

Navigating Early Study Guide

Navigating Early by Clare Vanderpool

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Plot Summary

“Navigating Early” by Claire Vanderpool is the story of Jack Baker, a 13-year-old who is a happy-go-lucky kid living in a small town in Kansas when tragedy strikes. His mother dies unexpectedly from a brain aneurysm. Jack suffers the requisite guilt of a 13-year-old who thinks he if hadn’t been mad at his mother that night, she could have lived or he could have saved her. Jack’s father is a naval captain. He left for duty in the European theater during World War II when Jack was nine. Four years later he returns not to celebrate the end of his tour of duty but to bury his wife.

Jack barely saw his father over the last four years. He doesn’t know him; he’s like a stranger to him. The memories that he does have of his father and his relationship with him are not good ones. His father is remote and emotionally distant. He treats Jack more like a recruit than a son. Jack refers to him as “The Captain” and his father signed a letter to Jack as “Captain Baker.” Jack was extremely close to his mother who was emotionally open to Jack and who had a laid back and forgiving style compared to the stringent, militaristic persona that his father portrays. But after her death, all they had was each other. Captain Baker really didn’t know what to do with his son. He was aware of the dysfunctional aspect of their relationship but he never discussed it with Jack.

Captain Baker is stationed at Portsmouth, Maine. So he decides to enroll Jack in a boys’ boarding school, Morton Hill, in Maine, so that at least they will be geographically close if not close in any other way. Jack had pleaded to be allowed to stay in Kansas and live with his grandfather but Captain Baker’s mind was made up. Jack is less than thrilled when he arrives at Morton Hill. He expects not to like it or have any friends. He’s miserable because everything reminds him of the mother he no longer has.

Jack doesn’t do well at rowing which is Morton Hill’s premiere sport. Early Auden who is in Jack’s class is an odd yet very bright little boy. The two begin to form a friendship although they are nothing alike. As it turns out, they do have profound things in common – great losses and the need to work their way through the accompanying grief.

Although Early was notified by no less than the U.S. Army that his big brother, Fisher, was killed in action in France, he is not easy to convince. He does some investigation and research himself and keeps his eyes open to all possibilities and comes to the conclusion that Fish is alive and is determined to find him. Early conflates his missing brother with the story of the star Polaris in the Ursa Major constellation. Polaris’ mother calls her son Pi. He wants to earn the name, Polaris, so she sets him off on a quest to do so. She tells him to follow the stars, the Great Bear, but he loses sight of the constellation and becomes a wandering, lost soul. Early is sure that same thing has happened to Fish – he’s a lost soul like Pi, but Early is certain he can find him.

Early is annoyed that a professor has theorized that the number pi 3.14 is not infinite as most believe. Early won’t buy it, because if pi ends that would mean the Pi and Fish are dead. Early invites Jack to go on the quest to find Fish. Although Jack thinks Early is delusional, he has nothing else going on so he goes with him.



The two boys have an adventure of a life time. The face danger, death and unimagined perils but they prevail mainly because of Early's belief that his brother is alive and he can find him. In the end, the boys survive the worst peril of all – personal loss. Early is right about pi and is right about Pi. Captain Baker opens up emotionally and becomes the father that Jack needs.



Chapters 1 - 5

Summary

Jack Baker throws up the first time he sees the ocean. They'd flown from Kansas to Maine on a military cargo plane and it was a rough ride. His father, who he called "captain," probably thought his son was a real baby. He was nine when his father left four years before to fight in the European Theater during World War II. In the Spring the war had started to wind down and Jack and his mother were looking forward to his father's homecoming. But his father came home earlier than expected – not to celebrate, but for Jack's mother's funeral. He and his father seem like two strangers. Jack is 13 now with no mother and a father he barely knows.

They took a jeep to the Morton Hill Academy in Cape Fealty, Maine. It was the closest boarding school to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard where Jack's father is stationed. After a tour of the campus, Mr. Conrady reminds Captain Baker about the Fall Regatta.

Jack and his father say their goodbyes. Captain Baker tells Jack to take care of himself. Four years before he told Jack to take care of his mother. Was that a reminder that Jack had failed? Jack takes a walk along the beach. Everything reminds him of his mother. He misses her. He sees a boy down a ways stacking sand bags on the beach but he loses sight of him. Jack spent most of the next day in the library. Jack looks at the trophy case that is filled with sports trophies and plaques won by the school over the years. The photo of the captain of the rowing team of 1943 gets his attention.

Jack recognizes Early Auden in his math class as the kid he saw on the beach. Professor Eric Blane introduces himself to the class. He writes, "Holy Grail," on the board to kick off a debate on the purposes and benefits of a quest. There can be quests for treasure or quests for justice – pi is the Holy Grail of math and is accepted as a never-ending number. Professor Douglas Stanton of Cambridge, however, is on a quest to prove that pi is not an unending number. Jack hears the door open and sees that Early just left.

At P.E., the boys have to dive in and push a weight across the pool. When it's Jack's turn, he notices a shiny object at the bottom of the pool. It looks like the navigator ring that his father gave him. He reaches for it but it isn't there. The coach is in the water pulling Jack to the side of the pool, asking him what he was doing. Jack tells him he feels sick. Instead of going to the locker room, he took the steps down and leans against the custodian's door.

Jack recalls during Boy Scout survival having to navigate using only landmarks, the stars and their brains. It was an overcast night and Jack got lost in the woods. He didn't find his way back until ten that night. Everyone was in a panic looking for him. The boys teased him all the way home. He had thought he was lost that night but didn't know how lost he would soon be. Jack looks around in the custodian's office which is unusually



neat. There are images of constellations and warnings about black bears on the bulletin board. A record had been playing but had reached its end.

Suddenly, Early is there saying that no one knew where he is buried, where Mozart is buried. He thinks Mozart wanted it that way. Early allows the record needle to keep scratching. He calls it “white space” which is what he figured Jack needed since he was upset. Early gives Jack some clean dry clothes to put on. The clothes don’t belong to Early because they’re big on Jack. Early tells him the office is his workshop and where he lived. The custodian, Mr. Wallace, set his office up in another room. Jack learns that Early’s mother died when he was born.

Early starts talking about Pi being lost in a hurricane. He writes pi, 3.14, on the small blackboard. He disagrees with Mr. Blane that pi isn’t endless. The “three” is Pi’s mother, the “four” is his father and the “one” is Pi whose real name is Polaris. Before the stars had names, there was a boy who wondered what was beyond the stars. He wondered why the sky was so big and why he was so small. When he grew big, he left his mother. They both cried. She had made a necklace of shells for him. She told him to look to the stars to find his way. The boy pointed to a star that looked like a little bear. The little bear had a mother, the Great Bear, who would watch over him.

Talk of stars makes Jack think of his mother again. She told him to focus on the beauty of the stars not navigating by them. She had said that stars were connected just like people are. She also stressed that it was best not to see the pathway of your life. It’s better to be surprised sometimes.

Mr. Blane makes the boys wake up early to practice rowing. Jack is assigned to a weather-beaten vessel called “Sweetie Pie.” Jack has never rowed before and immediately veers off course. He’s the last to make it back to the dock. When he stands after reaching the deck the Sweetie Pie pitches left and he falls in the Bay.

Analysis

The author sets up the premise of a serious schism between father and son. By inserting this integral element of their relationship at the very start of the story, the author is foreshadowing that this broken relationship has import in the rest of the telling of, “Navigating Early.” That Jack refers to his father as “captain” is symbolic of their dysfunctional relationship. His father encourages that aspect of their inactions by signing a letter to his son as, “Captain Baker.” The fault of the failed relationship lies at the feet of Captain Baker. He is the adult and the parent while Jack is 13-year-old boy. Baker allowed his relationship with his son to deteriorate. He ceded the close relationship with his son to his wife who had a totally different approach to Jack.

There is profound meaning in Jack’s feeling that he and his father are like strangers. It is obvious that they do not relate like father and son. Captain Baker may be a brave naval officer who is defending his country; however, he has abandoned something more important – a close relationship with his only child who needs a father. Jack’s lifeline



was his mother. When she passes, Jack feels lost and alone. He cannot turn to his father who's never been there for him. Captain Baker who would never abandon his military duties had abdicated his duty and responsibility to his child long before. The question looms whether this relationship can be fixed. The recovery will be mostly dependent on Captain Baker. Does he have what it takes to admit his mistakes and try to be a real father to Jack? Will it be too late?

Jack's obsessive thoughts about his mother are symbolic of the grief that he is suffering which he has not been given a chance to express. The youngster had virtually no support in getting through such a traumatic experience. He therefore is holding onto his mother in the only way he can – the memories he had with her. His father has once again abandoned Jack emotionally. He does his “duty” just like he would in the navy and enrolls Jack in a new school which ostensibly is “taking care of him.” But he is ignoring the pain that his son is suffering that is exacerbated by being stripped not only of his mother but of the only home he ever knew.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the differences between the way his mother treated Jack and the way his father treated him.

Discussion Question 2

What happened to Jack during Boy Scout survival? How was he treated by the other scouts? How did his mother react?

Discussion Question 3

What difficult adjustments does Jack have after his move to Morton Hill? Why do so many things tend to remind Jack of his mother?

Vocabulary

exhilarating, condolences, humanitarian, chalice, skepticism, authenticity, tangible, millennia, venerable, diversionary, unencumbered



Chapters 6 - 10

Summary

Everything has its shrine. The church was Jack's hometown shrine. The baseball diamond was his school's shrine. For Morton Hill Academy, the shrine is the stone boathouse. The Nook as it's called is the oldest building on campus. A gleaming boat called The Maine holds the highest place of honor in the Nook. He relates more to the shabby Sweetie Pie than the elegant ship.

