows everything he experienced was real.

When Nat returns to rehearsal, he is not the same boy who Arby cast in the Company of Boys when he first auditioned for the company. Nat is no longer reserved and cannot hide his emotions like he used to. He is a teenager stuck between two worlds, with more emotional baggage than most people will ever accumulate in an entire lifetime. In his vulnerable state, Nat becomes easily upset and fights with Arby about the differences between the Company of Boys' production and Shakespeare's version. When Arby tells Nat that Shakespeare's opinions do not matter because he is dead, Nat cannot contain his grief any longer.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Gil and Rachel are excited about Nat's trip to 1599. They believe him because of the extreme details he offers and because of the green leaf painted on Nat's neck. Nat realizes he must have switched places when he went back in time with another Nat Field who lived in 1599. Since both Nat Fields have been isolated away for a week - Nat Field in 1599 interacted only with the Chamberlain's Men, none of whom knew him prior to his arrival, and the other Nat Field in 1999 was kept in isolation in the hospital for a week - nobody was able to tell the boys had swapped lives. Upon hearing this, Gil is eager to look in the theatre history books for the Nat Field from 1599.

Gil, Rachel and Nat go to Arby's house to look through the books in his study. They all immediately find Nat's name in three different books. The history books are consistent with what Nat experienced when he traveled to 1599. They learn that Nat Field became the star of The Blackfriar's Boys acting troupe in 1600, a year after graduating from St. Paul's School. Nat does not understand why he did not join the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Rachel explains to Nat that the Nat Field from 1599 never met Shakespeare because he had swapped with the Nat Field from 1999 and spent the week recovering from the plague in the hospital. Gil and Rachel then realize that by swapping with the Nat Field from 1599, Nat Field from 1999 saved Shakespeare from contracting the plague. Nat is still sad about losing Shakespeare as a father figure and tells Gil and Rachel about the sonnet Shakespeare gave him. Gil recognizes the poem, and finds a copy of the sonnet in the study. Arby walks into the study recites the poem by memory.

Chapter 18 Analysis

With the help of his friend, Nat is able to make sense of what physically happened to him over the past week. Nat's friends are really excited by his adventure and are eager to sort out the specifics. Nat does not share their joy. They figure out from the history books Arby owns that all of Nat's facts are verifiable. It is important for the reader to keep close attention to the detail of the explanation offered by the author. The extra details can make the explanation seem confusing, but a basic fact remains: Nat Field from 1999 went back in time and switched with another Nat Field who lived in 1599. While Gil and Rachel find this exciting, Nat still struggles to figure out why it all happened. Nat is sad about losing Shakespeare and does not think it is fair. Rachel and Gil help Nat realize that because of him, Shakespeare avoided catching the plague and lived to write his most famous plays after 1599. Elizabethan Nat Field who had the bubonic plague was transported to 1999 and recovered in Guy's Hospital. Healthy Nat Field was transported to 1599 and acted with Shakespeare in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, effectively saving Shakespeare's life. They hope Nat will find solace in this fact. However, he continues to stew in his sadness. Rachel and Gil find a copy of the sonnet Shakespeare gave to Nat, and reinforce the poem's meaning to Nat. Rachel convinces

Nat that since a part of Shakespeare is still with Nat in the poem, Nat owes it to Shakespeare to perform in his play with the Company of Boys, which Nat agrees to do.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Arby gives Nat a copy of Shakespeare's Sonnets and a copy of *The Tempest*. Nat returns to rehearsal, and that night sleeps very soundly. At breakfast the following morning, Nat and Aunt Jen agree to talk about Nat's father more openly. At breakfast, Nat also discovers that Arby's full name is Richard Babage.

