A Million Little Pieces Study Guide

A Million Little Pieces by James Frey

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Introduction

James Frey's book *A Million Little Pieces* caused a scandal in 2006. Originally published as a memoir in 2003, it was revealed on the website *The Smoking Gun* in January 2006 that some of the events of the book had been fictionalized, while others had been exaggerated or were altogether fabricated. More liberties with the truth came to light as others began to investigate the book and its author. At least sixteen lawsuits were filed against Frey and his publisher in the wake of the revelations.

In 2005, Frey's book was selected for Oprah Winfrey's high-profile book club on her syndicated talk show, and Frey appeared on her show in conjunction with the selection. After the truth about his "memoir" came to light, Winfrey insisted Frey return to her show where she confronted him about the deception. An apology and notes from both the author and the publisher about the controversy were added to subsequent editions of *A Million Little Pieces*. The book was also re-classified as fiction by a number of libraries.

One reason for the controversy over the book's veracity was the subject and nature of *A Million Little Pieces*. Written in first person, the narrative focuses on Frey's time in a rehab clinic for treatment for addiction to alcohol and drugs when he was twenty-three years old. In vivid detail, he describes undergoing the detox process, coming to terms with his addiction and anger, and developing a plan for long-term sobriety.

Though the book sold well before his initial appearance on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, sales skyrocketed after Winfrey embraced Frey and his book. *A Million Little Pieces* sold at least 3.5 million copies, spent time at the top of several bestseller lists, and was the second-best selling book in the United States in 2005. Millions of readers who were riveted by the account or even inspired by the author's triumph felt duped, manipulated, and angry to learn that Frey may not have been entirely honest and sincere. Winfrey, in particular, was outraged as Frey's betrayal cast suspicion on her role as a powerful champion for literature.

Frey apologized and explained his actions, admitting he had a flawed memory about certain events. He also said he believed he had creative license to change facts to better mold the story and create a dramatic arc. "The Frey affair has been a train wreck," wrote Anne-Marie O'Connor and Josh Getlin in a *Los Angeles Times* article in early 2006. Frey told O'Connor and Getlin, "All I wanted to do was write a book that would help people get through tough times, and I never meant for any of this to happen, and I'm sorry that it has."

Author Biography

James Frey was born on April 12, 1969, in Cleveland, Ohio, to Bob and Lynne Frey. His father worked as an attorney, and Frey was raised in an upper-middle-class family. When Frey was twelve, the family moved to St. Joseph, Michigan, where his father took a job with Whirlpool. After completing high school there, Frey entered Denison University in 1988 and studied film production. Four years later, he briefly lived in Paris, France, with two friends from Denison while he worked for his father's company. In 1992, when he was twenty-three years old, he spent several weeks at the Hazelden Clinic for treatment for addictions. After his treatment was completed, Frey moved to Chicago and worked in retail and as a bouncer at several bars.

In the mid-1990s, Frey moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in the film industry, working as both a producer and screenwriter. He wrote or co-wrote the screenplays for the films *Kissing a Fool* and *Sugar: The Fall of the West*, both of which were released in 1998. Frey began writing what became *A Million Little Pieces*, a book about the time he spent in the rehab clinic, while still living in Venice, California, in 2000.

After initially shopping his manuscript to publishers as a novel, he started presenting it as a memoir to garner more interest. Frey finally published *A Million Little Pieces* as a work of nonfiction in 2003. In the book, he graphically describes the process he goes through to become sober while challenging the policies of the clinic. Frey received much critical acclaim for his courage and unflinching depiction of his time in the clinic. The book sold several million copies, with sales increasing after Oprah Winfrey selected it for her television talk show's book club in 2005.

Frey followed this book with *My Friend Leonard* (2005). This memoir, which features a disclaimer explaining that some facts had been changed, focuses on Frey's life after being released from the clinic, including his time spent in jail, the suicide of the girlfriend he met at the clinic, and his continued friendship with the organized crime figure he met in rehab. *My Friend Leonard* also became a hit with readers and critics alike.

Early in 2006, *The Smoking Gun* website and other sources revealed that Frey's first memoir was not entirely true but contained many fictional or exaggerated elements, as did its follow-up. These revelations led to a firestorm of controversy over the nature of Frey's books and public humiliation for the author, who was eventually dropped by both his publisher and his literary agent. As of 2006, he lives with his wife, Maya Rio, an advertising executive, and their daughter in New York City, where he continues to work as a writer, focusing on fiction and scripts for both television and film.

Plot Summary

A Million Little Pieces is a memoir of addiction and recovery, authored by James Frey, who records the time he spends in a Minnesota Rehabilitation Clinic at age twenty-three. At the beginning of the book, Frey checks into the Clinic with intense dependency on alcohol and crack and soon after begins suffering withdrawal symptoms, including hallucinations and nausea.

He is missing his four front teeth, has a broken nose, and a hole in his cheek. He is also weak, thin, and malnourished. Dr. Baker resets James's broken nose and stitches his cheek closed, and makes an appointment for James to meet with a dentist in the near future, where he has incredibly painful dental surgery. Because he is a drug addict he cannot have any pain medication. Soon, James meets Lilly, another patient to whom he has an immediate attraction.

James moves into Sawyer Unit for the duration of his stay at the Clinic. Every morning, James wakes up, runs to the bathroom to throw up, then attempts to look himself in the eye, then fails and steps into uncomfortably hot water for his shower. Afterwards, he must clean the Group Toilets, a disgusting job assigned to him since he is the newest arrival on the Unit. Roy, a senior patient, threatens and bullies him, and James loses his temper, which he calls the Fury.

James's strength impresses all who hear about it, including another patient named Leonard, who is intrigued by James's tough-guy personality. James refuses to reciprocate Leonard's offers of friendship until, after learning about the sweeping damage that he has done to his body, James tries to walk out of the Clinic to end his life. Leonard stops him and James agrees to give recovery an earnest try.

James's unit recovery counselor, Ken, pressures James to tow the AA line, but James resists the message of powerlessness that Alcoholics Anonymous preaches. He believes that the meetings are nothing more than a crutch for weak people who refuse to take responsibility for their poor decisions to become addicts and alcoholics.

For the rest of his time at the Clinic, James continues to battle his self-loathing, both with his therapist Joanne and himself. Every morning he attempts to look himself in the eye. The stronger he becomes, the closer he gets to seeing himself clearly. His parents visit him at the Clinic, and though their time together is difficult for the entire family, James learns about his family's history with alcoholism and childhood incidents that may have contributed to the Fury.

James continues to meet Lilly, even though the Clinic forbids such relationships between their patients. When Lilly's grandmother is diagnosed with cancer, James rushes to her side, which attracts the attention of Lincoln, the Sawyer Unit Supervisor, who tells them both that they must never speak to each other again. Lilly runs away from the Clinic. James goes after her and brings her back, at which point she must begin her treatment again.

James's friendships with Leonard and his roommate Miles continue to grow, and when Leonard leaves the Clinic at the end of his treatment, he asks James to remain in his life as a surrogate son. James, touched, agrees. He never comes to terms with the message of AA, however, and turns instead to a book of philosophy called the Tao for guidance and spiritual support. Lilly, the Tao, and ultimately James's own reserves of strength all become tools that help James control the Fury.

The final step of James's recovery at the Clinic is his confession to a priest, at which time he enumerates all of his sins. After his confession, James feels strong, liberated, and prepared for life after addiction. Only one hurdle remains, and it is one that all of James's friends and family fear. James is determined to test himself as soon as he leaves the Clinic. Sure enough, when his brother Bob picks him up after his discharge, James's first request is to go to a bar, where he orders a drink for his final showdown with the Fury. James triumphs, and looks to the future with hope.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

James Frey, twenty-three, wakes up on an airplane with a hole in his cheek, a broken nose, and no front teeth, wallet, or luggage. He does not remember how he sustained these injuries or how he got on the airplane, nor does he know where the flight is going. Once the airplane lands in Chicago, James vomits on himself and discovers his parents waiting for him at the end of the concourse. James feels embarrassed and panicked; his mother begins to cry, and his father doesn't speak. They drive to a cabin in Wisconsin and James wakes up only to drink two bottles of wine that his father unwillingly buys at a gas station. At the cabin, James thanks his parents for picking him up at the airport. Obviously worried, his parents try to hug him, but James feels uncomfortable and withdraws to the kitchen where he finds a bottle of whiskey. He smokes cigarettes and drinks until he blacks out.

This chapter introduces James and establishes the severity of James's addiction. Not only does he have no idea how he severely injured himself, but he also suffers from violent illness when he cannot have a drink, struggles to walk unassisted, and even asks his father to enable his alcoholism by buying alcohol for him so that he can get through the car ride. His parents are loving, supportive, and extremely concerned for their son once they see the totality of his addiction to alcohol. However, while James feels gratitude, he physically resists his parents' affection and offers no explanation except to say that he doesn't like it when they touch him. James's ambivalence when it comes to his parents' love will become a major issue in his recovery.

In addition to establishing character and plot, the first chapter also introduces the reader to Frey's sparse writing style. Frey does away with grammatical standards of capitalization and punctuation and instead capitalizes words of importance even if they are not proper nouns, for example, "Passengers", and "Gate". In combination with extensive repetition of certain words and phrases, this casual relationship with grammatical standards contributes to the book's unadorned "stream of consciousness" tone.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

James's family checks him into a rehabilitation clinic, and James's first stop is the medical wing. On the way, he learns some of the rules of the clinic: any substance abuse or any interaction beyond a polite greeting with any patient of the opposite sex will result in termination of treatment. At the medical wing, James tells a nurse that he abuses alcohol daily, as much as he can, from when he wakes up to the point that he passes out. He also tells her that he abuses all forms of cocaine, but most recently crack cocaine, daily and as much as he can, as well as sporadic abuse of pills, mushrooms, acid, methamphetamines, PCP, and glue.

James falls asleep and when he wakes up he has nightmarish hallucinations of bugs crawling in the corners of his room and on his body, shadows moving towards him, and the sounds of screaming. He scratches himself, trying to get rid of the invisible bugs, and loses control of his bodily functions, and must be sedated for the rest of his detoxification.

Chapter two details in more graphic terms the facts of James's life as an addict. When he arrives at the clinic with his family he has already drunk a bottle of vodka, but it is not enough to ease his withdrawal symptoms. Once in the medical wing, James displays his forthrightness when the nurse interviews him. This unwavering honesty is a trait that will color James's relationships with his parents, friends, and counselors throughout the rest of the book. Frey's directness expresses itself again when he describes the horrible hallucinations he suffered during withdrawal. The intense scene uses repetition and run-on sentence structure to enhance the pace of the encounter. However, Frey focuses entirely on describing the hallucinations, not his personal feelings. Therefore, the scene comes across more as a list of nightmares than as a personal low for the author.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

Heavily medicated, James goes to the Lounge to watch TV and sits down. Soon, another man comes into the Lounge and tells James that he is sitting in his chair, and that James has to get up. James feels his medication taking effect, and his body slides out of the chair and onto the ground. The man drags James away from the chair, where James passes out.