Early gives Jack some pointers for improving his rowing skills. Jack tells Early he doesn't need his help. Early replies that that was exactly what Pi said when he set out on his journey. Jack is stunned when Early calls him, "Jackie." His mother was the only one who called him that. Early tells him that if he didn't like the Sweetie Pie to take it apart and make it right – echoing what Jack's mother had told him.

Mr. Blane tells the class that Professor Stanton reports that although new numbers continue to calculate for pi, he's noticed that the numeral "one" no longer appears. His theory is that all the numbers will continue to drop off. When they're all gone, pi will be finished. Stanton will present his case at the Fall Math Institute that will be attended by mathematicians from around the world. If he's wrong it will be called a proof by contradiction. Someone will have to prove that one of the numbers that Stanton claims fell off is still there. That evening the boys congregate in Robbie Dean's room and discuss pi and whether Stanton's theory could be right.

When the boys discuss heroic figures, Jack says he'd rather have a current-day hero like the Fish. Dean explains to the others that the Fish – Number 67 from the class of '43 – is the greatest athlete the school ever knew. His boat is The Maine. Fish excelled in football, track and rowing and in the steeplechase an obstacle course that was stopped after one kid almost broke his neck on Dinosaur Log. Jack asks if Fish ever comes back. Robbie tells him that after graduation Fish enlisted in the army. His entire squad was killed in France.

Jack keeps thinking of the steeplechase and how it's like a quest. Jack runs down the beach and sees Dinosaur Log. It looks like a brontosaurus that stretched out over the waterfall and the rocks below. Jack steps up on the mossy, slippery log and inches his way across. It starts raining and he begins to lose his balance. He doesn't want to fall and decides to turn back. Jack goes to the library when he returns to school. He passes the trophy case and recalls how he felt sorry for Fish because he didn't know about life's cruelties. But the Fish was dead. Jack feels a kinship with him.

When he leaves the library, Jack hears a woman singing and follows the sound down to Early's custodial home. The singing is coming from Early's phonograph. It's Billie Holiday who Early plays when it's raining. Early is working on the Sweetie Pie. He hands Jack a square of sandpaper and tells him to help sand the boat down. Early



doesn't want to talk about Professor Stanton proving that pi has an end. He insists he's not making up a story that Pi and his journey are in the numbers – the numbers tell the story. Early begins telling Jack the entire story of Pi.

Jack and Early work on the boat. The boys listen to Early's records and shows on his radio. They hear about a rogue bear on the Appalachian Trail that has a bounty of \$750. They hear that Japan surrendered on the USS Missouri and that the war is over. The Regatta is just four weeks away. Jack wants to compete in it with the Sweetie Pie and win. He used to compete in everything back home until his mother died. He quit everything then. He recalls slugging his friend Melvin Trumbolt who talked about his mother's cooking. How could he talk about his mother like that when Jack didn't have his mother any longer?

The Sweetie Pie is finally refurbished. Jack practices rowing every day before sunrise and after school. He is sore at first but then his muscles adjust to the punishment. He still has trouble rowing in a straight line. Early tells him he needs a coxswain, a navigator. Early installs another seat for the navigator and takes the seat himself. As Jack rows through the water, Early is calling out instructions. Jack begins to row in a straighter line.

Analysis

Jack's lack of self-worth is symbolized when he compares the pristine Maine with his boat the shabby Sweetie Pie which he is assigned to use in rowing practice. He relates to the rundown boat because that's how he feels – he is broken and battered just like the boat. His guilt over his mother's death makes him feel like he's deserving of the worst boat. Jack is the Sweetie Pie – the great and legendary Fish is The Maine. Jack doesn't belong in that league. The coach didn't have any nefarious reasons for assigning the rundown boat to Jack. But to Jack it was the perfect choice for him. This episode symbolizes the nadir of Jack's feelings about himself.

The Sweetie Pie is used to bring in an entire new dimension to the story. Early Auden, the strange little boy who keeps to himself, tells Jack that if he didn't like the Sweetie Pie he should take it apart and make it right. Jack is nearly floored by Early's words which echo what his mother told him about the boxcar racer he made. He had left the car out in the rain and nearly ruined it. She told him to take it apart and fix it. His father, in his militaristic mindset, had told Jack that he made his bed and had to lie in it. The author is juxtaposing a fundamental difference between mother and father which furthers the understanding by the reader of Jack's relationship with both parents.

Jack's memory of his mother's words that are repeated almost exactly by Early gives Jack a glimmer of hope and an eerie feeling that his mother was speaking through this young boy. The author foreshadows the hope that Jack will emerge from his grief and survive his trial. No one will take his mother's place but having an intuitive friend like Early can help him mend and recover.



Discussion Question 1

What is Jack referring to when he says that everything has its “shrine?” Name some of the specific examples he gives and explain why he cites them.

Discussion Question 2

Why was Fisher Auden a legend at Morton Hill? Describe Jack’s reaction to Fisher’s photo and why he has that reaction.

Discussion Question 3

Why is Jack’s urge to compete in the Regatta a sign of his recovery? What sports had he played in the past and why did he quit competing in them?

Vocabulary

enshrine, congruent, befuddled, congregated, steeplechase, illiterate, bravado, exuberant, delirium, coxswain



Chapters 11 - 15

Summary

Early invites Jack to go on a trip with him during fall break. Jack turns him down because his father is coming to watch the Regatta. Early is going on a quest for Pi. The professor thinks Pi is dead, but he's just missing. Early is going to find him. Jack stresses that the professor is just referring to numbers not to the character Pi. But Early insists that pi the number doesn't end and that Pi is not dead. The last time Early saw Pi he was in danger. It's raining so Jack puts a Billie Holiday record on. Early continues telling Jack the saga of Pi.

On the morning of the regatta, Jack gets a message that the race would start at 8 am. Jack also receives a telegraph from his father that due to inclement weather he is able to attend the regatta. He promises to get in touch with him when possible. He signed the message, "Captain Baker." Jack is upset by the news. Preston teases Jack about having Early as his coxswain. It angers Jack. He doesn't need Early. He can win without him. He runs to the Nook and removes Early's seat from the Sweetie Pie.

Jack knows his father isn't there but he can't stop himself from looking. As he looks in the stands, he overshoots the buoy. The other boys have already turned back. He veers off and gets dangerously close to some rocks. He realizes he did need Early. A large rock tears through the side of the Sweetie Pie and it starts to take on water. He makes his turns and sees that the other boats are halfway back. Jack is the last boat to return. He makes it to the dock when his boat is partly submerged.

After the regatta, everyone is packing and preparing to leave for the break. Jack sits alone in his room listening to the rain and thinking about the day. It occurs to Jack that he has permission to leave the grounds and no one knows that his father isn't coming for him. He can go anywhere he wants to go. He wonders what the Fish was doing before he got killed. He wonders if it had been dark and if the Fish was scared. Jack sees a light coming from Early's workshop. He pulls his coat on and heads for the workshop.

Early is packing to go on his quest. Jack feels bad about dumping Early at the Regatta and offers to go with him. Early's plan is to go up the Kennebec River with Jack rowing and Early navigating and they'll be taking the Maine. Jack is reluctant to take the Maine because it had belonged to Fish. Early tells Jack that Fish is his brother and that he and Fish built the Maine together. To prove that Fish is Early's brother, Early shows Jack his dog tags. The name on the tags is, "Fisher Auden." He also shows him the letter of regret from the Army about Fish's death.

After they travel down the river, Early asks Jack what his mother was like and what happened to her. His mother died in her sleep of a brain aneurysm. He was supposed to take care of her but he wasn't there for her. He had slept in the barn that night because



he was mad. Only his friend Melvin had told Jack he was sorry about his mom. The other boys on the baseball team sent a card but no one could look him in the eye or say anything to him.

Jack tells Early that he's sorry about his brother. Early claims that his brother is alive. Jack tries to reason with Early but he gets nowhere. Jack gets angry and yells at Early that his brother will never come back; Fish is dead. Early's proof is that the number pi isn't dead and neither is Fish. Jack figures out that Early is speaking about Pi the hero in his story and the number pi. That's why he maintains that the number pi never ends. If pi runs out of numbers and ends, it will mean that Fish is dead.

The next morning, Early and Jack lower the "Maine" back in the water and go on their way. Early spreads a potion all over his exposed skin. He tells Jack that Pi had been attacked by stinging insects on his journey. Jack chooses not to use the potion. A short while later Jack is attacked by flying insects and smears the ointment on. Early shushes Jack; they need to look out for sharks. Jack decides not to point out that there are no sharks in the water. Early discusses how he reads pi and calculates the numbers. Jack asks if he can teach him but Early says that it's not something that can be taught. Early asks why Kansas is so colorless. Jack responds that Kansas is not colorless at all. He talks about the golden wheat fields and the clear beautiful blue sky, the red apples and orange pumpkins and the colorful fall leaves.

They encounter a barge with a crew of old men. One of the men called to them, telling them that they had a fine boat. Early has to catch his breath! "Pirates!"

Analysis

Jack has been unable to express the pain he has over his mother's death. That pain has been stuffed and repressed and festers inside of him like a poisonous infection. Unable to mourn outwardly, his anger and hurt comes out in indirect ways. Although Early has helped Jack and his words had so succinctly reminded him of the words of his mother, Jack takes his bitterness out on him. Perhaps Early became Jack's target because he had so closely echoed his mother's words. It reminded him of his loss.