After breakfast, Nat reports to the theatre for final preparations before the first performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Arby is in a particularly irritable mood, and Nat loses his temper, challenging Arby's authority. Arby dismisses the rest of the actors and orders Nat to speak with him privately. Arby explains to Nat that Time does not always travel in a straight line. Arby tells Nat that since the replica of the Globe was opened, it was his job to find a Nat Field whose personal suffering was strong enough to travel back in time to save Shakespeare. Arby then tells Nat that Shakespeare was sad that Nat never returned to the Chamberlain's Men after graduating from St. Paul's School. Arby explains that Shakespeare wrote a play inspired by his brief encounter with Nat in 1599 called *The Tempest*. Arby tells Nat he will play Ariel in *The Tempest* next summer with the Company of Boys. Nat is ready to begin his healing process, and prepares for the first performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Chapter 19 Analysis

This chapter offers a final resolution to Nat's story. With an understanding of what happened to him, Nat is left looking for the reason why he traveled back in time. Without fully understanding his situation, Nat is still emotional and irritable. Nat continues to speak out against Arby's direction, and Arby finally decides it is time to fill Nat in on the rest of the facts about his journey. Nat learns that he was intentionally brought into the Company of Boys so that he could save Shakespeare's life. Nat finally finds comfort in learning that Shakespeare wrote a play, *The Tempest*, inspired by Nat's time spent in 1599 with the Lord Chamberlain's Men. This final gift gives Nat the strength to move forward.

It is important to notice how the author blurs the lines between past and present, and dream and reality, in the explanation offered about Nat's experience. Nat confuses Arby's real name, Richard Babage for Richard Burbage momentarily. Nat also says that the light reflecting off of Arby's medallion necklace make him feel like he is flying through the night sky, just like he had dreamed when he was traveling to and from 1599. What is important about these blurred lines is that Nat is able to find a satisfying resolution for himself once he's learned all the facts, despite not quite being able to ground them in perfect reality.



Characters

Nat Field

Nat field is the main character of the book, who goes through a trip to 1599 and back again. Nat is an orphan, living with his aunt since his parents died. Nat's mother died of cancer when he was younger. His father, a writer, could not contain his grief, and killed himself. Nat found his body, and has the image of the blood on the floor ingrained in his memory. Nat has not been able to properly grieve their deaths, particularly his father's, and will not address his sadness. Instead he escapes into the world of the theatre to avoid his personal tragedy.

Nat became an actor at the suggestion of his aunt, who thought it would be a good way for him to deal with his grief. Nat excels at acting, particularly in acrobatics, and uses his skill to escape from his life. When Arby, the director of The Company of Boys, sees Nat is a production of Henry V, Arby invites him to audition for his all-boy company, and casts him as Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream, which will be performed at the Globe Theatre in London the following summer.

When Nat arrives in London, it is the year 1999. He becomes suddenly ill with what turns out to be bubonic plague. Nat goes to sleep in 1999 and wakes up four hundred years earlier in 1599 in Elizabethan England. He becomes an apprentice to William Shakespeare in his acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and plays the role of Puck. Nat finds a father figure in Shakespeare, and the two become close friends. Shakespeare helps Nat begin to reconcile his parent's death. After a successful performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream, Nat meets and is congratulated by Queen Elizabeth I, who has especially requested Shakespeare's company perform the play. Nat goes to sleep after celebrating with the Chamberlain's Men the successful performance, and wakes up in the hospital in London in 1999.

Nat is filled with grief about the loss of a second father figure in Shakespeare. He tries to understand why he has to continue suffering such losses, and cannot find a reason to mend his pain. Nat is fully recovered after a spending a week in the hospital, and returns to rehearsals for The Company of Boys' production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Nat is emotionally fragile, and has several arguments with Arby, the director, about how Shakespeare would have done the play. Arby tells Nat that Shakespeare's opinion do not matter because he is dead, and Nat runs away from the theatre crying. Nat tells his friends Gil and Rachel about his journey to the past. Gil and Rachel believe him, and help him try to understand why it all happened. The trio discovers that Nat Field from 1999 swapped with another Nat Field in 1599. By swapping places, Nat saved William Shakespeare's life, because the Nat from 1599 would have given Shakespeare the bubonic plague if they had not swapped. When Nat learns that Arby had intentionally cast him in the Company of Boys so that such a time traveling swap could take place, he begins to understand the significance of his experience, and is able to begin to properly grieve the loss of his parents.