The next morning, James wakes up on the floor of the Lounge and returns to his room, where an orderly has brought him some breakfast. James cannot eat anything more than toast due to the wounds in his mouth and on his face. After breakfast, James meets Dr. Baker, who begins the process of healing James's physical wounds. He stitches James's cheek closed and re-sets the broken nose. Because he is a drug addict, James cannot have any pain medication throughout this incredibly painful episode, but he steels himself and impresses the doctor with his composure. Frey also reveals that he relies heavily on his own inner strength to endure an ordeal. This self-sustaining attitude will both handicap and help James throughout his recovery process.

James goes to the Dispensary for Librium and Diazepam, two medications that sedate the body through withdrawal, and meets another patient, Lilly, in line. They have a brief conversation about what happened to James's face. Lilly makes James laugh, and a nurse watches them disapprovingly. His interaction with fellow addict Lilly is the first occasion that the reader sees James express happiness or amusement and foreshadows an important relationship, as well as the Clinic's opposition to that relationship.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

James wakes up in the Medical Wing feeling violently ill. He crawls to the bathroom and vomits blood, then, standing in front of a mirror, James is struck by his thin, beaten, and weak body. He gets into the shower and turns up the hot water until it burns. Frey writes that he believes he deserves the pain, and while the heat hurts, it also relieves his shame. Much of James's recovery can be tracked by what happens in the bathroom, both in the shower and in front of a mirror. This scene is the first time the reader witnesses both James's perception of himself as a stranger, and his desire to hurt himself by standing under scalding hot water. He tries to retrace his steps in the days before he woke up wounded on the airplane, but remembers only being in North Carolina and deciding to go for a drive, then two days later he remembers waking up in Washington DC, only to black out for another day when he wakes up in Ohio.

Dr. Baker notifies James that he will be moving out of the Medical Wing today and into a unit. James goes to the Lounge where he sees Lilly, and the two sit on the couch smoking and talking, even though their conversation is against the rules. Lilly tells James that her father left when she was four, leaving Lilly with a prostitute mother who was addicted to heroin and who, when Lilly was thirteen, began selling Lilly instead of herself for more drugs. Lilly ran away to live with her grandmother when she was seventeen, and she is addicted to crack and Quaaludes.

Throughout the entire memoir, Lilly, like most of the other addicts, displays remarkable candor when casually discussing the horrors of her life. Lilly reveals an incredibly painful and harrowing past to a man she has only met once, in a common room where anyone could easily overhear her. This fearlessness characterizes both the treatment atmosphere at the Clinic and the hardness of its patients.

Roy interrupts James and Lilly to take James to Sawyer Unit. Roy warns him that talking to women is against the rules, and James could be kicked out of the clinic for breaking them. James promises to try to obey the rules, but in the use of the word "try" reveals his lack of commitment to the regulations of the Clinic. Roy details more of the Clinic's rules, and James immediately bristles at Roy's condescending manner. In Sawyer Unit, James meets his new roommates, Warren, Larry, and John. James notices that all of the patients in the Clinic are different from each other in age, appearance, background, and attitude, yet their sickness connects them all. Frey makes a point to discriminate between every new patient that he introduces into the story. There is no such thing as a standard drug addict in this memoir.

James meets Ken, his Unit Recovery Counselor, who asks him more about his background as an addict. James details the beginnings of his substance abuse and the extent of his addiction, as well as his criminal history. Ken suggests that James consider dealing with his outstanding charges and asks James if he is willing to do whatever it

takes to change his life. James honestly answers that he does not know, and Ken chastises James for his defiance. Here, James displays his trademark candor and stubbornness to his counselor and defies an authority figure for the first time. Even though James knows what Ken wants to hear, he refuses to lie and reveals a complete lack of fear of Ken's position of authority.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

James wakes up to discover his face has been bleeding all night and that he is still suffering from the chills and mood swings of withdrawal. Regardless, Roy pesters James to thoroughly clean the group toilets. The relationship between James and Roy centers around power. Roy believes that he has power over James and attempts to exert it in petty ways, like reminding him of the rules of the Clinic and persisting in making sure that James does his job. James, in return, rebels against the assertion of authority.

Hank drives James to the dentist, and James and Hank immediately form a connection. Their conversation comes easily and James enjoys the ride with a man who does not attempt to patronize or control him. This is the first time that the reader sees James open up to another man. He immediately respects Hank's strength and easygoing nature. Hank speaks openly about his battle with alcoholism and his work with the Clinic.

When he arrives at the dentist's office, Frey writes that he feels afraid of the pain that he knows will occur. The dentist looks in James's mouth and says that James will need major oral surgery and will not have any pain killers for the procedure. On the way back to the Clinic, James's mind wanders to his college girlfriend. This is the first mention of a major figure in James's life, one whom will remain largely shrouded in mystery throughout the majority of the story.

Back at the Clinic, James meets another patient, Leonard, who he has been calling Gene Hackman while he has been medicated through withdrawal. James stands his ground when Leonard confronts and threatens him, and Leonard is intrigued. James refuses to engage in friendly conversation with him. He resists connecting with other men at the Clinic, especially other patients. He fears relationships because he has never successfully maintained one.

James takes the MMPI, a personality test, and reveals a great deal about his character as Frey narrates the questions and answers. James is brutally self-aware, self-loathing, and conflicted about whether or not he can ever rectify his life. After the test, James calls some friends, his brother, and his parents. The phone calls are poignant to James, especially the one to his parents. When he cannot give satisfactory answers to their questions about whether or not the treatment is helping, his mother begins to cry and his father encourages him to keep trying. Frey writes that he wonders how it is that his parents can still care about him after all of the mistakes that he has made. He feels a great deal of remorse for his actions and shock at his parents' unwavering support.

James returns to his room, where Larry has just discovered that he has contracted HIV. Frey composes a scene of limbo for Larry, in which he loves his family but knows that

he may have written their death sentences. James and the other patients support Larry by changing the subject, playing cards, and cracking jokes. This unspoken support manifests itself multiple times throughout the story, and depicts the habit of avoidance that so many addicts practice.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

James has his first user dream. He is in a room with drugs and alcohol. He drinks, sniffs, and smokes maniacally, despite the inner voice that begs him not to. Just as his high climaxes, he wakes up in the Clinic with overwhelming fear and anxiety. He takes a shower and then vomits. As the sickness subsides, James is overcome by the totality of his addiction and how much it has twisted his life. He cries until he hears his roommates wake up, then composes himself because he does not want them to find him so vulnerable.

Warren and John go to look for Larry, who is missing, but James knows that Larry has left the Clinic to try to rejoin his family, and James sends a blessing out to him. James's spirituality first appears in this scene, when he pronounces a prayer for Larry and his family. Although James does not subscribe to a specific faith, he still relies on prayer for wishing well to a fellow patient. The reader also discovers James's intense empathy with other addicts. Even though he has known Larry for less than a week, James relates to his total despair and understands why he has left the Clinic.

While James cleans the Group Toilets, Roy threatens he will get James thrown out of the Clinic. James lashes out and physically assaults Roy, who screams for help. James storms to his room and paces furiously, trying to control his temper, which he calls the Fury. He begins to throw furniture around the room and must be sedated. His fight with Roy reveals James's reliance on animalistic survival instincts. When Roy attempts to assert authority over James by threatening to have him thrown out of the Clinic, James reacts in the same way that a trapped animal would. He fights and then escapes. He has already shown that he turns to his inner strength to overcome physical pain. Now he shows that he turns to survival instincts when faced with a physical threat.

This incident marks the introduction of "The Fury", a dominating anger that takes over whenever James feels threatened or afraid and demands fuel in the form of self-destruction. In the past, James has used drugs and alcohol to tame the Fury; but with those outlets unavailable, he turns his energy towards the physical destruction of his room. The Fury can only be controlled through further devastation, and if James cannot turn the devastation inward by abusing his body, then he must express the urge in the outside world.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Certain that he is going to be asked to leave the Clinic, James meets with Ken and two other staff members. Joanne, a staff psychologist, wants to keep James at the Clinic, while Lincoln, the unit supervisor of Sawyer Unit, wants to ask James to leave. James tells them about his fight with Roy, and James leaves the meeting surprised that he has not been asked to leave. With every interaction with an authority figure, James reinforces his disdain for authority.

Hank picks James up, lends him a coat, and takes him to the dentist. At the dentist's office, Hank give James two tennis balls to squeeze during the procedure that is about to take place. Once he settles into the dentist's chair, he asks the nurse to bring him the Babar the Elephant book from the waiting room. He fondly remembers having read it as a child. Dr. Stevens describes the very painful root canal surgery that James is about to undergo and reminds him that it is impossible to give him any anesthesia or painkillers. Frey's description of root canal surgery is intensely graphic. He robotically repeats violent words and phrases and rambles in run-on sentences that walk the line of incoherency. These literary devices, the repetition, and his sentence structure engage the reader not only intellectually but viscerally as well, as the pace of the memoir increases and Frey constantly reiterates the quality of pain.

Dr. Stevens realizes that James is in a state of severe trauma. He wants to take James to the hospital, but James insists on returning to the Clinic. Before James leaves, he embraces Dr. Stevens. James has been awkward and fearful of physical contact up to this point. However, his hug with Dr. Stevens reveals that James is capable of expressing physical affection even after a harrowing ordeal. In this instance, the hug is the only gesture that can adequately describe his gratitude and respect for Dr. Stevens.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

James wakes up, still extremely ill and weak from his dental surgery, and wanders out into the Clinic to find something to do. He picks up The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous and begins to read it, as he has before. However, the AA message does not appeal to James. He believes that AA meetings themselves are an addiction, and the people who attend them fail to take personal responsibility for their choices. James's self-loathing plays a large role in his recovery, and it expresses itself first and foremost in his unwavering belief that his addictions are his own fault. His conflict with the core beliefs of Alcoholics Anonymous makes James realize that if the medical experts are right and AA is the only treatment the works on addiction, then he has little hope.

James cleans the group toilets, which have been neglected while he has been recovering from surgery and are therefore fouled. James suspects that Roy may have created the mess as retribution for the fight that he lost, but he cleans them anyway, even though he gets sick twice in the process because the bathroom is so filthy. Afterwards, he takes a shower and tries to look at his reflection in the mirror. He can see that his bruises and cuts are healing, and he tries to look at himself in the eye but cannot. He gets into the shower and turns the hot water up until it burns him, then begins to list all of the aspect of his life that he hates. He believes that he deserves the burning physical pain because he is too weak to look at his own eyes. This scene encapsulates one of James's core obstacles to recovery: that same self-loathing that forces him to shoulder the sole responsibility for his addictions. He wants to see himself but balks at the last minute, in fear of what he might see in his own eyes. He steps into a brutally hot shower, not to clean his body, but to pay for his sins.

One of the mistakes that Frey recounts while James is in the shower is the story of Michelle, a friend of his in high school who dies in a drunk driving accident. James regrets that he never told Michelle that he loved her while she was alive. However, the fact that Frey tells a story using specific details, even a harrowing one, as opposed to the fragmented shards and snapshots that he has attempted to suppress up to this point, shows that James is slowly beginning to examine his life with clear sight.