Although Jack was not mature enough to recognize that anger is part of grief, he strikes out at the boy who unknowingly mimicked his mother's words. Deep in Jack's psyche, Early symbolizes his mother in this instance. He's mad at his mother for leaving him. He can't strike out at her so he does the next best thing. He takes his venom out on the one person who has shown some sign of caring for him and giving him the same good advice that his mother had.

Jack caves under pressure from the other boys who tease him about having Early, the little weirdo, serve as his coxswain. In Jack's anger and pain, he dumps Early as his navigator, shoving off from the deck without him. Jack is hurting but he has the power to hurt right back. His rage is misdirected from the real sources of his misery – the mother who left him and the father who has never been there for him.



Jack is a soulful boy. Striking out and hurting Early did not have the reward he'd hoped for. He realizes quickly that he needed Early and on a symbolic level needed to hear again the words of his mother. He looks for Early in the stands but he's not there. He looks for his father in the stands and he's not there – but he's never been there for him. Can he make up his betrayal to Early? Is there any hope for a relationship with his father?

Discussion Question 1

Why did Jack betray Early and dump him as his navigator in the Regatta? Describe his experience during the Regatta and the personal issues that were impacting his performance.

Discussion Question 2

What proof does Early offer Jack that Fisher is his brother? Why does Early refuse to believe the conclusion of the army that his brother died in action? Why does Jack try to convince him to accept his brother's death?

Discussion Question 3

How does Early begin to conflate the story of Pi with his brother and with the number pi? How does the story begin to connect Early's tale about Pi with the story of Jack and Early?

Vocabulary

benevolent, inclement, hodgepodge, nonsensical, collage, conjured, vulgarity, regaled, incantations, brawn, meander, aneurysm, lethargic



Chapters 16 - 20

Summary

The “pirates” pull Jack and Early on board the barge. They tow the Maine behind them. When it gets dark Jack wants to make a run for it but one of the pirates have them haul some barrels of gun power onto a truck. Early finds the leader of the pirates, MacScott, up the hill at the Bear Knuckle Inn. Early tells him that they want their boat so they can be on their way. MacScott informs the boys that the Maine is now his boat.

Early asks him if he had seen the bear he read about in the paper. MacScott had seen the bear up close. MacScott has a scar-lined face and is missing an eye. MacScott claims the big bear mauled him. But he was able to kill her cub and took out the mama bear’s left eye. He plans to finish her off and collect the bounty.

MacScott orders the two men throw the boys out. Early thinks fast and tells MacScott that he knows of another guy who’s after the bear and is going to get to him before MacScott does. Early says that the hunter had been trying to keep his eye on the Great Bear but got lost. His name is Pi. He mentions that Pi knows about an ancient burial ground where people bury their treasures and dark secrets. MacScott gets interested and wants to hear more. Early continues his story about Pi.

Jack is drifting off but MacScott is engaged in Early’s story. Jack dreams of Pi when he falls asleep. He feels like he’s Pi the lost wanderer. Jack recalls Early telling about Pi being brought aboard a pirate ship. When Jack wakes he sees Early at the bar with the barmaid. He asks her if her name is Pauline. It isn’t. The girl isn’t especially pretty but after Early tells she has a pretty smile, she seems to transform. Her face was bright; the dullness in her eyes was gone.

Suddenly there’s an explosion outside and a trail of fire coming down the mountain side like the lava from a volcano. It’s their chance to get the Maine and leave. But one of the men get to the dock first and takes off with the barge. Jack and Early watch as the Maine is being towed away. They take off on foot in the darkness. They have most of their equipment with them in their backpacks. They talk about the Appalachian Trail which is over 2,000 miles long and appears in fourteen states. Early has all kinds of dire stories on the fate of hikers along the trail.

When they camp that night Jack asks himself how he got himself into this mess and why his mother had to die. And why he’s following Early. Jack tries to hear his mother’s voice but she’s silent. Early wakes up and says that the numbers are running out. The next morning, Jack has the feeling that someone is watching them. They haven’t found the trail yet – just wilderness. Early’s not worried. Jack wants to head back to school. He’d go back by himself if necessary.



They were the sound of barking dogs. Maybe someone is trying to find them or maybe they're tracking the bear. They cross the river so the dogs lose their scent. They crossed on some logs to a big boulder half way across the river. Early makes it to the bank first. Jack gets his foot stuck in between two logs. Early starts to come back to help when all the logs fall out from under Jack and he is swept away in the swiftly moving river.

Jack is in a blur of logs, rocks and icy water. He tries to grab a log but it's just out of reach. The current is strong. His body is growing cold and weak. He is struck in the forehead and almost passes out. His vision is blurry by something is floating alongside him just like Pi and the whale. The creature was a big white whale. Jack had to have been dreaming. Jack is in and out of consciousness and has an awful headache. He wakes up in a bed and wonders where Early is. He peeks out of the room and hears Early's voice. He is talking to Gunnar, the man who had rescued Jack from the river. Gunnar says that the gash in Jack's forehead needs a few stitches and gets out a needle and thread. Gunnar numbs the gash with a liquid substance and sews a couple of quick stitches. Back in the bedroom Jack notices that Gunnar is quite a reader and has some of the same books his mother. He spots a love letter inside the book from Gunnar to Emmaline.

Gunnar mentions that Early said they were on a quest. Jack says it's Early's quest. He's just going along with him. Gunnar seems to chastise and challenge Jack about his lack of enthusiasm. Gunnar is an outfitter. He has all the gear anyone needs for hunting and fishing. Early asks Gunnar to outfit them. Gunnar doesn't want to outfit the boys. There's already too many people looking around for the wrong thing. He says a lot of the people aren't really looking for something. They are trying to get away from something. But often whatever it is follows them. Jack thinks to himself that Gunnar had run away from something, too. He saw the scars on his back and he had seen the letter to Emmaline.

Analysis

Jack is finding a new kind of strength from Early who pushes on no matter what the odds. Early is a symbol of hope and the future. Jack thinks that he is in better emotional shape than Early. At least he admits that his mother is dead. Early is operating under an illusion. But despite all the evidence against his brother being alive, Early is never defeated. Jack deals with his up and down emotions but Early and the quest have been at least a distraction from Jack's pain. At low points he wonders how he had gotten himself in such a mess.

Jack shows signs of letting go, acceptance and moving on with his life. This is symbolized when Jack listens for his mother's voice and doesn't hear it. Does he fail to hear it because his mother's voice is silent or does he fail to hear it because he's not listening? He's beginning to live in the here and now. Early has seen to that. Although Jack is at times annoyed by Early and his steadfast and stubborn attitude, he is doing more than anyone else to help Jack through his grief.



The author interjects the character of Gunnar who also represents a phase in Jack's recovery. While he ostensibly helps him heal by sewing a few stitches in the gash in Jack's forehead, Gunnar does make strides in the healing that Jack really needs. There is a more profound purpose to Gunnar's brief relationship with Jack. He says that there are too many people looking for the wrong things. Jack is taken aback by that. His math teacher had said that quests can be for more than treasures or artifacts – there are quests for justice and happiness. Gunnar says that people who are seeking something are often really just trying to get away from something else and that something they're trying to leave behind follows them. The author uses Gunnar to enlighten Jack and make him understand that he can't escape from his pain and that he must deal with it.

Discussion Question 1

What similarities are there between Pi's quest and the quest that Early and Jack are on to find Fish? What overarching theme is there between the journeys of Pi, Early and Jack and Fish?

Discussion Question 2

How does Early demonstrate his intelligence and quick-thinking in his dealings with the pirates? How is he able to out-think his captors?

Discussion Question 3

What does Gunnar mean when he says that too many people are looking for the wrong thing? What reaction does Jack have to Gunnar's words and why does he have that reaction?

Vocabulary

gruesome, ferocious, catacombs, translucence, glowering, pilfer, conferment, coagulation, chastisement, contemplative



Chapters 21 - 25

Summary

Gunnar takes the boys to the river for a survival lesson. He says that Jesus had a lot of friends who were fishermen. Gunnar put a pair of waders on and gave the boys each a pair. Early tries to think of all the reasons why fly fishing may have been in the New Testament. Gunnar says that fly-fishing is a contemplative man's recreation. Early is already adept at fly fishing. Fish taught him. They fish for a couple of hours. The rest of the afternoon is spent on other wilderness training and survival skills, one of which was tracking a bear.

That night Gunnar names the stars that comprise the Pleiades star cluster. But Gunnar says stars don't have to be named. They are to be gazed upon and admired. And fly fishing is about enjoying the water and the breeze and the fish swimming about. The things he says reminds Jack of his mother. A person can see whatever he wants in the stars. Jack thinks Gunnar probably tried to cast his troubles in the river a long time ago but it didn't work. Jack didn't see anything in the stars. He feels lost again. Early finally asks Gunnar about his scars.

Gunnar was a prize fighter and fought for money. It all changed when he met Emmaline. She wanted him to quit the ring. He has one last fight scheduled in which he is opposed by two brothers. He punches one of them so hard that it kills him. He couldn't face Emmaline again. He came there to the woods to get away from everything. The boys encourage him to contact Emmaline again. He didn't mean to kill that man. When they return to Gunnar's cabin, they see that MacScott and his men are there waiting.