William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare becomes an invaluable part of the main character's life in the novel. When Nat falls suddenly ill in London in 1999 while rehearsing for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Globe in London, he goes to sleep and wakes up in Elizabethan England in 1599. William Shakespeare's acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, has borrowed Nat from St. Paul's School where he is a student, to act in their production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Nat and Shakespeare form a fast friendship, Shakespeare filling a much-needed void in his young life as a surrogate father figure. Shakespeare takes him into his home as an apprentice, offering Nat the love and support he desperately seeks. He offers sympathy and support to Nat when Nat divulges his personal struggles to him, and helps Nat to begin to reconcile the loss of his parents, his father in particular. He assures Nat, by giving him a poem about the everlasting power of love. The sonnet talks about love's unfaltering ability to transcend time, distance, and life itself. Shakespeare tells Nat that the poem represents the love Nat's father will always have for Nat, even though he is no longer alive.

Shakespeare acted in and wrote plays for the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Later in his career, he acted less, offering his talents solely as a playwright. Nat comments about Shakespeare that he was not the best actor. What Shakespeare lacked in natural talent, however, he made up for in the ability to be a crowd pleaser. Audiences loved him, and forgave his shortcomings as a performer. Nonetheless, Nat loves acting on stage with Shakespeare, and describes him as a king when he is acting.

Williams Shakespeare is regarded as one of the most well respected playwrights of all time. He was a leading figure in popular entertainment in Elizabethan England and was highly regarded by Queen Elizabeth I herself. Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, lived in and worked in London for much of his life, and died in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1616. He wrote nearly forty plays and hundreds poems throughout his lifetime.



Objects/Places

Cambridge, MA

Cambridge, Massachusetts is located in eastern Massachusetts, just north of Boston. The Company of Boys rehearses in Cambridge for a few weeks before flying to London to perform at the Globe.

Company of Boys

The Company of Boys is the acting troupe lead by Arby, of which Nat is a member. The company will perform two of Shakespeare's plays in the newly opened Globe Theatre in London. A wealthy donor has donated all his money to fund the company.

Friends of the Globe

The Friends of the Globe are a group of supporters who helped to fund the newly built Globe Theatre. The Fisher family, with whom Nat is living in London, are Friends of the Globe.

The Globe

The old Globe Theatre is a replica of the new Globe theatre that opened in 1599. The new Globe theatre opened to the public in 1999. The Globe theatre is the setting for both Shakespeare's and Arby's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, set four hundred years apart.

The Sorbonne

The Sorbonne is part of the University of Paris. The Fisher's son is taking a summer course at the Sorbonne for the summer.

Southwark

Southwark is on the south bank of the Thames River in Central London. The Globe is located in Southwark.

Bubonic Plague

Bubonic Plague is a disease transmitted through rodents and fleas, characterized by swollen lymph nodes, or buboes. The plague thrived in Elizabethan England because of

the extreme filth in the city, and was usually considered a death sentence if contracted. Today, the disease is curable by taking antibiotics if detected early enough.

Groundlings

Groundlings are the audience members who pay the least amount of money to see plays at the Globe. The Groundlings stand during performances in an open space at the center of the Globe in front of the stage.

St. Paul's School

St. Paul's School is a private boys school founded in 1509. Though the school has moved since its founding, in 1599 it was located just north of St. Paul's Cathedral on the north side of the Thames River in the City of London. Nat Field is a student at St. Paul's School in 1599.

Thames River

The Thames River runs through the center of London from west to east.

London Bridge

London Bridge connects Southwark on the south bank of the Thames River to The City of London on the north bank of the Thames River. It was the only bridge spanning the Thames River in central London until 1793.