James falls asleep and has his second user dream. Similarly to the first dream, he ingests as much of every substance in front of him as he possibly can. Then he finds a gun and puts the barrel in his mouth, spins the chamber and puts his thumb on the trigger. James wakes up with a spot of blood under his nose, crawls to the bathroom, and vomits in front of two of his roommates. Panicked and hopeless, James realizes that he cannot continue down the road that he has been following since childhood. This is possibly the first time that Frey verbalizes James's consuming fear of failing to recover. James has already admitted to having a problem with drugs and alcohol, but only now does he realize what he has gambled in going to recovery. If James relapses, he knows that he will lose his friends, family, and ultimately, his life.

Warren lends James a shirt since his is stained with vomit, and James accepts it gratefully. He goes to breakfast, and for the first time since his arrival at the Clinic, eats an enormous meal of solid foods. In fact, he eats so much and so ravenously that he feels sick, and Frey likens the intense craving for food to James's insatiable desire for drugs and alcohol. Leonard joins James and is shocked when James tells him about his un-anesthetized dental surgery, but James continues to reject Leonard's offers of friendship.

Doctor Baker commends James on his strength during the root canals and then reviews the results of James's blood tests. If James ever takes another drink or uses another drug, he could die. This news causes James to crave alcohol and drugs even more strongly, and even consider leaving the Clinic. James knows that his death would be glossed over by his friends and family, and the thought makes him review the facts of his addiction, starting with his first intoxication at the age of ten. James convinces himself that he deserves the painful death that he will receive, and decides to leave the Clinic.

At that moment, Roy and Lincoln come into James's room and Roy claims that James never cleaned the group toilets. Lincoln attempts to force James to clean them again, but James refuses and challenges Lincoln, who backs down. Again, James's total lack of respect for authority reminds him how poorly he fits in at the Clinic, and how hopeless his situation is. Instead of despairing, though, now he enjoys the sensation of control that comes with his decision to leave the Clinic and kill himself.

Roy graduates from the Clinic. The ceremony is simple and hopeful, but James predicts that he will be back within a month. James eats his dinner slowly and reminds himself that this will be the last meal he ever eats. As usual, Leonard sits with James and tries in vain to engage James in conversation, but James persists in shrugging him off. Lilly sits across the room and her beauty captivates James. He stares at her because he knows that he will probably never see anyone so beautiful again for the rest of his short life. This day, for James, is one of finality and repetition. He recognizes all of the last times and through his recognition he repeats various mantras, like, "I am going to die", and "I am doing the right thing".

James walks out of the Clinic. He gets a few feet away before Leonard runs after him and physically stops him. If James leaves the Clinic, Leonard says that he will find him and have him returned, and James is baffled by the near-stranger's dedication to his recovery. James agrees to stay for one more day; as he walks with Leonard back into the Clinic, he realizes how afraid he is.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Having just agreed to stay at the Clinic for another day, James returns to his room and looks at himself in the mirror. He still cannot look at himself in the eye. James leaves, cleans the toilets, and goes to breakfast in what has become his morning routine. Leonard joins him and tells him about his childhood mentor Michaelangelo, who gave Leonard his first job and adopted him when both of Leonard's parents died. James does not want to be the object of such an adoption for Leonard, but agrees to watch the football game with Leonard later.

Lincoln apologizes for siding with Roy in the matter of the group toilets. One of Roy's friends confessed that Roy had been trying to get James in trouble with the administration and even fouled the group toilets in an attempt to have James removed from the Clinic. James and Lincoln shake hands and agree to start over.

James's brother Bob and two of his friends, Julie and Kirk, have come to see him and have brought him gifts of clothes, cigarettes, candy, toiletries, and books. James is so touched by this gesture of kindness that he has to keep himself from crying. Frey writes that James feels that he does not deserve the generosity of good people, in another example of James's instinct for self-punishment. The four of them walk around the Clinic and eventually bump into Lilly and her grandmother. The conversation is short, but James feels good after seeing Lilly.

Bob, Julie, and Kirk ask James about the Clinic. James is uncertain that he can recover and answers their questions honestly, which upsets them. They insist that he continue to try to recover, and James realizes that he has only four hours left until his day is over and he can leave the Clinic again if he wants to. James thanks them for coming to see him and nearly begins to cry when he hugs his brother. While James is genuinely moved by his loved ones' devotion, he knows that their love alone cannot beat his addiction. After his visitors leave, James calls his parents, who ask about his progress. James answers honestly that he is uncertain, and his parents mention that they would like to visit. James vehemently declines. His relationship with his parents causes him violent guilt and regret, and he does not want them to see him in recovery.

James eats four heaping plates of food at dinner and is not emotionally comfortable until he is physically uncomfortable. James has effectively replaced his addiction to drugs and alcohol with an addiction to food, the only substance that he can regularly access at the Clinic. Lilly calls James and the conversation makes James smile. He goes back to his room and falls asleep smiling, even though he has only fifteen minutes left until he can leave the Clinic if he wants to. James has been comforted this day by friends and family that he feels unworthy of, and these gifts encourage him to give recovery another try.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

The results of James's MMPI psychology test have been processed, and Joanne reviews them with James. After diagnosing him as depressed, intensely self-loathing, and possessing above-average intelligence, Joanne strongly recommends that James begin working the AA-condoned twelve-step program. James rejects the idea. AA and the twelve steps repel James, who views them as a crutch for people who have ultimately chosen to become addicted. Despite overwhelming medical proof that addiction is a disease, James places the responsibility for his destructive life choices squarely on his own shoulders.

In the Lounge, the Bald Man is tearfully telling his group about the worst moment of his alcoholism, when he passed out in front of his two young daughters and then attacked his neighbor on Halloween. The group laughs, the Bald Man runs from the room, and Lincoln yells at the group for its insensitivity. James thinks that the story is funny too, but the more he reflects on the Bald Man's experience, the more disturbing and humiliating he finds it. James's empathy is in a steady state of growth and generosity, and the Bald Man teaches him that crying is a courageous thing to do.

James goes for a walk in the woods outside of the Clinic. While he walks, he realizes that he has the opportunity to choose a better life for himself. The decision is not an easy one, and he battles his inner demons until he begins to cry. This scene is a major turning point in James's recovery. He actively decides to fight his addiction, to desire a better life, and to do whatever he must in order to realize those goals.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

James meets Matty Jackson, a formerly famous featherweight boxer with an addiction to crack who perfectly fits in with James and Leonard's group of friends at the Clinic. James also pays a visit to Joanne and describes the moment of clarity that he experienced the day before in the woods. As a result, James receives a Step 1 coloring book and is asked to write a personal goal on the goal board. James cracks jokes to Ken when he receives this assignment, and although he has agreed to put effort into his recovery, he still resists authority figures at every turn.

When he returns to his room, James learns that two of his roommates, Warren and John, will be leaving the Clinic that day. Warren feels prepared, but John cries because he knows that he is not ready to face the real world yet. James tries to comfort John and realizes that John's wounds may be beyond repair. This insight infuriates James, who returns to the woods and becomes possessed by the Fury to the point that he physically attacks a small tree in a clearing. Lilly stops him, holds him, and comforts him while James cries. James's sudden vulnerability is caused by two recent events: the Bald Man's willingness to lay himself bare in front of a group of his peers, and John's paralyzing fear of his own weakness. The Fury is James's self-destructive response to vulnerability. When he feels fear or sadness, the Fury rises and compels James to destroy those feelings with drugs, alcohol, or even by trying to tear a tree to pieces. Lilly calms the Fury with her patience, tenderness, and lack of judgment. The next step to James's recovery will be discovering a source of such patience and love that he can create himself.

James returns to his room, calm and exhausted by his catharsis, and meets his new roommate Miles. Miles is a Judge and James is immediately intimidated by his office. However, the more that James talks to Miles the more he discovers that Miles is, like the other friends that James has made at the Clinic, tolerant and nonjudgmental. Together, the two roommates attend a lecture given by a famous rock star, whose outlandish tales of addiction infuriate James. The rock star romanticizes addiction and makes it seem as though a high tolerance for drugs and alcohol is a glamorous trait. Such gloss is often applied to addiction, even in outlets that the patients at the Clinic can access, like lectures and television. James feels that such interpretations are totally unrealistic and even insulting to the people struggling with recovery. However, James never relies on the Fury to deal with his anger at outside sources. The Fury only wants to destroy James.

After the lecture, James returns to his room with Miles, who plays the clarinet while James reads the Tao Te Ching, a book that his brother brought him. Although James is naturally suspicious of all religious texts, the Tao intrigues and calms him in the same way that Lilly's presence does. The book never attempts to assert regulations or establish an authoritarian position, which helps James to connect with it on an even

deeper level. Rather, the Tao simply presents wisdom for daily life that encourages James to live in the moment and accept himself for who he is.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

James wakes up in the middle of the night to the sound of screaming. Roy has returned to the Clinic and is standing in the Lounge, swinging a cudgel and calling himself Jack the Man-Hammer. Lincoln and two security guards restrain him, but James feels disturbed by the scene and cannot go back to sleep. Instead, he revisits his memories of his college girlfriend and recalls the first time he spoke with her. The memory of his first love always pulls an extreme reaction from James, usually the urge to abuse drugs or liquor. However, this time he simply goes outside in order to escape the confines of the Clinic, where he meets Leonard. Leonard tells James a story about his surrogate parents, Mikey and Geena, and how Leonard found himself at the Clinic. The simple moral of Leonard's story is "hold on". James is receptive to Leonard's advice for the first time in their friendship.

Bobby arrives at the Clinic and dominates the mealtime conversation with his wildly exaggerated stories. James laughs at him and leaves the table, bumping into Lilly on his way out the door. She passes him a note telling him to meet her in the woods later that afternoon. Any interaction with Lilly cheers James's spirits, and he happily proceeds to work on writing his goal on the goal board and coloring his Step 1 workbook. He writes a humorous goal that makes him laugh every time he reads it. However, the point of the workbook is for the patient to admit that he has a problem with drug or alcohol addiction, and James already knows that his dependency is completely out of control. In combination with Ken, an authority figure, instructing him, the book's simplistic and redundant lesson insults James. Instead of coloring it in, he scrawls a message in the pages of the book and turns it in at Ken's office.

At a Unit Meeting, the group learns that Roy suffers from Multiple Personality Disorder, which explains his outburst the night before. James does not comment, despite the fact that his relationship with Roy was not a friendly one. After the meeting, Lincoln calls James into his office and berates him for making light of his workbook and goal assignment. James defends both acts, saying that laughter is his goal, and that the workbook is an insult to his intelligence. He also challenges their twelve-step program by asserting that once he leaves the Clinic he will test himself to find out if he can resist drugs and alcohol. Both Joanne and Lincoln strongly discourage this decision, and their disapproval only strengthens James's resolve.