Gunnar tells the boys to stay behind while he goes to talk to MacScott. He asks Gunnar if he has seen two boys hiking on the trail. The dogs brought them there. Gunnar tells MacScott he hasn't seen them. MacScott doesn't believe him. He holds a rifle on Gunnar and tells Olson to go inside the cabin and look around. Gunnar tells him he's an outfitter and can set them up with any gear they might need. Olson doesn't find any clue of the boys inside so MacScott and his men take off.

Jack and Early leave during the night without telling Gunnar. Early figures the pirates really want to kill the bear and think the boys are tracking it. A pile of walnut shells crunch under Jack's foot. Gunnar had filled their backpacks with food during their survival training. Jack is surprised to see that Gunnar put a book of poetry and an envelope addressed to Emmaline in his backpack. Early figures Gunnar wants Jack to mail it.

Early is able to find Ursa Major and the Great Bear to help him navigate. The next morning they find a foot bridge across the Kennebec River. Jack heads for some berries he sees. Early tells him that they're going the wrong way. The path they are on narrows and disappears. They get confused and wind up going in circles. Early tells Jack the



story about when Pi got lost in a maze just like they are lost. Pi started out in his maze with “one, two, three” but ended up with “three, six, seven, seven, seven” which is the place of the Ancient one. Early tells Jack about Pi and the Ancient One who mistook Pi for her son.

Jack tells Early they better try to find the way out of the maze that they are in. Jack hears the sound of rain pinging on a metal roof. Jack can almost hear his mother’s voice in the noise. Early says he hears a woman calling out. In a clearing they find an old woman. She is banking a metal rod around the inside of a triangle. She is calling for Martin to come home for supper. The woman spots Jack and says, “There you are!” and tells him to get out of the rain.

The old woman tells Jack to come in and bring his friend. She scolds Jack for not being home when he was expected. She introduces herself to Early as Eustasia Johannsen. She mentions Martin’s new rifle. They can get dry clothes in Martin’s room. Early begins to believe that the old woman is Jack’s grandmother and that “Martin” is Jack’s real name.

In Martin’s room, Jack picks up a Sears catalog that is marked 1894. Jack shows Early and they figure if a kid bought a gun in 1894 he would be about their age -- thirteen. At dinner Eustasia tells the boys that the neighbors had been telling her to give up that Martin was never coming home. But she wouldn’t give up. She looks at Jack with tears in her eyes and tells him she’s so glad he came back.

Now that “Martin” is back, she wants him and Early to dig a grave for her. She’s been hanging on just to see him return. Now she’s ready to go. The boys follow Eustasia’s directions and find two shovels in the shed and head to a sycamore tree to start digging. Jack tries to reason with Early. They’re digging a grave for a woman who’s not dead yet! And he is not her son. Suddenly, Eustasia is standing there. She had heard him. She looks around the woods and says that Martin will be home soon. The boys get ready to leave. She tells them to come back. Martin would like that. They walk back into the woods. The maze seems to have eased its grip on them.

Analysis

The author brings in an element of religion with the character of Gunnar. When he takes the boys fly-fishing, he mentions that Jesus had a lot of friends who were fishermen. The narrative involving the character Gunnar is the only one in which religion is overtly inserted. The author is hinting that Jack’s recovery may be accelerated with the help of God. Jack is struck once again by the words of his mother being spoken by another person. Perhaps Jack doesn’t have to listen for his mother’s voice any longer because she is speaking through others. More importantly, for his recovery maybe Jack is listening with a discriminating ear for words that evoke the memories and words of his mother.



Gunnar, just like Jack's mother, tells Jack that stars should be admired not named. Fly-fishing should be enjoyed because of the water and breeze and the fish swimming about. Gunnar doesn't say that the fish that are caught are what should be enjoyed. This ties into Professor Blane's contention that a quest can be about more than finding a treasure. It can be about finding happiness and resolution and acceptance. A quote by Steve Jobs' is just as relevant: "The journey is the destination."

Gunnar also evokes a humanity in Jack that has been somewhat lacking. While Gunnar talks a good game about others trying to get away from their past, his life has symbolized just that. Jack tunes into Gunnar's pain which is hidden and repressed. Gunnar's isolation in the woods symbolizes his efforts to hide from the past. It's undoubtedly Gunnar's own experiences that make him so wise about not being able to run away from the past.

The maze that Jack and Early get caught in parallels that of Pi's experiences – which much of the story does. A maze is a symbol of being lost and confused. As the boys near the end of their journey getting into a maze has another deeper purpose – it helps delay the end of the quest. The quest has been an adventure. At the end of their quests – and there are multiple quests in this story – there is no more adventure only truth. Are they ready to complete their quests and face the truth?

Discussion Question 1

When Gunnar describes his feelings about stars why does Jack think of his mother? What does Jack think about the stars and why does he feel that way?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Gunnar put the letter to Emmaline in Jack's backpack? What does that indicate about Gunnar's satisfaction with his current life? What change might Gunnar be hoping for?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Eustasia think that Jack is her son, Martin? What parallel is there in this episode with Pi's story? Compare and contrast the two stories.

Vocabulary

perilous, nauseated, brambly, commentary, momentum, excursion, surrogate



Chapter 26 - 30

Summary

Early tells Jack that he was wrong about the Ancient One in Pi's story. He thought she was an enchantress or a witch. Eustasia is just a sad old woman who lost her son. He feels badly she was ready to let go but now she has to wait longer. Jack reminds Early that he's looking for a bear on the trail that will lead them to his brother – who is also not coming back. Early warns Jack not to say that. Fish is coming back. He's just having trouble finding his way. Early spies a huge footprint the size of a pie pan. They find six more huge prints and follow them. The lines between fantasy and real life are blurring. Have they found the Great Bear?

Jack wonders to himself what would happen after they find the Great Bear and there is no Pi – no Fisher? Early is heading to a huge heartache. Early tells Jack about Fisher. He didn't really care about trophies. Fish's squad had orders to blow up a bridge in France. Someone had to swim across the river to take the charges to the shed where the explosives would be set off. Fish was an expert swimmer and would have done that job. He would have taken his dog tags off so they didn't make noise. He hid in the water after the explosion and now he's lost. Just like Pi was.

Early is determined to find the Great Bear; she'll show them the way to Fish. Jack sees more tracks but also sees blood on the ground. Jack points out that if the bear is injured, it could kill them. A sense of curiosity - maybe even adventure - has started to creep into Jack's psyche so he stays on the quest. With Early in the lead they start to follow the tracks again. Jack wonders if someone is lurking in the shadows. Jack hears the crunch of walnut shells again. Early's story of Pi dominates Jack's mind. Everything around them seems like it's part of that story. They stumble onto a deserted logging camp. Early suggests they go farther north. Pi would follow the Great Bear north.

The terrain becomes more rugged the further they walk. They split up to look for the best spot to camp. Jack comes to a prehistoric gorge with a water runoff into what looks like a bottomless pit of water. He wants to be swallowed by it so that he's absolved. But absolved of what? Guilt about his mother? He hadn't been there for her.

Jack sees a flash of color in the water. He looks for the color to emerge from the water. The color was tartan – Early's color. Early couldn't have climbed to the top of the waterfall in such a short time. The rain beats harder. He turns upstream toward the waterfall. It's difficult for Jack not to lose his footing in all the water. He follows footprints that disappear at the end of a narrow path. Jack continues to walk across the treacherous rocks over the waterfall. He calls out to Early but there's no answer. His voice echoes back; he winds up in a cave. Pi had gotten lost in catacombs. Jack tries to think like Early so he can find him.



There are multiple rooms in the cavern. Jack sees a figure lying on the ground covered by Early's tartan red jacket. Jack pulls the jacket off; it's a skeleton. He finds the real Early in another room. He tells Jack that the skeleton isn't Fish; it's Martin Johannsen. Jack looks at the blue jacket under Early's red jacket. A receipt for the Winchester rifle is stuck in his pocket. Someone shot him the chest. Early says it was an accident and that they have to take Martin home to his mother. Instead of carrying his bones home, Jack suggests they take the Civil War pin on his jacket to give to his mother and convince her that Martin is dead. Early insists that Jack wear the medal.

Suddenly, Jack is looking down the barrel of Martin's rifle. He sees Martin's initials engraved on the barrel. MacScott accidentally shot Martin when he fired a random shot to get Martin's attention. He went looking for Martin and found him lying on the ground, dead. His bullet had struck Martin. MacScott put Martin in the cave so the animals wouldn't get him. He was going to tell Mrs. Johannsen but he just couldn't. MacScott is looking down at Martin's skeleton when Early finds the old bullseye in one of his pockets. While MacScott is distracted, Jack and Early take off running.

Out of breath, they come to a rocky incline. Early reaches the top before Jack is half-way up. Just as Jack is near the top, he grabs at a tree root. Behind the root is a snake that clamps down on his hand. Jack falls down the rocky hill. Early rushes to Jack. He assures Jack that the snake wasn't poisonous. The boys spot the big bear. It's the Great Appalachian Bear – its left eye was mangled just the way MacScott described.

MacScott shows up and shoots the bear but it rises up and charges him. MacScott shoots again but misses. The bear mauls MacScott to death then disappears. Early is so upset that he has a seizure. Someone emerges from the trees and kneels down by Early, cradling him in his arms. Early opens his eyes, looks at the man and says "Fisher."

Analysis

Jack expresses his fear that Early will be disappointed when they complete their quest and that there is no Pi – which symbolically confirms Fish's death. Jack's concern for Early provides further evidence of Jack's recovery. He is able to get outside of himself and his grief and show concern for another. His mother's influence is with him and it's something that he will never lose. Through his quest to find resolution, Jack is becoming more like his mother. He understands the nuances of her words about stars and fixing things that aren't right rather than abandoning them. Jack had commented that his mother always liked the little weirdoes like Early.