Guy's Hospital

Guy's Hospital is in Southwark in London. It is the hospital where Nat Field is treated for bubonic plague.

Bankside

Bankside refers to the section of Southwark along the Thames River. Because it was just outside the authority of the City of London where most entertainment was forbidden, it became the entertainment headquarters of London. The Globe stands in Bankside.

The City of London

The City of London refers to the one-square mile of London on the north bank of the Thames River across from London Bridge delineated in medieval times. Today, it is incorporated into the wider expanse of London.



Apprentice

An Apprentice is a person who learns a trade by observing and practices a skill on the job. The young boy actors in the Chamberlain's Men are apprentices to the older actors in the company. Nat becomes Williams Shakespeare's Apprentice.

The Tower

The Tower refers to the Tower of London, which was used as a prison in sixteenth century London.

Stratford

Stratford refers to the city of Stratford-upon-Avon where Shakespeare was born. The city is roughly one hundred miles northwest of London.

Greenwich

Greenwich refers to the area of east of London where the Palace of Placentia was located. The Queen invites the Lord Chamberlain's Men to perform at the palace after she sees A Midsummer Night's Dream at the Globe.

King of Shadows

King of Shadows refers to a line spoken by Puck to Oberon in A Midsummer Night's Dream. The line reads, "Believe me, King of Shadows, I mistook."

The King's Men

The King's Men refers to the name given to the Lord Chamberlain's Men after Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603. King James became the patron of the company when he assumed power, thus the name change.

The Gallery Rooms

The Gallery Rooms are the private boxes located on the balcony level of the Globe. The Queen sits in a room called "The Gentleman's Room" to privately watch A Midsummer Night's Dream.



White Witch

A White Witch refers to someone who practices magic for the benefit of everyone around them. When Nat saves Roper from choking by using the Heimlich maneuver (which has not yet been invented), members of Chamberlain's Men begin to suspect he is a White Witch.



Themes

Grief

Grief is a central theme to the novel, as seen through the main character, Nat. Nat is an orphan who is being raised by his aunt. Nat's mother died of cancer, and shortly after, his father commits suicide out of grief. Nat finds his father's body lying in a pool of blood, and has the image permanently ingrained in his memory. Left parentless, he moves in with his aunt. Nat and his aunt do not discuss the death of his parents, denying Nat the ability to grieve and move forward. At the recommendation of his aunt, Nat begins to act in community plays as a distraction from his sadness. Nat quickly takes to acting, and excels in the theatre. With acting as a distraction, Nat further distances himself from the grieving process.

When Nat joins the Company of Boys, his new friends ask about his parents. Nat is unwilling to address their deaths, and lets his emotions continue to fester without fully acknowledging them. When Nat is transported back to 1599, he finds a father figure in William Shakespeare, and with this newfound comfort, some of his emotions come rushing to the surface. Nat tells Shakespeare of his troubled past, and with Shakespeare's support, is able to begin the grieving process.

When Nat is transported back to the present in 1999, he suffers another devastating loss, this time losing Shakespeare as a surrogate parent. Nat is heartbroken by this newest loss, and cannot contain his emotions internally anymore. He has several arguments with Arby, the director of the Company of Boys, over the integrity of his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and ultimately loses control of his emotions altogether. When Arby explains to Nat the significance of his journey back to 1599, Nat is finally in a position to grieve the losses he has suffered and move forward.

Escape

Escape is another theme central to the novel. At the suggestion of his aunt, Nat begins acting as a way to avoid thinking about the death of his parents. Nat enjoys the stage and becomes deeply involved in acting. Nat discovers that he can let the real world melt away and he can disappear in the world of the character he is portraying on stage, thus avoiding his own sad reality. As more time passes since the death of his parents, Nat relies heavily on the escape he manages by acting to avoid his problems.