James continues to find peace with the Tao Te Ching's quiet wisdom and lack of regulations, and he begins to integrate the themes of balance and acceptance into his communication with other people. When he meets Lilly in the woods, James opens up to her about his first sexual experiences, and the two share stories about how they came to be at the Clinic. Despite the administration's insistence that such a relationship can only be detrimental to a patient's recovery, James and Lilly can entrust each other

with their most painful memories. Their relationship helps them both find the emotional peace that lasting recovery requires.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

After another frightening User Dream, James continues to work privately on the seemingly impossible task of looking into his own eyes. The stronger he becomes, the closer he comes to looking into the darkest part of his eyes and facing himself. James relies so much on his own strength that he tells Joanne that he will know he has recovered only when he has tested himself. He plans to confront drugs or alcohol as soon as he leaves the clinic and measure himself on how well he can resist the temptation. Joanne strongly disapproves of this plan because she has seen many other addicts attempt to do the same thing, only to relapse with even greater addiction. Unfortunately, because James has such a strong aversion to AA and to authority, he completely disregards Joanne's warnings.

James learns that his parents will be arriving at the Clinic the next day to begin family therapy sessions, despite the fact that James asked them not to come. The Fury immediately rises, but this time James uses the Tao Te Ching to calm himself. The Fury has, in the past, only been satisfied when James acts in a self-destructive manner, as with his alcoholism and drug addiction. The fact that James now turns instead to philosophy to ease his anger shows tremendous progress in his emotional recovery.

James and Lilly meet in the woods again, and James confides in Lilly about his relationship with his college girlfriend and his parents' impending arrival. Lilly reminds him to be thankful for his parents' devotion to him because many other patients, including herself, would give anything for parents who care that much. James trusts Lilly enough to accept her suggestion, in sharp contrast to his relationship with authority figures Ken, Lincoln, and even Joanne.

The Unit watches an episode of ER that depicts a young attractive heroin addict who arrives in a hospital, falls in love with a doctor, recovers from her addiction, and pulls her life back together by the end of the episode. Such glamorization of addiction infuriates James and the other patients at the Clinic. With his disdain, Frey reminds the reader that his account of these events should not be interpreted as exciting, romantic, or thrilling, but rather exactly the opposite. James will continue to fight the stereotypes surrounding addiction when his parents arrive and he experiences family therapy with non-addicts.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

James and his parents begin family counseling. The first step is James's full disclosure of his addictions and experiences, which horrifies his parents and enrages James. He tells Joanne privately about the Fury that overshadows any interaction he has with his parents. Even though this event is one of the most important that James experiences while at the Clinic, it is also the most difficult for him to appreciate.

Next, James and his parents attend group therapy sessions with other addicts and family members, who take the opportunity to learn more about addiction. James helps to educate them about the glamorousness of drugs and alcohol, and throughout the session a bond develops within the group. James dreads his next one-on-one meeting with his parents, in which they express their shock and sorrow at James's confession that morning.

James turns to Miles, and the two men confide in each other their struggles with shame, James for the way that he has ruined his parents' happiness, and Miles for lying to and disappointing his pregnant wife. James supports Miles and recommends the Tao Te Ching for comfort, then meets Lilly in the woods, where the two come very close to their first sexual contact. James, overwhelmed, stops Lilly from going too far, and painfully recounts his sexual problems with his college girlfriend. She wanted to give him her virginity, but James drank too much to perform and still feels powerless and ashamed of how his addiction prevented him from growing closer to a woman he loved. Lilly begins to tell James a story of her own, but cannot. James will soon learn what it is that Lilly cannot express, but for now they lie together in the woods and silently comfort each other.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

After spending the night in the woods, James must rush to meet his parents and a lawyer named Randall who works with the Clinic. Randall tells James that the authorities in Ohio want him to serve three years in prison and refuse to make any kind of deal. Both James and his parents are shocked and dismayed at the news. James apologizes to his mother and, for the first time in his life, initiates physical contact with her. The Fury has always prevented him from embracing his parents, and although James continues to battle the Fury, he wins this fight and holds on to his parents despite his impulse to run.

The afternoon's group session deals with the biological science of addiction. James does not believe that addiction is a physical disease, but rather that such an argument is only an excuse for people who do not want to take responsibility for their decisions. During this session, the counselor also reveals that the average relapse rate of any Clinic in the world is eighty-five percent. Torn between the genuine affection that he feels for the group that surrounds him and his own blunt pragmatism, James accepts the statistic with dread. Nevertheless, his ambivalence suggests a growing comfort with creating friendships within the Clinic, something that he initially resisted. Being able to maintain human relationships is essential to his recovery; in this area, James continues to make great progress without the aid of the twelve steps. For example, when The Bald Man leaves the Clinic, weeping with joy, James feels intense gratitude for this man who is brave enough to cry in front of other men.

At his next extremely revealing session with his parents, James argues that his mother attempted to assert too much control throughout his childhood. Such control, Joanne asserts, could be one reason why James both rebelled as a child and continues to resent authority figures to the extent that he does. James's mother reveals that her worry for James stems from the knowledge that her father was an alcoholic, something that James never knew. Joanne feels that his knowledge is crucial to explaining why James's addictions are so profound, but James insists that the genetic history of alcoholism is not as much to blame as have been his own decisions.

James's parents also confess that James suffered from undiagnosed ear infections for the first year of his life. Joanne suggests that this early experience of pain might be a root source of the Fury. James concedes that the ear infections affected him, but refuses to blame his addiction on them. In this therapy session, his parents provide two reasonable influences in his development into an alcoholic and drug addict, but James will not relinquish control of his life to genetics or ear infections. While Joanne is frustrated with his stubbornness, his parents are proud of him for his strength and self-awareness.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

Lilly wakes James up in the middle of the night, enraged that he missed their rendezvous in the woods because he was in family counseling. She fears that one of the men on Sawyer Unit may have told James a story about her that disturbed him. James assures her that he has heard nothing, and that no story about Lilly could make him abandon her. Lilly calms down, and the two spend the rest of the night walking through the woods, talking. James tells Lilly that he loves her.

When he arrives back on Sawyer Unit in the morning, another patient tells James the story that Lilly feared he would hear. Before coming to the Clinic, Lilly was raped by a gang of men, including the man who tells James the story. James attacks the man and threatens him. For the first time, the Fury directs James to destroy something other than himself, symbolizing James's progression from the self-abusive pattern addiction.

James learns that his parents must leave the Clinic early, but all of them feel comforted and strengthened by the time they spent together in therapy. James tells his parents of his plan to test himself once he leaves the Clinic, and they agree with Joanne that the idea sounds foolish and dangerous. While they fear that James will put himself at risk for relapse, his parents allow James to make his own decision and do not attempt to force him to change his mind. James respects his parents for reserving their authority, and continues to triumph over the Fury's impulses to run away from his family's affection. That day, James looks into his own eyes for the first time in his memory. He also takes a comfortable shower, as opposed to using the scalding water to punish himself. The ability to look himself in the eye and the easing of his guilt both point to a major advance in his recovery. He is forgiving himself, reacquainting himself with a man he has not known or liked for most of his life.

Lilly calls James in a panic and begs him to meet her in the woods. Her grandmother has been diagnosed with aggressive cancer and Lilly is hysterical. However, James attracts some attention when he runs off to the woods in the middle of the day, and Lincoln follows and discovers him with Lilly. Even though they have broken a major rule, Lincoln agrees to give them another chance as long as they agree to stop seeing each other. James agrees, but Lilly refuses to stop meeting James and leaves the Clinic. James, panicked, goes after her. Hank and Lincoln agree to help him in his search and drive him to a bus station, where James speaks to a crack dealer and then discovers Lilly in an abandoned, dilapidated building, trading her body for drugs. James, Lincoln, and Hank take her back to the Clinic, where she must begin recovery again.

This event is significant in many ways. Ironically, a day that begins with tremendous hope and optimism for James's recovery climaxes with his first face-to-face encounter with drugs after the longest period of sobriety that he has ever known. James proves that he can rely on his self-control to keep him sober. Statistically, such reliance results

in overwhelming rates of relapse; however, James has never wavered in his insistence that, for him, his stubbornness will be a greater ally than all the steps in the world.

Although he successfully resists the Fury's overwhelming pressure to forget Lilly and smoke the crack, James cannot celebrate his victory because of Lilly's defeat. Such conflict is precisely the reason that the Clinic forbids relationships between their male and female patients. James feels her failure as deeply as he would his own, despite the fact that he has failed only to relapse.

Finally, this rescue marks the first time that Lincoln, an authority figure whose assertions of control have always infuriated James, acts not as a man in charge, but rather as a man who wants to help. Lincoln reaches out even though he risks his job in coming to help bring Lilly back to the Clinic, and James is intensely grateful. James and Lincoln take their first steps toward a common ground.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

James wakes up after a particularly vivid User Dream, which Lincoln predicts will occur any time James is exposed to any of the substances to which he was once addicted. Lincoln expresses his admiration and astonishment at James's feat the night before, in which he held a bag of crack in one hand, a woman he had just met in the other, and still emerged from the building with his sobriety intact. Lincoln challenges James to prove that he can stay sober on his own terms, and James accepts the challenge from a man he now considers a friend.

Randall informs James that his sentence in Ohio has been reduced from three years to three months. Such a miraculous offer could only be the result of Miles and Leonard's influence, but neither man admits anything when James thanks them for their efforts. This reduction of sentence is only the most literal way that these friendships have rewarded James throughout his time at the Clinic. James continues to feel amazement at his good fortune to have met good men in a place that only bad men need.

Joanne gives James his final assignment: to make a written and spoken confession of his deeds. When Joanne recommends confessing to a priest, James hesitates, but agrees. James's disdain for religion has been painted up to this point as merely another expression of his scorn for all forms of authority. However, Frey begins to foreshadow that there may be something more specific to priests that causes James's discomfort. The Tao continues to serve as James's spiritual outlet because it requires peaceful acceptance rather than unwavering obedience.

In the Lounge that night, Leonard throws a party to celebrate his departure from the Clinic, complete with a lavish dinner and temporary cable service for a boxing match that the entire Unit has been looking forward to. James watches the men on the floor devour their food with the mechanical greed that characterizes serious addiction. James eats his meal slowly and chooses not to eat a second plate. He can control his impulses. James's progress has been intermittent throughout his time at the Clinic, but in the last chapters he has made major strides towards bringing his life back under control.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary and Analysis

James introduces himself to Michael, the newest arrival to the Clinic. Michael is a Catholic University Administrator addicted to crack and prostitutes, and yet another example of the universality of addiction. At the Clinic, all the patients are equal, regardless of education, income, background, or culture. The reservation of judgment is critical to each patient's recovery, since each patient must deal with his own judgment of himself before he can maintain his sobriety. James deals with his self-condemnation through the act of looking himself in the eye and ceasing to punish himself physically for his addiction.