The crushed walnuts and the shadowy figures that Jack spots now and then have been interjected by the author in several points in the story. These occurrences have served as the foreshadowing of the possible emergence of another presence, that another person has been tracking them. The author has created several possibilities some of which will undoubtedly be red herrings. Are the pirates following them or could it be Gunnar, or even Pi, or the Great Bear herself? Perhaps it's someone or something



totally unexpected. The author has brought in an eerie element into the story with references to ghosts and shadowy figures and Pi's experience with the half-dead/half-alive people.

Again there is a delay in ending the quest harkening up the old adage that one should be happy with the status quo because you know what you have but don't know what may await you in the future. The delays to end the quest come in several forms – the terrain is becoming more rugged the further they go and thus slowing them down; they get separated and confused in the large cavern which adds further chaos and delays; a skeleton is introduced into the story that makes it veer off from the end of the quest. How much more delay can be manufactured by the boys or by the author?

Discussion Question 1

What concerns does Jack have for Early as they near the end of their quest? What do these thoughts about Early indicate about Jack's feelings for Early and their relationship?

Discussion Question 2

What makes Jack think that someone has been following them during their trek? Describe three people who may be following them and why each of them would be following them.

Discussion Question 3

What murder mystery do the boys solve? How do they figure out the who-done-it? What mistakes did MacScott make after the shooting years before, and what ramifications did his actions have?

Vocabulary

tirade, ferocious, kindred, abyss, conquistadors, terrain, niche, absolved, cascade, hooligans, mesmerized



Chapter 31 - 35

Summary

The man, a lumberjack, doesn't look anything like Fish's photo in the trophy case. He's glad that Eustasia thought she was tending to her son. Early tells Jack that Mrs. Johannsen died. She had been happy that "Martin" was back and that she was caring for him. She thanked Early for bringing "Martin" back to her. The man, the lumberjack that Early called Fish, is gone. He's upset and realizes that his brother isn't coming back. Early believes that MacScott could have killed the bear; instead he let it kill him.

Despite his earlier change of heart, Early is once again convinced that the lumberjack is Fisher. When Jack and Early go to the grave which they had partially dug, it's already filled with dirt with a marker that reads, "Martin Johannsen." Jack puts it all together – the walnut shells, the newly dug grave – Fisher had been watching over them.

Jack wants to know how Early knew that Fish was alive. A German tank hit the shed where Fish's squad was hiding but the tank was blown up on the bridge. Someone had to be alive to push the detonator. Fish would have been in the water when the German's blew up the shed. He gave his dog tags to a fellow soldier. The dog tags were found with the remains of the squad and he was presumed dead. Early says his brother is raining inside. Early had asked Fish to come back with him but he refused.

After burying Mrs. Johannsen, Jack and Early start their long walk home. They are exhausted; they'd been gone six days with little to eat and little sleep. Early stops on the bridge they had crossed days before and throws Fish's dog tags in the river. Jack immediately jumps in the river to retrieve them. Searching for the dog tags reminds Jack of the time he searched for the navigator ring in the pool. He remembers his mother's funeral and how his father couldn't let go. It had been raining inside him, too. He recalls how upset he was when his father wanted to get rid of a box of his mother's personal items. He accused his father of wanting to get rid of her memories.

Jack's lungs were bursting as the river tried to sweep him away but he finds the dog tags and brings them ashore. They head to a shack they had seen earlier and make a fire in the potbelly stove there. Jack feels sorry for Early. He'd come all this way yet was still not bringing his brother home. Jack gently reminds Early that Fish lost his entire squad. He feels lost and doesn't know where he belongs, something Jack can relate to.

It occurs to the boys that they might be able to get the Maine back. They are sitting on a tarp-covered boat. They throw the tarp off and to their delight it's the Maine. The pirates spot the smoke coming out of the shack. Jack and Early hoist the Maine on their shoulders and burst out of the shed, running toward the river. The pirates are too drunk or lazy to catch them. They reach the river and float away on the Maine. Jack thinks that the reason Early wasn't able to get Fish to return with them is because he's a soldier and needs another soldier to convince him.



The boys arrive back at Morton Hill; Jack's father is among those who greet them. A tearful Captain Baker hugs Jack and holds him tight. Jack's father drives Jack and Early up north to find Fish. Jack's father, wearing his naval captain's uniform, approaches Fish who salutes him. Fisher had been wounded in the bridge explosion and nearly drowned. A French farmer rescued him. Fish heard that eight markers were being placed in the town square to honor the fallen American soldiers – including Fish. He couldn't bear the thought of coming forward to say he had survived. He felt guilty for not being with his fellow soldiers. Fish eventually took a cargo ship back to Maine. The army declared him dead and he planned to spend the rest of his days alone in the woods.

Jack's father tells Fish that he'd been through a lot but he carried out his mission. A lot of good men were lost. The only thing that would make that worse would be to lose one more. He tells Fish that it's time for him to come home. Fish responds, "Yes, sir." They all pile in the jeep and head home.

Fish is admitted into the hospital. Captain Baker drives Jack and Early to Boston for the Fall Math Institute. Professor Stanton presents his theory that pi is finite. He asks if there are any questions or comments. Early stands and makes a presentation which seems to impress the audience. Early explains that he has provided proof by contraction and asserts that the professor's numbers are wrong. The "one" did disappear for a while but the professor didn't know that Pi was just lost.

Jack senses that his father had been on a journey, too. Captain Baker apologizes for bringing him so far from home and for packing up his mother's things. He offers to take Jack home but Jack wants to stay at Morton Hill. Besides, he wrecked a boat and needs to repair it. He asks his dad he would help him.

Analysis

Early is human. For the first time since the quest began, he has a moment of doubt about finding his brother. But that doesn't last long. His positive spirit and confidence in his own convictions resurface. Jack is finally convinced that Fish is alive which symbolizes the end of the quest. The quests that the boys were on have been successful. Early wanted to find his brother who was the only remaining member of his family. Like Pi who learned a lot from the ocean, Jack has learned a lot from the journey. He will always love the memory of his mother and her words will always be part of his heart, but the quest taught him that he has a life to live and that his mother would want nothing more than for him to live it.

Early is disappointed that the brother he knew is not the brother he found. Fish symbolizes life itself – how pain and tragedy and guilt are parts of life and that while not embracing the downsides of life they must be accepted because that is the only pathway to get past them. Fish is also renewal and redemption. Guilt and shame and heartache can all be survived and that we can learn from them just as Pi learned from the ocean.



Jack was intuitive in asking his father to convince Fish to return. He knew that Fish would listen to another military man. Captain Baker is wise and touches a deep part of Fish when he tells him that losing the good men of his squad was a tragedy but a more profound tragedy would be to lose the eighth man in the squad.

When Jack was missing from school, Captain Baker had the chance to take inventory of his life. He realized that his son was the most important person in the world to him. Ironically, the emotional distance between Jack and his father was wiped out by Jack physically distancing himself from his father.

Discussion Question 1

What happened to Fish during his mission in France? Why does Jack recruit his father to talk to Fish and why is he successful in convincing him to return home?

Discussion Question 2

What made Captain Baker change his attitude toward Jack? What understanding did Jack come to about his father during private thoughts on his quest?

Discussion Question 3

What hopeful signs emerge at the end of the story? Describe the challenges that face Fish and Early in recapturing their relationship and that Jack and Captain Baker have in turning their dysfunctional relationship around.

Vocabulary

rending, vittles, accolades, unencumbered, culmination, numbskull, conjure



Characters

Jack Baker

Jack Baker was nine years old when his father left to serve as a navy captain in the European theater during World War II. When he was 13, his father returned to bury his wife. In the intervening years, Jack had barely seen his father. His mother, whom he loved more than anyone, was gone and he was left with a father he barely knew. Jack was also left with profound guilt over his mother's death because he failed to take care of her. When he left, his father had told him to take care of his mother while he was gone. Jack was angry over a minor issue the night she died and slept in the barn. Had he been there for her, perhaps he could have gotten her help.

Captain Baker doesn't know what to do with his son. Although he doesn't express it in words, he knows that he has a dysfunctional relationship with his son. He does what he thinks is best and enrolls him in a boys' boarding school near Portsmouth, Maine, where he is stationed. At least geographically they'll be close.

Jack pleaded with his father to let him live with his grandfather but Captain Baker had made up his mind. Jack is not thrilled with his new life where everything reminds him of the mother he lost. He tries, but fails, at making a mark at swimming and rowing. A weird little boy who was also 13 named Early Auden befriends him. The two eventually go on a quest to find Early's brother, Fish, who had been pronounced dead by the U.S. Army. Fish was reportedly killed in action on a mission in France. But Early had evidence to the contrary and the boys begin a perilous quest during which they face death and danger, are kidnapped by pirates and solve a 100-year-old murder.

When Jack returns to school, his worried father is waiting there for him. Captain Baker finally lets down his guard, cries and embraces the son he thought he lost. Jack is moved by his father's show of emotion and has great hopes for a close relationship with him.

Early Auden

Early Auden is small in stature for his 13 years. But he is probably the smartest kid in his eighth grade class at the Morton Hill boarding school. Early comes from a wealthy family. His father was a trustee of the school. Sadly, Early lost both of his parents and his big brother, Fisher, became his only family and caretaker. Fish had been the most accomplished athlete in the history of the school. He excelled at virtually every sport particularly rowing. Early idolized his big brother and Fish was crazy about Early.