In the Company of Boys, Nat continues to use acting as an escape from all his problems. When friends ask him about his parents, Nat retreats from the group to escape talking about his past. When he becomes dizzy in rehearsal, he shrugs it off and escapes deeper into rehearsal instead of addressing his symptoms. When Nat travels back to 1599, he focuses on rehearsing for Shakespeare's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to avoid feelings of panic and confusion about his uncertain predicament.



Nat has fine-tuned his ability to escape his own reality for that of someone else's, but it comes with a price.

By escaping his own reality for so long, Nat has let his emotions sit unaddressed for an unhealthy amount of time. It is only a matter of time before his emotions reach an internal tipping point, and Nat's sadness eventually boils over. When Nat suffers a second devastating loss - this time with the loss of Shakespeare as a replacement father figure - Nat is unable to escape his problems any longer. With the help of members of the Company of Boys, Nat finds purpose and solace in his time spent in 1599 with Shakespeare, and is finally ready to address his past instead of escape from it.

The Love of Family

The Love of Family is another important theme of the novel. The main character's definition of family has been disrupted from a very early age. When his mother dies of cancer, and his father kills himself shortly afterward out of grief, Nat is left abandoned and moves in with his aunt who continues to raise him. While his aunt is a caring guardian, Nat lacks a father figure on whom he can rely.

When Nat is cast in the Company of Boys, Arby, the company's director, work to instill a trusting bond among all the actors in the company. Arby stresses that for their productions of Julius Caesar and A Midsummer Night's Dream to succeed, the boys must trust each other like a family. When one of the boys plays a trick on Nat during one of Arby's trust-building exercises, Arby immediately kicks the boy out of the company for violating the trust of the company as a whole.

When Nat is transported back in time to 1599, he discovers that Shakespeare's acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, follows a similar motto to Arby about family cohesion. Shakespeare emphasizes that The Chamberlain's Men functions as a close-knit family, forgiving the flaws of various family members when need be. Nat also finds a surrogate father figure in Shakespeare, who fills a much-needed void in his young life. Shakespeare takes him into his home as an apprentice while Nat is on loan to the Chamberlain's Men from St. Paul's School, offering Nat the love and support he desperately seeks. Nat is overjoyed to have the embrace of a family again. When he returns to present day London in 1999, he is devastated to lose Shakespeare's friendship. Nat struggles to understand why twice in his young life he has had to lose his family. Upon returning to the present, Nat and his aunt agree to start talking about Nat's father more, now that Nat is getting older.

Nat receives a poem from Shakespeare while he is in Elizabethan England. The poem, a sonnet, talks about love's unfaltering ability to transcend time, distance, and life itself. Shakespeare tells Nat that the poem represents the love Nat's father will always have for Nat, even though he is no longer alive. Nat struggles to understand the poem's significance at first, but somehow knows that the poem holds the key to eventually

healing his emotional wounds. When Nat returns to 1999, his friends find the sonnet in a printed book of Shakespeare's Sonnets, and confirm the meaning of the poem to Nat.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel switches back and forth between first person and third person. The protagonist, Nat, tells the first person point of view. Nat is honest and detailed in his descriptions. He is telling the story in the past tense, and relates his story the way he perceived his experience as it was happening to him. The reader experiences everything for the first time along with Nat. The other point of view is told in the third person. This point of view is omniscient and reliable. It is very basic and told economically. In comparison to Nat's very personal first person narration, the third person narrator feels quite distant and impersonal, merely relating facts.

Nat's first person narration reveals a lot about his character. His description of places and people is very detailed. It demonstrates his keen ability to absorb the world around him. He is a good actor because he can quickly think on his feet. His narration also demonstrates his personal struggles as well. Many times Nat will express the reader his true feelings, but will tell the people around him something different. Nat is struggling to grieve the loss of his parents, and his sense of sadness and conflict comes through in his narration.