James walks Leonard out of the Clinic. Leonard asks James to be his son, and James is moved and flattered by the request. Leonard has played a major role in James's recovery, has been a source of strength and comfort in James's darkest episodes, and as soon as he is gone, James feels lonely. He begins to write his confession and fills most of a legal pad before coming to one haunting event that he still cannot express. If the confession is intended to cleanse the conscience so that the patient can begin life again, James will have to fully pronounce everything he has written and anything that he cannot write before he can feel truly forgiven.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary and Analysis

James, anxious and fearful, reads his confession aloud to a Priest. Once his is finished reading, James steels himself to tell the story that he has never told anyone else. Before coming to the Clinic, James violently beat a French priest who molested him as James was contemplating suicide. He feels shame, guilt, and rage when he confesses the story, but after he finishes, he walks away with a lightness that he has never known. He will be leaving the Clinic the next day, so he makes arrangements for his brother to pick him up in the morning.

James sees that Lilly has finished her detoxification period, and that she has rejoined her unit at the Clinic. The mere sight of her buoys his spirits even more. Even though he will be going from the Clinic to County lockup in Ohio for three months, the power of his unwavering love for Lilly continues to strengthen and comfort him. He opens his mail to discover that his college girlfriend has sent him a packet of photographs of the two of them. James looks at each photo carefully and remembers what he can of their time together, then goes outside to burn the photos. This act cleanses him of the guilt and regret that has haunted his memories of his college girlfriend. After the cathartic confession that morning and the destruction of the last evidence of a relationship that he destroyed with his addictions, James reads the Tao and falls into a peaceful sleep. He is finally free of the self-loathing that has colored his life to this point.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary and Analysis

James wakes up in the middle of the night with overwhelming fear. He walks in the woods and worries about what could happen to him when he leaves the Clinic, what might happen between Lilly and himself. For the first time, Frey reveals a crack in James's confidence in his own ability to stay sober without AA. Remembering the Tao, James realizes that he feels fear only because he allows himself to feel fear. If he lets go of the fear, he will not be afraid. Suddenly, without drugs or alcohol or Lilly, James empowers himself, and he returns to the Clinic feeling centered and prepared for the outside world.

He says his goodbyes to his remaining friends at the Clinic and tells Lilly that he will see her in three months when he is out of prison. James climbs into his brother's car and tells him to drive to a bar. Bob refuses, but James insists that with or without his brother he is going to a bar today. Bob drives miserably from James's Clinic to a bar, fearing that James is about to dive right back into his alcoholism. James, however, knows that it is time to execute the test that he has been planning against the Clinic's best advice.

A bartender pours James a tall glass of bourbon and James smells and holds the liquid. The Fury rises within him and orders him to drink the alcohol but James decides not to. Finally, James has proved to himself that he can master the Fury, and he asks the bartender to pour out the liquor.

Characters

James Frey

Author, narrator, and main character of this memoir, James Frey is an alcoholic and drug addict who undergoes treatment at a rehab Clinic in Minnesota. He relies heavily on his own strength in order to get through recovery, as opposed to using the AA-sanctioned twelve steps. James has a severe aversion to authority figures of all kinds, including his parents, God, administrators, and even his addiction. He refuses to believe that his addiction has power over him. Rather, he forces his addiction to bend to his will. He believes that, as long as he continues to choose not to drink or do drugs, he can stay sober. He is stubborn, empathetic, very intelligent, and highly self-loathing.

On the other hand, however, James must deal with his impulse for self-destruction that takes the form of the Fury. The Fury takes over whenever James feels threatened, afraid, or hurt, and the only way to subdue the Fury is to inflict pain on himself. For most of his life, James does just that with heavy abuse of drugs and alcohol. When he cannot abuse these substances in the Clinic, James hurts himself in any number of other ways, including taking painfully hot showers that he claims he deserves, ripping off one of his toenails, and eating so much food at mealtimes that he is physically uncomfortable.

Lilly

James's love interest, Lilly, is an ex-prostitute with addictions to crack and Quaaludes. She has been sexually abused and abandoned for her entire life and only trusts her grandmother and, ultimately, James. She came to the Clinic after a horrible gang-rape that she suffered at the hands of her boyfriend and many of his drug dealers. Regardless, she remains a rock for James, acts as a calming force when James battles the Fury, and speaks comfortably of many of the tragedies in her life. In return, James is a comfort to her in times of great fear, as when she finds out that her grandmother has cancer.

Lilly runs away from the Clinic after she learns that she can no longer see James, and sells her body for crack in an abandoned building in Minneapolis. James rescues her and she successfully reenters treatment. She and James make plans to live together in Chicago when they are both finished with their treatment and James is out of jail.

Leonard

Leonard is a west-coast mafioso addicted to cocaine. He is very wealthy, extremely generous, supportive, and firm, and becomes something of a father figure for James while they are both at the Clinic. When James tries to walk out of the Clinic, Leonard stops him and convinces him to stay long enough to get healthy. He also exerts some influence with the court system in order to have James's prison sentence reduced.

Leonard's parents died when he was a young boy, and he was adopted by a high-level mobster in California who genuinely loved him and raised him well. This mobster, Mikey the Nose, was killed in a drive-by shooting soon after he beat his addiction to cocaine, and Leonard avenged his death right before coming to the Clinic. Leonard offers the same surrogate relationship to James upon his departure, and James agrees to act as Leonard's son.

Miles Davis

Miles is a judge and an alcoholic. He is James's roommate for the majority of James's stay at the Clinic. This is Miles' second term of rehab, which he must complete after a relapse that forced his pregnant wife to kick him out. Despite his self-loathing and intense struggle with shame, Miles is a pillar of strength for James. He is quiet, nonjudgmental, and generous with his time and empathy. He asserts some authority, along with Leonard, in order to get James's prison sentence reduced. He plays the clarinet.

Roy

Roy is another patient on Sawyer Unit at the Clinic, one whose seniority makes him feel comfortable bullying James. He threatens to have James kicked out of the Clinic, fouls the bathroom that James must clean, and lies about it to Ken and Lincoln. After his discharge from the Clinic, he returns one night in a psychotic episode and attacks Lincoln with a cudgel. Roy, as it turns out, suffers from Multiple Personality Disorder. There is little sympathy among the other patients.

Hank

Hank is the first man at the Clinic with whom James feels a connection. He drives James to and from the dentist, and James likes Hank's easygoing, down-to-earth nature. Hank is a recovering alcoholic who begins working at the Clinic after he graduates from its recovery program. He gives James a coat to keep him warm in the Minnesota winter. He also takes James on an unsanctioned trip to Minneapolis to rescue Lilly when she runs away from the Clinic.

Joanne

James's therapist and Hank's girlfriend, Joanne is one of the few staff members who fights to keep James at the Clinic even after he gets into a fight and breaks the co-ed relationship rule with Lilly. She guides James through his recovery, including his family therapy. A recovering alcoholic herself, she believes that AA and the twelve steps are the only way to deal with addiction. Quietly insistent, open-minded, and patient, Joanne never loses her temper with James's stubbornness or forces him to ascribe to her belief in AA. She is James's greatest ally among the Clinic staff.

Lincoln and Ken

The Sawyer Unit Supervisor and Recovery Counselor, respectively. Both men are recovering addicts who come to work at the Clinic after their successful treatment there. Both men are staunch advocates of AA and the twelve steps, and so James immediately clashes with them. At first, they do not believe that James cares about his recovery because he makes jokes and refuses to take their assignments seriously. However, ultimately they come to respect James's strength and stubbornness.

Bob and Lynne Frey

James's parents, who travel extensively for Bob's business. They are loving, attentive, and extremely concerned about their son's alcoholism, of which they have been aware for many years. They only learn about James's addiction to crack and his trouble with the law when they come to visit him at the Clinic for family therapy. Bob is stern but loving, and Lynne is quick to cry and very expressive of her fear and heartbreak. They have tried to shelter James for his entire life, which, in James's eyes, is a reason that he rebelled so violently.

The Girl with the Arctic Eyes (James's Unnamed College Girlf

This girl remains anonymous throughout the book, revisiting James in flashbacks and memories. They date while they are both in college and have a very intense connection. She remains unaware of the extent of James's drug and alcohol abuse, although she does know that he drinks too much. When she tries to have sex with him for her first time, James is impotent and cannot perform. This experience haunts James and leads to their break-up soon after they both graduate. James does not speak with her anymore, but she hears of his time in rehab and sends him a packet of photographs, which he receives soon before he leaves the Clinic.

Objects/Places

Clinicappears in non-fiction

The Clinic is located in a small town in Minnesota where James and the other patients receive treatment for their addictions. This Clinic subscribes to belief in AA and the twelve steps, which is the most widely-accepted and generally effective treatment for managing addiction. The Clinic has several stringent rules banning substance use by patients and co-ed relationships.

Alcoholics Anonymousappears in non-fiction

Alcoholics Anonymous, or AA for short, is a relatively effective system of support and recovery based on surrendering control over your addiction to a higher power through twelve steps. This system has the highest rate of effectiveness of any known system of addiction management, and is generally believed to be the only thing that works. James never subscribes to this system.

Tao Te Chingappears in non-fiction

The book of Eastern philosophy that James's brother brings him for comfort at the Clinic preaches no authoritarian or strict doctrine, but rather calmness and willingness to let go of negative influences. James feels clarity and calm whenever he reads the Tao.

Crackappears in non-fiction

Cocaine that has been cooked with ethyl alcohol, gas, and baking powder. It is smoked with a glass pipe, and is severely addictive.

Methappears in non-fiction

Abbreviation for methamphetamines, a drug that is made with ephedrine, formaldehyde, and baking powder. It is incredibly destructive to the human body and severely addictive.

The Big Blue Bookappears in non-fiction

A guide book to Alcoholics Anonymous that details the concepts behind AA as well as how to work the twelve steps to recovery.

User Dreamappears in non-fiction

A vivid dream in which an addict or alcoholic abuses massive quantities of his drugs of choice. It is the result of years of conditioning that these substances are necessary to the body's functioning. James suffers three of them while he is at the Clinic, the most realistic and frightening of which happens during the night after he comes into contact with crack.

The Bus Stationappears in non-fiction

When Lilly runs away from the Clinic, she buys crack from a dealer in the men's bathroom at the Minneapolis Bus Station before hiding in a nearby abandoned building to smoke. James visits the same dealer on his mission to save Lilly, and then follows her to the abandoned building, where he saves her. The bus station is a home base for homeless people, drug dealers, users, and other social outcasts. As soon as James walks into the station, he knows where to find the dealer by spotting the two lookouts sitting outside of the men's room. James's familiarity with such places is, in this situation, a great tool.

The Barappears in non-fiction

The location of James's showdown with the Fury. As soon as he leaves the Clinic, James goes to this bar with his brother and orders a large glass of whiskey. After conquering his temptation and forever asserting his dominance over the Fury, James knows that he is ready to take on life sober, and joins his brother for a game of pool.

Hank's Coatappears in non-fiction

When James goes to the Dentist, Hank lends him one of his old coats so that he will be more comfortable in the Minnesota winter. This gift is received with sincere gratitude, and helps to build a bridge between James and Hank. Since Hank is the first person at the Clinic that James feels comfortable with, the coat becomes a symbol of a friend's support and strength.