After graduation, Fish joined the Army. It was the 1940s and World War II was raging. Early is beset with yet another profound loss when the U.S. Army notifies him that Fisher Auden was killed in action in France. They sent his dog tags as proof of death. Little Early was now alone in the world. But Early was as resourceful as he was bright.



He looked more deeply into things and after putting two and two together and spotting some photographic evidence decided that Fisher was still alive and that he would go on a quest to find him and bring him home.

By this time, Jack Baker showed up at school as a new student. Early took a liking to Jack and invited him to go on the quest with him. Jack tried to convince Early that his brother was dead. He didn't want him to be disappointed again when he couldn't find him. But Early wouldn't hear of it. He would find his brother. He tells Jack the story of the Polaris star in Ursa Major. Polaris' mother called her son, Pi. Pi wanted to be known as Polaris but had to earn that right. His mother sent Pi off on a quest to earn the name, Polaris. But Polaris got lost, losing sight of the constellation the Great Bear, his guide, and became a lost wanderer on sea and land. To Early the story of Pi was a direct parallel to Fish's story. Fish had just lost his way and Early needed to save him.

Early was angered by Professor Stanton's theory that pi, 3.14 the number, was not as it was thought to be infinite. Early wouldn't hear of it. He equated pi with Pi and, therefore, with Fish. If pi was finite and ended that would mean that Pi and Fish were dead. He would prove the professor to be wrong.

Early remains resolved to find his brother on the journey that he and Jack take that is rife with danger and uncertainty. They face many challenges and the unexpected. Early stays focused and in the end Jack becomes a believer who realizes that he'd been as lost as Pi and Fish.

Pi

Pi, or Polaris, is a star in the Constellation Ursa Major. His mother told him to follow the Great Bear constellation (another name for Ursa Major). Pi sets off on a journey to earn his name, Polaris. However, he loses sight of the Great Bear and becomes a lost wanderer, a desolate soul who is neither dead or alive.

Pi is also a number that begins with 3.14 and it is mathematical theory that it has no end, that pi is an infinite number. Early Auden tells the tale of Pi, the lost soul, throughout the story. Early has conflated Pi with pi and with his missing brother, Fisher. He is angered by Professor Stanton's theory that pi has an ending, that it is not infinite. Early clings to pi's infinity because if pi ends so does Pi, the traveler, and so does Fish, Early's brother.

Captain Baker

Jack's father is a naval captain who is assigned to Portsmouth, Maine. He left for a tour of duty when his son, Jack was nine and was gone most of the next four years. Jack feels an emotional distance from his father who he sees as cold and remote and militaristic. His father even signs letters to Jack as "Captain Baker." When Jack's mother dies when Jack is 13, his father is at a loss over what to do with his only child. He



decides to take him from his Kansas home and enroll him in a boys' boarding school in Maine so that he's geographically close to him.

Jack becomes friends with Early Auden, a fellow student at the boarding school. Jack and Early go on a quest to find Early's older brother, Fisher, who has been declared "dead" by the U.S. Army. Early believes that his brother is alive and that he can find him. The boys go on a perilous journey that involves many dangers that even includes "pirates." When they finally return to school, Jack figures his father will be mad at him and discipline him. Instead, his father cries and grabs and hugs his son, so relieved that Jack's alive. It's a father who Jack had never seen. Jack comes to understand his father, and his father opens up emotionally to Jack, and the two finally are headed for a close father and son relationship.

Jack's Mother

Jack was very close to his mother. His father had been away on a tour of duty during World War II for most of the four years since Jack was nine. Jack loved his mother dearly and became accustomed to her easy-going ways and emotional vulnerability. Jack is devastated when she dies unexpectedly of a brain aneurysm. Jack is forced to move from his Kansas home to a boys' boarding school in Maine which is close to where his father is stationed. That he doesn't know his father makes Jack's grief over his mother all the more overwhelming. Jack often thinks of his mother and what she would say or do in any given instance. She is never far from his thoughts. He has guilt over his mother's passing. His father had told him to take care of his mother while he was gone. He was angry the night she died and failed to check on her welfare. The next morning she was dead. Jack struggles with his guilt and grief throughout the story.

Fisher Auden

Fisher Auden was the big jock at Morton Hill. He was the popular guy who excelled at all the sports. He was several years ahead of his younger brother, Early. Fisher joined the Army and served in the European theater during World War II. His entire squad was taken out and Fisher was declared dead. Early doesn't believe that his brother is dead and goes on a quest, accompanied by Jack Baker, to find his brother and bring him home.

Much to Jack's astonishment, Fisher was alive and they found him. He alone had survived the attack by German soldiers was traumatized by the incident. His squad had been taken out by the Germans. He had to deal with a physical injury he sustained and survivor guilt. Jack recruited his father, another military man, to convince Fisher that he can come home and recover from the devastation that he suffered in the war.



Martin Johannsen

Martin Johannsen is a 12-year-old who lived in the late 1800s. He was accidentally shot by a companion who hid his body in a cave. The boy never told Martin's mother what happened to him. Mrs. Johannsen went insane over her missing son and thinks that Jack is Martin when he and Early stumble onto her property. Later, the boys find Martin's skeleton in a cave and Early figures out who killed him.

Eustasia Johannsen

Eustasia Johannsen is 100 years old. She is ready to die but she is hanging on until her missing son, Martin, comes home. She mistakes Jack for Martin when she sees him. Jack and Early figure out what happened to Martin and Eustasia is finally able to die in peace. Jack and Early dig her grave and bury her.

Archibald MacScott

Archibald MacScott operates a barge on the river. He and his companions are ruffians, thieves and, according to Early, pirates. As Jack and Early are paddling down the river in their beautiful boat, the Maine, MacScott and his thugs stop the boys and steal their boat. They take Jack and Early prisoner and hold them until the boys have the chance to escape. Early figures out that Archibald MacScott was the young companion with Martin when he was killed. Early also figured out that MacScott accidentally killed Martin and hid his body. MacScott commits suicide by allowing the Great Bear to maul him to death.

Professor Douglas Stanton

Professor Douglas Stanton is a mathematician at Cambridge who theorizes that pi is a finite number. He is determined to prove it at an annual gathering of mathematicians called the Fall Mathematical Institute in Boston. Early is determined to prove him wrong. He shows up at the meeting and using proof by contradiction methodology demonstrates that the professor's theory is incorrect.

Professor Eric Blane

Professor Blane is Jack's math teacher at Morton Hill. He gets the boys involved in a debate about the nature and merits of quests and urges them to think outside the box. Quests can be about more than finding treasure or rare artifacts. Quests for justice and happiness are just as important, perhaps more important. Professor Blane is also the swimming and rowing coach. He recognizes that Jack is not an experienced rower and promises to help him.



Gunnar Skoglund

Gunnar Skoglund is a recluse who lives in an isolated area in the northern woods of Maine. He happens to be nearby when Jack slips off a log and nearly drowns in the river. He saves him and tends to his wounds. Much to Jack's chagrin, Gunnar takes a needle and thread and sews up a couple of stitches to help Jack's forehead wound heal.

Gunnar is an outfitter who provides all the gear that hunters, fishermen and trappers need. In his youth he was a prize fighter. He met and fell in love with Emmaline who wanted him to stop boxing. In his last bout, he unintentionally killed a man with just his punch. He was so shamed that he left town to live in the remote forest without telling Emmaline.



Symbols and Symbolism

Polaris

Polaris is a star in the Ursa Major Constellation. Early told a story about Polaris and his mother, The Great Bear (another name for Ursa Major). His mother called him Pi, but Polaris wanted to “earn” his name so his mother set him out on a quest so he could do so. She told him to look to the Great Bear for direction. Polaris traveled too far south and lost sight of the Great Bear and could no longer hear her voice. He became a lost soul and wandered the seas facing many perils trying to find his way home.

The Great Bear

The Great Bear has two meanings in, “Navigating Early.” The constellation Ursa Major is also known as the Great Bear and is referred to in Early’s story about Polaris, or Pi, wandering land and sea trying to find his way home. Early has been following newspaper articles about a large bear in the northern woods of Maine which he calls the Great Bear. There is a bounty on the bear but Early’s not interested in the money. He sees a photo of a lumberjack in the region who he is determined to find. Early conflates the story of Polaris and the Great Bear with the black bear in northern Maine. He is convinced that the bear will lead him to find his missing brother who he compares to Pi, the lost star who cannot find his way.

Pi

Pi is a number that starts with 3.14 and its calculations are considered by many to be infinite. Professor Stanton has noticed that the ones are dropping off in pi calculations. He theorizes that all the numbers will drop off one by one which result in a final calculation for pi which will prove that pi is not infinite. Early vehemently disagrees and want to prove the professor wrong with “proof by contradiction.” The Math is not Early’s only concern. If pi ends it will mean that Pi is dead, and if Pi is dead, that means Early’s brother is dead.

The Navigator Ring

When Captain Baker left for his tour of duty in Europe during World War II, he gave Jack a navigator ring and told him to take care of his mother. Unfortunately, his mother died unexpectedly and Jack blamed himself. Out of his misery, he threw the navigator ring in the river behind his house. The image of the ring stayed in his mind. When he was swimming in the pool at school, he thought he saw the navigator ring in the bottom of the pool and dove for it. His coach had to pull him out to keep him from drowning.