Nat tells the story mostly through detailed expositions in the first person. Between the detailed back story are sections of dialogue that help expand upon the characters in the novel. Nat's detailed exposition is important because it fills in a lot of historical details through the book that would make the story confusing without the contextualization. The author keeps the reader focused on Nat's point of view for the majority of the book so that the reader must experience and form their own opinions about the extreme circumstances Nat finds himself in.

Setting

The first part of the novel is set in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1999. Cambridge is located just north of Boston across the Charles River. The Company of Boys gathers as a group for the first time in Cambridge, and begins to rehearse for the plays they will take to London to perform at the Globe Theatre. Cambridge is an old city, with beautiful brick buildings set along the winding Charles River. Harvard University is in the heart of the city. The Company of Boys spends a majority of their time rehearsing in a school auditorium. The book takes place in Cambridge for three weeks.

The second setting of the book is London, England, in 1999. Modern day London is beautifully kept and very modern. The Company of Boys will rehearse for another week in London, and spend the remainder of their time performing two of Shakespeare's plays at the Globe. While in London, the Company of boys are housed all over the city. Half of the boys live in a London University hostel north of the Thames River, which runs



through the center of the city. The other half of the boys are placed with foster families all around London. Nat stays with the Fisher Family who live in an apartment with a great view of the river. The Globe Theatre is on the south bank of the Thames River in an area called Southwark. This is where both the new Globe built in 1599 and the old Globe, a replica that opened to the public in 1999 stands.

The third location of the novel is set in Elizabethan London in 1599. In Elizabethan London, the City of London, located on the north bank of the Thames River is the heart of the city. Elizabethan London is dirty and smelly. There is trash and bodily waste in the streets and it has a terrible odor. Many people are sick because of the lack of sanitation. The bubonic plague is going around, and most people who contract it during the sixteenth century do not survive. The people in Elizabethan English speak a language that sounds like a combination of Southern American and modern day English. Nat notes that his accent from North Carolina sounds similar to Elizabethan English.

At the end of the novel, Nat returns to modern day London.

Language and Meaning

The language in this novel is casual and colloquial. Nat is a teenage boy, and the language in the book reflects his youth. He uses slang, profanity, and other forms of language that brings forward his everyday personality. At the same time, Nat is a very astute boy, and his observations are quite detailed. While he expresses himself in a casual manner, his train of thought tends to reflect a more thoughtful intellect. Nat has experiences a lot of hardship in his short life so far, and in the process has had to grow up quickly. As he repeatedly expresses, he uses acting as a way to escape from his personal life.

When Nat goes back in time to 1599, he maintains his informal, yet detailed language. However, the author introduces the Elizabethan English dialect into the story, and the reader must become familiar with the new speech pattern. In his exposition, Nat is kind enough to explain many of the differences, including the use of "tha" to mean "you". Some of the language may be tricky to decipher at first, but within the context of the conversation, along with Nat's clarifications, the reader can make sense of the dialogue.

The trickiest part of the language may in fact be the actual interpretation of the interpolated Shakespearean text into the novel. However, the author places the Shakespearean text in for affect only. Nat explains the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* throughout the novel, so it is not necessary for the reader to interpret Shakespeare's text. Those readers who are familiar with the plays already will find the interpolation fun, but not central the plot of the novel.

Structure

This novel is comprised of nineteen chapters. There are two kinds of chapters in the novel. The first person chapters, narrated by the protagonist, Nat, are roughly ten to



twenty pages each. There are fourteen first person chapters. The other kind of chapters is the third person omniscient chapters, which are roughly two pages each. There are five of these chapters. The chapters are each simply numbered, without a title. The first person chapters are full of exposition with dialogue inserted intermittently. The third person chapters are brief and simply update the reader of Nat's health condition.

The plot is fairly simply to follow, as the author keeps the focus on Nat, whose narration offers strong exposition as well as analysis of his personal feelings as he travels back to 1599. Every couple of chapters, the third person narrator steps in to give the reader an update on Nat's condition back in the hospital in modern day London in 1999. The most difficult aspect of the novel is understanding the explanation offered about Nat's time traveling. The explanation is a bit confusing, and the reader may want to reread the final explanation offered in chapters eighteen and nineteen to keep track of the details. The facts themselves are not terribly complex, but the reality is quite far-fetched, creating the confusion. That being said, when the truth is revealed, the novel offers a heartwarming resolution to Nat's journey back in time.