Themes

Powerlessness and Authority

AA states that alcoholics and addicts must recognize that they are powerless against their addictions. Alcoholism is a disease that can no more be cured by willpower than can cancer. James, however, refuses to accept the idea that he must surrender. He believes that he chose to become an addict and that he deserves to suffer the consequences of those addictions. The idea of surrendering control over his life to any system of belief is unbearable to James. Rather, he continues to place the responsibility for his addictions squarely on his own shoulders, and to believe that he can beat this addiction by refusing to be powerless to it. The Clinic staff has seen such stubbornness lead to relapse over and over again, and they try futilely to convince James to work the twelve steps.

However, James's refusal to submit to any form of authority, be it religious, administrative, or parental, prevents him from exploring AA. James instinctively bristles whenever anyone tells him what to do, especially his parents or any of the supervisors on the unit. His knee-jerk aversion is influenced by several events, especially an incident with a priest, a religious authority, and a lifetime of fights with police officers, judges, and other legal authority figures. Ironically, James's addictions are the ultimate authority in his life, since they dictate how he lives his life, but he has lived obediently under them for over a decade.

The Clinic's Routine

A substantial amount of text is devoted to describing the daily routine of the Clinic. Because these addicts have lived without structure or with a warped daily routine, the Clinic institutes a regimen that fills the time of its patients with "normal" activities. Every day, the patients must complete a chore, eat three square meals, attend three lectures, and participate in any number of other activities like therapy or twelve-step work. This regularity is scary for many patients, who fear that they may lose it when they must reenter the real world. For James, this routine is both a comfort and a source of irritation. Since he wants desperately to have a normal, healthy life, he happily does his chore and eats healthy meals. However, his instinctive disdain for authority figures and AA causes him to rebel against participating in the lectures and therapy sessions.

Depictions of Addiction

Addiction is practically another character in this memoir, since nearly every person included in the narrative battles an addiction. Similarly, the nature of addiction is a major theme in Frey's story. First, the universality of addiction is clear in the wide diversity found in the patients at the Clinic. A judge, a Catholic university administrator, a boxer, a mobster, and any number of penniless or wealthy, pampered or neglected patients live

side-by-side. Every one of them must fight a battle that only other addicts can understand. Frey ensures that no reader of his memoir will believe that there is such a thing as a standard or stereotypical drug addict.

Frey also explores the role of addiction in society by juxtaposing the reality of addiction with some common interpretations of addiction that might appear in the media. A TV addict is wearing dirt on her face but has a peaches and cream complexion. A real-life addict is covered in cuts, bruises, lesions, garbage, and filth. A rock star addict talks about how much fun drugs used to be. A real-life addict feels no happiness because the act of needing the drugs is shameful, mechanical, and out of control. To Frey, these misconceptions are an insult to real addicts and a fatal handicap for family members of friends of addicts who want to understand their loved ones' struggles.

Addiction

The primary focus of *A Million Little Pieces* is addiction and its effects. Because the book is set at a rehab clinic, most of the characters are addicts or former addicts. The text's narrator, James, has had a profound addiction to drugs and alcohol for many years and is told by the clinic's doctor that he will die soon if he does not give them up. At the beginning of the book, James realizes that if he wants to live, he must conquer his addictions. It takes time and support for him to fully accept this fact and find his own path to recovery. Though doubts emerge for him along the way, James fights his fears and emerges a stronger person in the end. He also meets many other addicts, some of whom succeed in the same quest while others stumble or fail completely. The difficulty of admitting one's addiction in the first place, and of succeeding in recovery in the second place, are illustrated on every page of the book.

Pain and Suffering

The concepts of pain and suffering play significant roles in the book, underscoring the price of addiction. James arrives at the clinic in terrible physical condition because he is an addict. He then suffers severe physical pain because of his addictions and the detoxification process. Detox involves vomiting, shaking, fatigue, hallucinations, panic, and user dreams, which make the recovering addict relive the feelings of using drugs. James also has other physical problems when he arrives, including four broken teeth, a broken nose, and a wound in his cheek. He undergoes extensive oral surgery and reconstruction. As a recovering addict, he is forced to face the gruesome ordeal without anesthesia.

Even after the physical pain of detox and dental work subsides, James must deal with the emotional pain and suffering caused and masked by his addictions. James himself deals with an extremely destructive inner anger he dubs "the Fury" and the toll his addictions have taken on his life as well as the lives of his parents and friends. His fellow patients also face the destruction their addictions have wrought in their own lives.

Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are important to most of the characters and their recovery in *A Million Little Pieces*, especially to James. It was friends who called James's parents and put him on a plane so they could get him help. At the clinic, friends like Leonard and Miles help him remain with the program, deal with his legal issues, and face his addictions. While friends like Ted and Ed are less significant, they provide company at meals and a sense of camaraderie, which helps James continue to move forward. More significant is James's romantic relationship with Lilly. Though the pair break clinic rules to interact, James draws much strength and hope from Lilly in their telephone calls and secret meetings in the clearing. He gets strength from his desire to be strong for Lilly's sake.

James's relationship with his parents is more complicated than his friendships. He finds it difficult to be around his parents, and he becomes extremely angry whenever he has to deal with them, especially in person. Therapy with his parents brings them closer together with better understanding of each other. His parents open themselves to anguish to help James recover. James understands how he has hurt them and accepts responsibility for his life. The process is painful for all involved, but they all face it in order to move on.

Belief Systems

Belief systems, including philosophy and religion, are threads that run through the text. James is dismissive of the spiritual aspects of Alcoholics Anonymous and twelve-step programs. He repeatedly states that he does not believe in God or any type of higher power. He believes he is responsible for his own problems and his own fate, and he refuses to embrace any philosophy that says otherwise. The counselors and patients embrace the twelve steps, but James sees it as a farce. The counselors gradually come to see that James's approach is valid for him. Instead of such organized religion, James finds an inspiring life philosophy in a small book given to him by his brother. The poems in the *Tao te Ching* give James a framework for developing his philosophy for his recovery and life as a former addict.

Style

Perspective

The story is told exclusively in first-person narrative, from the point of view of author James Frey. Frey's reliability as a narrator has been called into question by the media, after a sensational expose that revealed that he had made up some of the details in the memoir. However, the events in the memoir are told logically and consistently, and within the world of the book the narrator's voice is a trustworthy one. Frey's narrative incorporates a lot of dialogue, both internal and with other individuals.

Tone

Frey's storytelling is sparse and unadorned. With the use of repetition, run-on sentences, and lackadaisical punctuation, Frey's voice feels casual and natural, more like a stream of consciousness than a crafted, structured narrative. Because of this construction, the tone of the memoir is spontaneous, raw and revelatory. A moment of clarity or empathy arrives unannounced, allowing the reader to experience the shock of discovery along with the characters in the book.

The dialogue is natural and unrefined. With the use of profanity, common spoken grammatical errors, and the kind of repetition that people rely on in times of grief, shock, or discomfort, Frey perpetrates the illusion that this book is more than an interpretation of the events in question, but rather a window into the time at the Clinic, for better or for worse.

Structure

The book is divided into unnumbered chapters, most of which follow a linear narrative structure. Frey does divert into occasional flashbacks, which are generally perfunctory and which exist in a dialogue of storytelling. The main plot of the memoir is of James's time at the Clinic, though Frey does incorporate two major subplots (the story of James and his college girlfriend and the story of the French priest) and many other minor stories told by James and the other patients in the Clinic.

The pace reflects the intensity of a given scene. For example, the pace of the scene in which James undergoes dental surgery without anesthesia is rapid-fire, in order to simulate the intensity of the experience. Conversely, a scene in which James and Lilly walk in the woods and discuss their lives with each other moves slowly, thoughtfully, and easily because the experience itself is a calming one.

First-person Narrative

Whether *A Million Little Pieces* is a work of fiction or nonfiction, it is presented in the style of a memoir, or the author's recollection of an important time in his or her life. Many novelists, tellers of tall tales, and conmen also employ this point of view to make their stories more believable. Memoirs focus only on a specific time or event, whereas biographies and autobiographies are meant to tell the story of a person's whole life. The first-person narrator tells the story as it appears to him, using "I" and "me" to present his point of view. The narrator shares his own thoughts and conversations, as those are the only details the limited viewpoint of a real, non-omniscient memoirist can provide.

Stylized Writing

One of the most distinctive aspects of *A Million Little Pieces* is the highly stylized manner in which the text is written. Frey's language and grammar represent his stream of consciousness, capturing the way people think and speak, unconstrained by the rules of formal communication. Describing his mother's tears during one of their family sessions at the clinic, for example, Frey writes, "My Mother continues to cry. She cannot will not is unable to stop."

Frey's usage of type mechanics is also creative. He does not use any quotation marks to separate dialogue and narrative. He capitalizes words to give weight to certain things or concepts but does not capitalize them consistently. In addition, Frey does not use exclamation points but employs a bold typeface to indicate shouting or emphasis. Such stylistic idiosyncrasies sometimes make the narrative hard to follow, but they also create a distinctive voice that is full of character.

Anti-hero

In writing the character of James, Frey fashions him as an anti-hero. An anti-hero is not a traditional "good guy," but he is someone the audience identifies with and roots for nonetheless. While he is the primary character in the book, James is not heroic but is an outcast and rebel who follows his own path. James is dismissive of much of the philosophy of and values supported by the clinic. He refuses to accept many of the principals taught there, primarily related to twelve-step programs and Alcoholics Anonymous. James does not believe in a higher power, nor will he submit to many of the twelve step-related teachings clinic employees like Ken, Lincoln, and Joanne try to get him to embrace. They believe James will fail to stay sober if he follows the plan he is fashioning for himself.

Many of the clinic employees also believe that James is socializing with the "wrong" patients. His relationship with Lilly is forbidden because of clinic rules. Though such romantic relationships are taboo for the patients' own good as they overcome the control of their addictions, James's relationship with Lilly is healing for him. The employees of the clinic also disapprove of his friendship with the mobster Leonard, a

friendship that helps keep James at the clinic and finding solutions to his recovery. As with such relationships, James recovers on his own terms and with his own methods.

Flashback

At several points in *A Million Little Pieces*, flashbacks give details about James's past. A flashback looks back to action and events that happened before the story at hand began. Most of James's flashbacks revolve around his relationship with his ex-girlfriend, including how they met and how the relationship ended. James has other flashbacks as well, including memories of his eighth-grade friend Michelle whose death he was blamed for and of a priest in Paris whom James beat—possibly to death.

Historical Context

Every day in 2002, about one million people in the United States were receiving treatment for alcohol or drug addiction. By 2003, $133 billion per year was spent treating the long-term and short-term medical consequences of addiction.

In 2002, about 11 percent of addicts in the United States received initial treatments at inpatient facilities like Hazelden (the clinic represented in *A Million Little Pieces*) or at hospitals, if they could afford it or had insurance that would cover the cost. Beginning in the 1960s, such facilities, based on the so-called Minnesota model of short-term inpatient care, offered addicts the chance to detoxify and move toward sobriety in a controlled environment for several weeks. The term of twenty-eight days was a norm, though some nonhospital residential treatments lasted from a few months to two years. While government support of such treatment in lieu of time in prison or jail ebbed and flowed between the 1960s and early 2000s, the Minnesota model became the standard for such clinics, both private and public. By the 1990s, most clinics treated both alcoholics and drug addicts in the same facility.