The Sweetie Pie

Professor Blane wakes all the boys up at five in the morning to practice rowing. Blane is the coach and he wants to prepare the boys for the upcoming regatta. Jack is the last to arrive at the practice. The other boys are already paired up and the only boat left is the Sweetie Pie which is in terrible shape. Jack has never rowed before and he does poorly bringing in the Sweetie Pie in even worse shape. Early is an expert at boat repair and helps refurbish the Sweetie Pie until it is in pristine condition. Early volunteers to be Jack's navigator for the regatta but at the last minute Jack dumps Early and enters the competition without him. Jack does horribly and realizes he needed Early to be his navigator. He feels bad for dumping Early and for losing the regatta and wrecking the Sweetie Pie again.

The Dog Tags

As proof of death, Early was sent Fish's dog tags by the Army. But Early is hard to convince. He does some research and investigation himself and determines that his brother is still alive. He goes on a quest to find his brother and bring him home. Early invites Jack to come along with him. Jack thinks Early is delusional about his brother and is in major denial. The dog tags prove that his brother is dead. Early very rarely gets down and stops believing. At one low point, he takes his brother's dog tags and throws them in the river. Jack jumps in and nearly drowns himself retrieving them. Jack senses that Early needs to hold onto those tags. They are the last remnants of his brother who he loved so much.

Martin's Rifle

In the last 1800s, Martin Johannsen had gone missing after a friend stopped by to see his new rifle. The boys went deeper into the woods for a shooting competition. Martin never returned home and his mother waited for his return for literally years. When the boys were captured by MacScott, Early noticed that there were initials etched into his rifle. Later Jack and Martin discovered a receipt for Martin's new rifle and an extra charge for having his initials etched in it. They figured out that it was MacScott who was the friend who stopped by to see Martin's new rifle then shot and killed him and took his rifle.

The Skeleton

During their quest, Jack and Early got separated for a brief time and both wound up in a large cavern. Jack saw who he thought was Early lying on the cave floor. He walked up to the figure and pulled Early's red coat off the body only to discover that it was a skeleton lying there. Early had found the skeleton first. Later, the boys figured out that the skeleton is the missing Martin Johannsen.



The Shell Necklace

When Pi left on his quest to earn the name of Polaris, his mother gifted him with a large necklace made of shells. As time passed and Pi became lost and confused, the shell necklace was heavy and burdened him down. He took the necklace off and placed it in his satchel so that it wasn't a weight upon his shoulders. The shell necklace is analogous with Fisher's dog tags that he took off so that he wouldn't make noise while he swam during a mission with his squad in France during World War II.

The Gaston Bridge

Fisher and his squad were given a mission to blow up the Gaston Bridge on the Allier River in central France to slow the progress of the Germans. Since Fisher was a great swimmer, he was given the job of swimming across the river with the charges that would explode the bridge. The other seven members of his squad secreted themselves in a shed that was obliterated when a German tank came through. The seven members of Fish's squad who were in the shed all died. Fish was the only survivor.

Settings

Morton Hill Academy for Boys

After Jack Baker's mother died, his father decided to enroll him in the Morton Hill Academy for Boys because it was geographically close to the Portsmouth, Maine, shipyard where Captain Baker was stationed. The words etched into the stone entryway of the school was: Semper Fidelis or "Always Faithful" which is the motto of the U.S. Marines.

When Jack and his father arrived, they were given a tour of the campus. There were two classroom buildings, Lexington Hall and Concord Hall. There were also two dormitories. Fort O'Brien was for the high school boys and Camp Keys was for the younger boys where Jack would be staying. The cafeteria was called Dunkirk Commons and there was a campus church called Armistice Chapel.

Jack couldn't help but notice the militaristic names given to the buildings at the boarding school and wonder what he was getting into.

The Nook

The oldest structure on the grounds of the Morton Hill Academy for Boys was the boathouse that was built in 1870 and was referred to as the Nook. It was also considered the Holy Grail of the school probably due to the school's avid support of its rowing program. The boys were all required to practice rowing every morning before school in preparation for the regatta which was an annual rowing competition. Their boats were all stored in the Nook.

After Jack wrecked his boat, Sweetie Pie, Early showed Jack the boat they would use on their quest to find his brother. It was the Maine, the most beautiful boat in the Nook. It was a stunning blue in color and its exterior was pristine and gleaming. Jack was stunned when he saw the spectacular boat placed at the center of the other boats in the Nook.

Bear Knuckle Inn

After Jack and Early were captured by MacScott and his thugs, they were forced to go to the Bear Knuckle Inn with their captors. The inn was really nothing more than a shack and was located in the middle of the woods. The inn's interior was decorated with the stuffed heads and skins of animals that were hunted down and killed in the northern woods of Maine. The most terrifying head that hung on the wall was a ferocious looking bear with snarling teeth that appeared ready to pounce. It was from the Bear Knuckle Inn that the boys were able to escape from MacScott.



The Johannsen Cabin

As Jack and Early stumbled through the woods trying to find their way on foot after losing their boat and escaping from the pirates, they encountered a shack in the middle of nowhere. A very old woman was ringing the dinner bell and calling loudly for Martin to come home. She turned and looked at the boys and when she spotted Jack, she called him Martin. She scolded him for being late for dinner. The boys went inside and had a hot meal. She told “Martin” to go to his room and change into some dry clothes and to give his little friend some dry clothes to wear, too. In Martin’s room, the boys found an unfinished math homework sheet, ancient text books and dated clothing. Later, they would figure out the mystery behind Martin and his old mother.

Gunnar Skoglund’s Cabin

After Jack nearly drowned in the river, he woke up in a cozy bed but had no idea where he was. Unknown to Jack, he had been saved by Gunnar Skoglund, a man who lived alone in the woods. Jack ventured out of the bedroom after hearing Early’s chirpy voice. Early and Gunnar were sitting by a huge stone fireplace. The cabin was cluttered by homey. Gunnar decided that the gash on Jack’s head needed stitches and sent Jack back into the bedroom to get his medical book. Jack noticed all the great works of literature that were on Gunnar’s bookshelves. It reminded him of the books his mother liked to read. In one of the books was an unmailed letter to “Emmaline.” The boys stayed the night but left before sunrise to continue on their quest.

The Cavern

Jack and Early make their way to a cavern that had multiple rooms. They had been separated and arrived in the cavern at different times. Jack was shocked when he saw a small body lying on the cave floor covered with Early’s jacket. He quickly pulled the jacket off. It wasn’t Early; it was a skeleton. Later, the boys figure out that the skeleton is Martin Johannsen who had gone missing from his home and had never returned. The cavern was analogous to the catacombs that Pi explored during his quest.



Themes and Motifs

Abandonment

There are different forms of abandonment – all of them potentially devastating with long-term, even life-long, suffering. Abandonment emerges as one of the main themes in, “Navigating Early,” which is a story rich in themes. Jack Baker is the 13-year-old protagonist of this adventure drama. He was devastated by the unexpected death of his mother with whom he was very close. Death is the great abandoner; it is final and unforgiving. Everything reminds Jack of his mother and everything brings sadness to Jack because he misses her so.

Unfortunately, Jack was also abandoned by his father in a different sense but one that was just as hurtful. Jack’s father was a naval captain who often treated Jack like a navy recruit instead of a son. He even signed off on a letter to his young son as, “Captain Baker.” Jack’s father had abandoned Jack emotionally. He was not a father to him; he was his superior officer. Jack’s father didn’t abuse Jack physically; however, the scars that Jack suffered from his father’s failure to be a parent were just as real.

Early Auden’s parents were both dead. He’d been abandoned by his parents and relied on his older brother, Fisher, to take their place. After graduation, Fisher joined the army and served in the European theater during World War II. Early was naturally devastated when he received word that Fish had been killed in duty. Abandoned again!

Fisher had his own issues with abandonment. In his case, he felt he had abandoned his fellow soldiers. His squad had been attacked by German soldiers when they had been on a mission to blow up a bridge. Fisher was the only one to survive the attack and suffered with survivor’s guilt for not having done more to save them.

Throughout the book, Early tells a tale that is analogous to the real story. He tells the legend of Pi who is the star Polaris in the Constellation Ursa Major. His mother sets Pi off on a journey to earn his name, Polaris. The Great Bear (another name for Ursa Major) is Pi’s navigator. His mother tells him to let the Great Bear be his guide but he loses sight of her and becomes a lost soul. Although it was Pi’s wandering afar who lost his navigator, he was alone and abandoned by his own doing.

Guilt

Guilt is one of the recurring themes in, “Navigating Early.” Thirteen-year-old Jack Baker, the story’s protagonist, is filled with guilt after the death of his mother. His father who was a military man serving in Europe during World War II had told Jack to take care of his mother while he was gone. Not only did he not take care of his mother, she died! Jack was very close to his mother and in the subsequent months he relived the night she died over and over again. He had been upset about some minor issue and had slept in the barn that night. The next day he found that his mother had died in her sleep.



Jack struggled with his guilt throughout the story. Had he been closer to his father he could have discussed his feelings and tempered them. But instead, like many people do, he repressed his emotions and stuffed the guilt back inside where it festered and continued to haunt him.

Fisher Auden was a member of an eight-man squad with the Army. Their mission was to blow up a bridge over a French river to slow the progress of the Germans. Fisher was the only soldier in his squad to survive the assault from a German tank. Fisher suffered from what is now referred to as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and a good dose of survivor's guilt. The scene ruminated through Fisher's mind. What could he have done to save his men? Why did he live and his seven fellow squad members die?

Gunnar Skoglund had been a prize fighter in his younger years. He carried the guilt of unintentionally killing one of his opponents for years. He was so ridden with guilt that he went off by himself to live in the woods. He also abandoned a relationship he had with a young woman. The guilt he felt over the death of the man haunted him so that he was unable to confess to the woman he loved what he had done.