Quotes

"Oh please. I came here to get away from this. I thought I could get away from this."
Chap. 1, p. 12

"If you have to answer questions every time, how are you ever going to learn to forget?"
Chap. 1, p. 13

"It would be better in London, it would be better in the company; I wouldn't be Nat, I would be Puck."
Chap. 1, p. 13

"And he laughed. It wasn't as if he thought my name was funny, it was a weird laugh, sort of triumphant."
Chap. 2, p. 20

"I thought: don't go, please don't go. It wasn't because he was William Shakespeare. I just knew that I liked being with him, more than with anyone I knew."
Chap. 6, p. 50

"...blood on the floor, bright red, a pool of blood, spreading..."
Chap. 7, p. 67

"This company is a family, close and closeted. We all know what that miserable boy is at, and I am sorry for it, and for thee. But he is talented, and useful, and apprenticed to my friend Heminges - canst forgive us thy troubles, for the play's sake?"
Chap. 8, p. 73

"The nurses are not troubled by the unfamiliarity of his face, because they have never seen him before; nor by his strange ramblings and cries of fear, because he is semidelirious and cannot be expected to behave like a normal boy."
Chap. 9, p. 79

"...standing there listening to him, knowing I was part - and a useful part, just now - of his company, safe in the small family world of the theatre. I wanted it never to end."
Chap. 11, p. 95



"It was a wonderful poem. Even though I didn't wholly understand it, deep down it had begun to heal the hurt that I'd been trying not to look at for the past three years."

Chap. 15, p. 148

"Below him, his father, the rows of faces and the theatre itself shrink and disappear, and there is only the misty green of the earth and the blue of the sky, and a wonderful sense of being on his way to a great adventure. A sense of freedom."

Chap. 16, p. 149

"Believe me, King of Shadows, I mistook."

Chap. 17, p. 155

"She understood about the comfort you can get from a small separate world, whether it's a theatre or a basketball team or the inside of a book."

Chap. 17, p. 157

"I'd been given such a wonderful present, the best thing to have happened since my father died, and then it had been taken away."

Chap. 18, p. 172

"It's a wonderful poem. I says, loving doesn't change just because someone isn't there, or because time gets in the way, or even death. It's always with you, keeping you safe, it won't ever leave you. "

Chap. 18, p. 175

Topics for Discussion

Discuss loss. How has loss shaped Nat's life? Does loss hold Nat back, or is it what will make him a stronger person and actor? How does Nat handle the loss that he has experienced in his short life? Does he ultimately recover?

Discuss the idea of escape. Does escaping into the life of a character in a play help Nat, or does it make his life more difficult? Is escaping from his personal life a bad thing? Talk about the benefits and the disadvantages of escape in Nat's life.

Discuss the theatre of Shakespeare's day. What are the similarities and differences from the modern day theatre you have experienced today? What does Nat recognize, and what is new and different to Nat? Does Nat have a preference?

Discuss the parallels between 1599 and 1999. Which characters from the two worlds resemble one another? What is the significance of these parallels? Does Nat recognize any of the similarities when he travels back in time?

Shakespeare becomes a father figure to Nat when Nat travels to 1599. What qualities in Shakespeare does Nat find comforting? What does Nat learn from Shakespeare?

Discuss three historical aspects of Elizabethan England? For example, what was the political climate? What was it like to live in London in 1599? What were the rules and regulations? Use information from the book as a launching point for a little outside research using the Internet or an encyclopedia.

How does Nat change over the course of the book? Where is Nat's turning point? Does Nat understand the significance of the events going on around him, or does he only recognize the significance after the fact?