Outpatient clinics, such as the halfway houses discussed in the book, are a less expensive and more popular option for treatment of addicts. In 2002, about 89 percent of addicts in the United States were in such programs. These outpatient clinics also give alcoholics a chance to avoid jail and receive attention for their condition, which is becoming generally accepted as a disease, not a crime, character flaw, or a mental illness. Those who seek treatment in outpatient clinics go to a care center on a daily to weekly basis. There, they receive counseling and take advantage of other resources to help them manage their addictions.

After release from an inpatient clinic or as part of outpatient treatment, addicts are generally expected to join a self-help group such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or its counterpart, Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Both are based on the twelve-step program Frey rejects in *A Million Little Pieces*. Such programs promote the idea of addiction as a disease. They also give recovering addicts a support system to keep their addictions in check. AA and NA are often seen as the only way for addicts to stay sober in the long term, primarily because of the peer support at the meetings, which are an essential part of the experience. There are dissenters who agree with Frey, viewing AA and NA as cults and replacement addictions.

Another treatment for alcoholism that gained more acceptance in this period are drugs to help alcoholics stay sober. Antabuse is a medication that works by making users ill with nausea, vomiting, and other physical symptoms if they drink alcohol. In the mid-1990s, another drug came on the market that helped alcoholics after detoxification; Naltrexone deals with both the physical and psychological effects of alcoholism, by easing cravings for alcohol and preventing relapses for heavy drinkers.

Despite such treatments, most alcoholics and addicts do not achieve long-term sobriety. For example, by 2002, the California-based Center Point treatment facilities saw one

third of its patients leave before completing their program. A study mandated by the U.S. Congress in this same time period found that half of those who conquered a cocaine addiction as well two-thirds of those addicted to both heroin and cocaine began using drugs again within a year.

Critical Overview

When *A Million Little Pieces* was published, the memoir was praised by critics for its brutally honest depiction of addiction and rehabilitation. In a review in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, James Sullivan wrote, "James Frey's staggering recovery memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, could well be seen as the final word on the topic [of addiction]." Julian Keeling, a former patient at Hazelden (the setting of Frey's book) commented, "His intense, repetitive prose accurately captures the physical experience of being in recovery."

Critics also noted Frey's distinctive style and generally had praise for its effect. David Kamp of the *New York Times Book Review* noted, "From the get-go, his book sets itself apart, its narrative unspooling in short, unindented paragraphs and barely punctuated sentences whose spare, deadpan language belies the horror of what he's describing—a meltdown dispatched in telegrams." John Freeman of the *Boston Globe* called *A Million Little Pieces* "mesmerizing," adding, "Unlike other memoirists, whose fidelity to realism limits their ability to shock or astonish, Frey throws all the rules of writing out the window and rebuilds language from there."

Some critics found Frey's depiction of himself off-putting. *New York Times* reviewer Kamp described it as "an unwelcome narcissism" and remarked, "it's evident that the sober Frey still digs the supertough, supersick baddie he was." Others saw different problems with the book. Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* wrote that Frey's book follows a prescribed pattern, with all the high notes and low notes of familiar memoirs. Of the crisis around Lilly leaving the clinic, she wrote, "although every detail of it may be accurate, it powerfully and sadly resembles pulp fiction."

Though Laura Miller of the *New Yorker* called the book "a good show" that is "[hard] to forget," she expressed some doubts about its veracity before the truth about the book's untruths came to light. "This is the Dirty Harry model of recovery, and the cinematic quality of some of Frey's exploits makes you wonder whether the facts in this memoir have been enhanced," she observed.

In 2006, after the *Smoking Gun* website revealed that *A Million Little Pieces* had been partially fabricated and other information came to light that Frey had exaggerated or made up aspects of the story, critical opinion changed dramatically. While a few still found the book to have value, many condemned Frey and his publisher for the deception. Tom Scocca in the *New York Observer* charged, "James Frey is a liar. (By the way, so is 'James Frey.') His best-selling memoir, *A Million Little Pieces* is a fraud. It is a seamless mass of falsehoods, told deliberately, for the purpose of making money."

Several commentators did not accept Frey's excuse of a poor memory for his fictionalization of the truth. Writing in *Newsweek*, columnist Anna Quindlen asserted,

Memory is what accounts for confusing an overcast day with a clear one. Lying is what we wordsmiths call turning a single night in custody into three harrowing months in the

clink. And lying matters. Truth is a rock; if you chip away at it enough, you wind up with gravel, then sand.

Others went further, charging that Frey's action and his book undermined the credibility of other writers. Moira Farr of the *Ottawa Citizen* asserted, "Mr. Frey's laissez-faire attitude about what's true or not in a memoir … tarnishes all journalists and non-fiction writers who base their professional integrity on their ability and desire to get the facts right."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Petrusso is a history and screenwriting scholar and freelance writer and editor. In this essay, Petrusso argues that the revelations surrounding Frey's exaggerations and falsifications in A Million Little Pieces *change how the book is read and how to regard Frey's character therein. Instead of Frey as rebellious sober addict superhero, Frey becomes a star in a cautionary tale about hubris*.

When James Frey's stark memoir of his intense recovery from drug and alcohol addiction was published in 2003, a number of critics praised the power of *A Million Little Pieces*, impressed with the tough yet effective way he described himself. Writing in the *Boston Globe*, John Freeman gushed, "Within a few pages, one feels as imprisoned in Frey's head as he was then—trapped, in fact, by his pain, his misery, his self-loathing, and his desire for drugs." Other early reviewers did detect some conceit in his depiction of himself, but the gripping story and the unflinching presentation often pushed aside such concerns about his character.

However, Frey's true egotism came to light in 2006 after revelations of falsehoods in the book appeared first on *The Smoking Gun* website and later in newspapers and magazines. Many key events in the book were embellished or did not happen at all. For example, the death of his only friend in junior high school in a car wreck, a girl called Michelle in *A Million Little Pieces*, actually happened while he was in high school to two popular girls named Jane Hall and Melissa Sanders. Though Frey claimed to have contributed to "her" death by covering for "her" whereabouts, he had nothing to do with the real-life incident.

Other "facts" about Frey's life both before and during his visit to the clinic were also shown to be fabrications. He did not run away to Paris after being arrested in Ohio. Frey had a job there with his father's company. In fact, his Ohio arrest was not even for the charges he claimed in the book. He did not spend three months in jail, only about five hours when he was initially arrested. Some investigators also doubt many of the details about Lilly, with a few wondering if she existed at all. In the epilogue to *A Million Little Pieces*, Frey writes that Lilly hanged herself in her Chicago halfway house the day he was released from his three-month sentence in Ohio, though the latter event never happened. There was no record found of such a suicide, her burial, or such a person with any similar details found in the Chicago area.

Furthermore, there is no record Frey underwent two root canals without any anesthesia or painkillers in the area around the Hazelden Clinic, where he was receiving treatment for his addictions. If he had, he would have received some sort of anesthesia during the operation, but no painkillers after the procedure was completed. The president of the Minnesota Dental Association, Dr. Scott Lingle, told the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (quoted in the *New York Post*), "I wouldn't give him a narcotic post-operatively, but Novocaine wouldn't affect an addiction."

Finally and most importantly, Frey would not have been allowed to remain at Hazelden if he had flouted the rules as he claimed he did in *A Million Little Pieces*. Former patients and counselors at the clinic stated in interviews that Frey would have been expelled after physically attacking two others or getting caught meeting Lilly. Carol Colleran, who was employed at various Hazelden locations for nearly two decades, told Edward Wyatt of the *New York Times* that in terms of the clinic's operating procedures, "98 percent of that book is false."

Critical opinion generally changed after these and other truths about Frey's book came to light. For example, Mark Mordue of the *Weekend Australian* charged "you can see the recipe for hubris oozing through the language, a penchant for self-worshipping edginess and machismo that already signals a somewhat one-eyed and inflated view of his world." Overnight, Frey went from being a successful revolutionary to a pathetic man-child who fashioned himself as the character readers wished he was. Frey tried to make himself into an epic anti-hero, but was only an impostor in the mythology of his own life. He undermined himself as well as the power and potential of his literary work to do good for other addicts and those who love them.

Reading *A Million Little Pieces* after the scandal broke, what becomes clear is that Frey sees himself as an iconoclast. Such characteristics are not as obvious when reading the book without knowing the truth about it. If the memoir were indeed true, Frey would be a survivor, an ideal American do-it-yourself anti-hero, ready to inspire readers around the world to win over addictions or anything else on their own terms. He would epitomize the alternative Generation X attitude in his own cool, tough guy, nouveau-Steve McQueen kind of way. Unfortunately, as Frey was forced to admit several times on national television, he is a liar. He lied about such qualities and he lied about himself.

Examining Frey's depiction of himself while knowing the truth about his deceptions, it is easy to see the superhuman characteristics he gives himself in *A Million Little Pieces*. Throughout the text, Frey is always right when moral judgments are at hand. He does not need to follow the rules of the clinic because his relationship with Lilly betters them both. Frey can physically attack Bobby's friend because the man was questioning Lilly's honor and he deserves to be punished by Frey. Frey can also physically attack Roy because Roy deserves it for lying about Frey. Those who doubted Frey eventually know the "truth." Frey will not be expelled from the clinic even when those in charge believe he should be because Frey's personal qualities allow someone, usually Joanne, to be on his side—the "right" side. Other powerful men like Leonard and Miles also recognize James's epic character and use their influence on his behalf. The rebel is embraced by the authority who sees his righteousness.

While Frey wrote that he tried to keep an open mind about the clinic's program and what he could learn there, he adamantly refused to submit to much of the clinic's twelve-step program. Frey would not participate in the steps in the way the clinic's program was laid out, though he would do parts on his own terms. He also dismissed the suggestion to join AA after leaving the clinic, believing it was nothing more than trading one addiction for another. Frey also steadfastly refused to believe in, need, or surrender to a higher power. He implies some disillusionment with the Catholic Church because of the

incident with the priest in Paris. He also seems to have embraced a compatible, if not self-centered, moral philosophy in the *Tao te Ching*.

The real reason for Frey's uneasiness with the idea of a higher power was that there could be no higher power than himself in *A Million Little Pieces*. While Frey evolves in the book, accepting that he has made a mess of his life in the past and learning from his many admitted mistakes, he is also the compassionate all-knowing one because of the experiences he purports to have had at the clinic. Frey finds strength in the Bald Man's public tears, comforts Miles, feels compassion for John, and saves Lilly from herself and her still-strong addictions by rescuing her after she leaves. Dealing with his parents, the trigger that often sets off his "Fury," even comes under his control because god-like Frey can learn a lifetime of self-control from one meeting with his mother and Joanne. He never gives into temptations to use drugs and alcohol. Frey does not make mistakes in *A Million Little Pieces*. Every action he takes after he enters that clinic is depicted as the right one. He draws himself as an all-knowing being whose life became livable once he accepted his own righteousness.

My Friend Leonard (2005), is the second book by Frey. It is a follow-up to *A Million Little Pieces*, covering several years after he left the clinic.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962), a novel by Ken Kesey, tells the story of patients in a mental asylum with varying degrees of problems and illnesses, who are captivated by a new patient who refuses to accept the status quo.

Angela's Ashes (1996), a Pulitzer Prize-winning memoir by Frank McCourt, focuses on the author's miserable, tragic childhood but is a gripping personal story of triumph over adversity.

Permanent Midnight: A Memoir (1995) is a memoir by Jerry Stahl recounting his years of working as writer in Hollywood while sinking deeper into drug addiction.

Drinking: A Love Story (1997), by Caroline Knapp, is a memoir about Knapp's life as an alcoholic. She successfully competed rehab and embraced Alcoholics Anonymous.

What is ironic about Frey and the controversy surrounding the truth, or lack thereof, in *A Million Little Pieces* is that Frey repeatedly claims to see the falsehoods and illusions of others, from the posturing former patients who return to share their stories to the counselors, Ken and Lincoln, who have him all wrong. Yet Frey willfully embraces many such falsehoods and illusions in his own story. He did not lose his only friend in junior high because of his deceit. He did not have two root canals without anesthetic. He did not spend three months in jail in Ohio, and he did not commit the crimes he said he did. He did not enter rehab knowing all the answers, and he did not live above the law when he was there.

Such lies also make one wonder about the extent of Frey's addiction to begin with, as well as the reality of his detox and treatment. Was he an alcoholic? Did he really use crack? Does it matter in the face of his many untruths? Frey really did spend time at Hazelden, but to what end? *A Million Little Pieces* would not have worked as a novel

because the character of "James Frey" is written too unbelievably to be taken seriously had it not been a given that his story was true. To work as a piece of fiction, the protagonist would have to ring more true. Thus, the whole of the book has to be questioned.

Frey admitted to the ultimate irony about the whole situation surrounding his book. Shortly after the scandal broke, Wyatt of the *New York Times* wrote, "James Frey … offered the first detailed explanation of why he embellished and lied about events in *A Million Little Pieces*, his best-selling book: it made a better story." Unfortunately, it was not marketed as just a good yarn, but the alleged truth about one man's alleged addictions and alleged recovery. When his fans—many actual addicts who found hope and inspiration in his tale—discovered the truth, they were outraged by the betrayal. In the end, Frey's story does contain some mythical qualities; unfortunately, he turned out to be more of an Icarus than a Hercules.

Source: A. Petrusso, Critical Essay on *A Million Little Pieces*, in *Literary Newsmakers*, Thomson Gale, 2007.

Quotes

"I find a chair and I light a cigarette and I take a long deep drag and I look at the men sitting around me. They are black and white and yellow and brown. They have long hair, short hair, beards and moustaches. They are well dressed and they wear rags, they are fat and they are thin. They are hard, weathered, worn-out and desperate. Intimidating and thuggish, addicted and insane. They are all different and they are all the same and as I sit there smoking my cigarette, they scare the living shit out of me." Chap. 4, p. 31

"I am an Alcoholic and I am a Drug Addict and I am a Criminal." Chap. 7, p. 74

"I may be a coke Addict and a fellow Patient and a Fuck-Up of the First Order, but I am giving you good advice. Be smart, be strong, be proud, live honorably and with dignity, and just hold on." Chap. 12, p. 195

"These things, these poems, these words, these meanings, they make sense to me. They do not tell me to do anything or be anything or believe in anything or become anything. They don't judge me or try to convince me. There is no righteousness or pretension. They don't fight me or insult me or tell me I'm wrong. There is no Authority and there are no Rules. They are just words strung together on a page sitting and waiting patiently for me to accept or reject them. They don't care if I do either or both or nothing at all. They will never tell me I'm wrong. They will never tell me I'm right either. They just sit there." Chap. 12, p. 201

"The Addicts and Alcoholics give straight, simple answers. We ask no questions. Unlike the Family Members, we already know the answers. We fuck up your lives. We ruin every single one of your days. We are your worst nightmare. You don't know what to do with us. You're at the end of your rope. You don't know what to do. You're at the end of your fucking rope. You don't know what to do." Chap. 14, p. 260

"I want to look up into the pale green of my eyes. I want to see the self that lives beneath. Closer, closer. I can't do it. No fucking way. I turn away and I walk to the shower and I step into the shower and I am pummeled by the heat. It burns me and it turns my skin red and it hurts but I won't step away from it. I deserve this hurt for not being brave enough to look at myself. I deserve this hurt and I will stand and I will take it because I am not brave enough to look into my own eyes." Chap. 8, p. 79

"Because I think it's funny that a Federal Judge is asking me for advice. We are all the same in here. Judge of Criminal, Bourbon Drinker or Crackhead." Chap. 14, p. 271

"I don't believe that addiction is a disease. Cancer is a disease. It takes over the body and destroys it. Alzheimer's is a disease. It takes over the body and mind and it ruins them. Parkinson's is a disease. It takes over the body and the mind and makes them

shake and it wrecks them. Addiction is not a disease. Not even close. Diseases are destructive Medical conditions that human beings do not control. They do not choose when to have them, they do not choose when to get rid of them. They do not choose the type of disease they would like or in what form it is delivered, the do not choose how much of it they would like or what time they would like it. A disease is a Medical condition that must be dealt with using Medical technology. It cannot be dealt with using a Group or a set of Steps. . . If someone is stupid, but wants to be smart, it is not a genetic disease. If a drunk is a drunk, but doesn't want to be a drunk anymore, it is not a genetic disease. Addiction is a decision." Chap. 15, p. 291

"I've always felt these things. I don't think there are any words that describe them exactly, but they are a combination of rage, anger, extreme pain. They mix together into what I call the Fury. I have known the Fury for as long as I can remember. It is the one thing that has been with me my entire life." Chap. 15, p. 303

"Our Jobs here, as stupid and menial as they may be, allow us to pretend that we are, if even for just a few minutes a day, just like other people. That is why the Jobs get done. Not because we are told to do them, for most of us have spent our lives doing everything but that which we have been told to do, but because the Jobs make us feel normal. Normal people have Jobs. For a few minutes a day, we get to pretend." Chap. 16, p. 332

"I see the pipe burning his hand. The butane torch is in his other hand he is pointing it at me like a gun. The smell of crack, like bittersweet peppermint gasoline, drifts through the Room. The smell taunts me and it enrages me and I would love to taste that smell, but I want Lilly more than the great and terrible rock." Chap. 16, p. 353

"I have missed it my little Chinese book. Forty-four. What is more important, fame or integrity. What is more valuable, money or happiness. What is more dangerous, success or failure. If you look to others for fulfillment, you will never be fulfilled. If your happiness depends on money, you will never be happy. Be content with what you have and take joy in the way things are. When you realize you have all you need, the World belongs to you. Thirty-six. If you want to shrink something, you must first expand it. If you want to get rid of something, you must first allow it to flourish. If you want to take something, you must allow it to be given. The soft will overcome the hard. The slow will beat the fast. Don't tell people the way, just show them the results." Chap. 17, p. 370

"I don't believe in the Twelve Steps. I don't believe in God or any form of Higher Power. I refuse to turn my life and my will over to anything or anyone, much less something I don't believe in. . . I'm going to live my life. I am going to take things as they come and I will deal with what is in front of me when it is in front of me. When alcohol or drugs or both are in front of me, I will make a decision not to use them. I'm not going to live in fear of alcohol or drugs, and I'm not going to spend my time sitting and talking with people who live in fear of them. I am not going to be dependent on anything but myself." Chap. 18, p. 409

"I look into myself. Into the pale green of my own eyes. I like what I see. I am comfortable with it. It is fixed and focused. It will not blink. For the first time in my life, I look into my own eyes. I like what I see. I can live with it. I want to live with it. For a long time. I want to live with it. I want to live. The Fury screams bloody fucking murder. The Pale Green softly speaks. It says you are mine, Motherfucker. You are mine and you will always be mine. From this day forward I own you, I control you and you will do what I tell you to do. From this day forward, I make the fucking decisions." Chap. 20, p. 429

Topics for Discussion

What is a memoir? How is it different from a novel or an autobiography?

How does James's self-loathing both aid and hinder his recovery at the Clinic? Is self-loathing always a negative trait?

How does Frey's writing style and the format of the book contribute to the story? Does it detract from or enhance the plot and themes of the memoir?

Do you trust Frey's telling of this story? Do you believe that his version of these events is truthful and unbiased? If so, why? If not, how is his story biased?

James believes that AA is only effective because it substitutes one addiction for another: addiction to alcohol becomes addiction to support meetings. Do you agree with James? Why or why not? How do the experiences of the patients at the Clinic support your opinion?

Compare James's real-life experiences to other depictions of addiction that you have seen, either on TV or in other books. What is similar? What is different?

The addicts at the Clinic require many different kinds of support from many different sources. What are some of those sources of support, and how do they differ from each other? For example, how does Leonard's support differ from Joanne's or James's brother's support? How are they the same?

- In *A Million Little Pieces*, James Frey uses unconventional punctuation, grammar, and text elements to enhance the mood of his story. Pick a mood to convey in writing—joy, fear, boredom, desperation—and try to develop a graphic style to represent it. Experiment with the ways upper and lowercase letters, fonts and type styles, grammar and punctuation change the prose's voice.
- Research the origins and effectiveness of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), which was founded in the United States in the 1940s. While Frey is dismissive of the usefulness of the group, at least for himself, AA is often considered an essential part of an alcoholic's program of sobriety. Present your findings, touching on why you believe Frey does not support AA for himself.
- Divide the class into small groups of about five students each. Each group should read and analyze several poems in the *Tao Te Ching*. In group discussions, answer such questions as: Why the poems inspired Frey? What support do they provide for recovering addicts? What truths do they hold for your life?
- Research the life and writings of another writer who chose to not conquer his addictions, such as William S. Burroughs or Charles Bukowski. Write a paper in which you compare Frey's life and literary stylings as a former addict with the life and work of an addict writer who lived with his or her condition.
- A great uproar resulted when it came to light that *A Million Little Pieces* is more a work of fiction than a memoir. How does that knowledge change the book's

impact on readers? As a group, discuss the value of literature and if that value changes depending on whether a book's events are true or invented. Consider why so many readers were so outraged to discover Frey's deception.

Further Study

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This guide, published by the rehab clinic Frey describes in *A Million Little Pieces*, offers information on alcoholism and addictions and the ways that loved ones can get help for those suffering from these conditions.

Kurtz, Ernest, *Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Hazelden, 1991.

This book, which began as the author's doctoral dissertation, examines the origins and spread of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Lemanski, Michael, *A History of Addiction & Recovery in the United States: Traditional Treatments and Effective Alternatives*, See Sharp Press, 2001.

This nonfiction work outlines the history of addiction and its treatment in America, including questions about the effectiveness of twelve-step programs.

Mitchell, Stephen, translator, *Tao te Ching: A New English Version*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2000.

In *A Million Little Pieces*, Frey finds comfort in a translation of the *Tao te Ching*, the teachings of Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher.

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David Galens

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Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

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Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331–3535