Captain Baker always seemed emotionally unavailable to Jack. After Jack and Early were missing for days during their quest, the captain finally let his guard down. He cried and embraced his son when they were reunited. He apologized to him for not being there for him. Captain Baker was finally able to let go of the guilt he felt over his dysfunctional relationship with his son and express his hope for a positive future together.

Pi's Story

The story of Polaris, or Pi, runs parallel with the story of Jack and Early. The tale of Pi and his quest to earn the name Polaris is told to Jack by Early. The story that he tells runs throughout the story and has many parallels to the main story. Early compares the story of Pi to his brother; however, there are many similarities in the tale of Pi with the story of Jack and Early.

When Pi began his journey he realized he only knew what the ocean let him know. The ocean became his master teacher. He was tossed around in the sea and had to cling to his small boat. The boat crashed into rocks and Pi was stranded on an island. He became strong from his lessons and began rebuilding his boat. To Early, his brother Fish was like Pi. He had been sent on a quest during World War II and learned from his experiences. Another parallel to Pi is when Jack crashed his boat, the Sweetie Pie, and Early helped him rebuild it.

Pi faced many dangers on his voyage. Sharks stalked him for days and he was stung by a swarm of buzzing insects. He was thrown overboard and a whale was near him in the water then he passed out. He woke on another beach. He had another problem on the island. There was an erupting volcano. During their quest, Jack is attacked by swarming insects and the side of a hill goes up in flames leaving a trail of fire down the side like a



volcano. When Jack almost drowns, he senses that a large whale is swimming next to him to save him. The big whale turns out to be Gunnar.

Pi is saved by pirates who turn on him. When they realized he had nothing of value, they prepared to throw him back in. He tempted them with his stories. They asked him to tell them about his travels. MacScott and his thugs kidnap the boys and steal their boat. Early calls them “pirates.” When Early senses they are about to kill them, he starts telling them stories that MacScott finds engaging.

Pi found the shell necklace his mother had made for him on the ground. He put the necklace on; it was a symbol of loss. Pi drifted alone with no direction and no stars to guide him. The boys get lost in the forest. The necklace is analogous to both Fish’s dog tags which represented his death and Jack’s navigator ring which he threw away because it too was a symbol of loss – his mother’s death.

Pi got lost in the maze for hours, days. He lay down to rest. Before sleep overcame him, he heard a bell. He saw a woman who had to be the oldest woman in the world. She told him that he belonged there. She brought him to her home and fed him. She told him that it was his home, too. The stories she told him about a past he didn’t remember soon became his own memories. She called him Filius. The boys get lost and stumble onto the Johannsen house. Mrs. Johannsen is like the Ancient One who Pi encountered. Mrs. Johannsen was 100 years old. They walked toward the dinner bell that she was ringing. She mistook Jack for her missing son, Martin. Instead of Jack beginning to believe that he was really Martin, it was Early who began to believe her just like Pi had believed the Ancient One initially.

Pi stumbled onto the catacombs. It was a place where everyone buried their darkest secrets. The spirits moaned and sighed – they couldn’t let go of their burdens. Pi realized he had to hold onto his pain. It defined him. Like Pi, Jack and Early found a dark secret buried in the cavern they discovered. Jack, Fish and Early were Pi’s kindred spirits and realized that sometime it’s necessary to hold onto your pain and face it because it makes you who you are.

Pi was hurt and alone between life and death in the catacombs. He was translucent and wasn’t really alive. A shadowy figure called out to him to take his hand. He stood and began climbing up a rocky hill. The hand was strong and pulled him up. It was Pi’s father. His father had been hunting when their village was attacked. He stayed in the village for months waiting for Pi to return. He was heartbroken when Pi never returned and he like, Pi, was drawn to the island of lost souls. Pi and his father found their way out of the catacombs. Just like Pi’s father, Captain Baker had been away fighting the enemy. He finally returns to Jack to become his real father.

Quests

Quests are the culmination of a dream or desire to discover or find something valuable or elusive or rare. The success of the quest is two-fold: firstly, the desired item is found



and secondly those who ventured on the journey withstood the challenge. To quote Steve Jobs, “The journey is the reward.”

There are many quests of different varieties that are part of the story of, “Navigating Early.” One could argue that fighting in a world war is certainly a quest. Captain Baker is a navy officer who has a tour of duty in the European theater during World War II. Fisher Auden joined the army after he graduated from Morton Hill. He was presumed dead after his squad was ambushed by a German tank during a mission in central France. While war is hell, the victory of the Allied Forces was the reward although all those on the quest were not able to survive.

When Jack attends his first math class at Morton Hill, Professor Blane writes the words, “Holy Grail” on the blackboard. The search for the Holy Grail is, of course, the quest of the ages. Searching for the religious artifact had wide ranging impact – everything from the waging of wars to the making of Hollywood movies. But Professor Blane had no intention of discussing the quest for the Holy Grail. He wanted to discuss the nature and merits of a quest. “Why does one embark upon a quest,” he asks the class. Blane asserts that pi is the holy grail of math. He urges the boys to think beyond the idea of a quest for treasure or wealth – quests for justice and happiness have more merit.

Jack and Early embark on a quest to find Early’s brother. During their quest to find him, Early tells Jack the story of Pi who was on a quest to earn the name of Polaris. Early conflates the quest that Pi who became lost and alone undertook with that of his brother who he was certain wasn’t dead but just a little lost.

Grief

There are five stages of guilt... at least. The word “stages” hints at the false proposition that once a grief-stricken individual reaches the final stage he has graduated to happiness and joy and full acceptance of his loss. Needless to say that’s not how it goes. The five stages of grief allow a person to become accustomed to their loss and while they don’t wind up in a comfort zone, with any luck they will land in a familiar zone where they reluctantly accept the loss of a loved one, a loved one that they will always miss.

Jack Baker is a 13-year-old who loses his mother unexpectedly. He loved and adored his mother. He was extremely close to her and enjoyed life with her, a laid back woman who was slow to blame and quick to praise. Jack’s father was the polar opposite. A military man, he believed in discipline, staying on task, being responsible and a militaristic approach even toward his son, perhaps especially toward his son. Captain Baker had been gone for the lion’s share of four years when his wife suddenly died of a brain aneurysm. He was a naval captain who served in the European theater during World War II. Jack was only nine when his father left for his tour of duty. He was thirteen when his mother died and the father he barely knew returned.



While Jack is suffering profoundly, he is forced to leave the only home he's ever known to attend an all boys' boarding school in Maine. He didn't want to go. He pleaded with Captain Baker to let him stay with his grandfather. He'd be home and near so many things that would remind him of his mother but his father's mind was set. He was stationed in Portsmouth which would be close to Jack's school. Everything at the new school reminded Jack of his mother – a walk on the beach, the bright sky, a gentle wind. Taking him away from Kansas did not take away from his grief.



Styles

Point of View

“Navigating Early” by Claire Vanderpool is told in the first person from the perspective of the protagonist Jack Baker. The story is told from the point of view of 13-year-old Jack who has just lost his mother unexpectedly and has been transplanted from his home in Kansas to a boys’ boarding school in Maine. His father is a military man who is stationed in Portsmouth and selects the boarding school that is closest to him. As a navy captain, Jack’s father has been away for much of Jack’s life and Jack is not close to him. Jack is grieving over his mother’s death, is upset at being yanked from his home and is uncertain about his relationship with a father he doesn’t know. By telling the story from Jack’s perspective, the reader is privy to the young boy’s angst, anger and uncertainty.

Early Auden is a main character in the story and the namesake for the title of the book. Early is on a quest to find his missing brother, Fish. His brother has been declared dead but Early doesn’t believe it. While it is Jack who tells Early’s story and interprets his feelings, it is Early who tells the story of Pi who has a dual identity in the book. Pi is short for Polaris a star in the Ursa Major constellation. Pi’s guide is the Great Bear (another name for Ursa Major). Pi, much like Jack and Early both, is a lost soul who is trying to deal with loss and to discover where he belongs.

Pi was set off on a journey by his mother but has lost sight of the Great Bear. He is on a quest to find his way home. Early is on a quest to find his brother and prove he is still alive and Jack is on a quest to find resolution for his mother’s death and the dysfunctional relationship he has with his father. Pi’s story is woven throughout the book and is narrated by Early. Pi’s second identity is “pi” the number. A professor has declared that pi is not an infinite number and will end. Early is voraciously opposed to this theory because if “pi” dies so does “Pi” and so does “Fish,” Early’s brother.

Language and Meaning

“Navigating Early” by Claire Vanderpool is the story of two 13-year-old boys who venture out on a quest to find the missing brother of one of them. The story takes place in the early 1940s when World War II was coming to an end. There are certain phrases and terminology that are indicative of that era. Jack’s father is a naval captain and has been on a tour of duty in the European theater. Early’s brother also served in the military during the war. He and his squad were given the mission of blowing up the Gaston Bridge on the Allier River in central France. The squad was then attacked by German tanks.



Early, a bright but eccentric young boy plays his favorite records on his phonograph. He plays Billie Holiday when it rains, Mozart on Sundays, Louis Armstrong on Mondays, Frank Sinatra on Wednesdays and Glenn Miller on Fridays.

The boys attend Morton Hill Boarding School where rowing is the favored sport. All the boys must participate in rowing and prepare for the regatta which is an annual race that the schools in the area all participate in. The school had banned another competition which was called the steeplechase.

There are references to navigation throughout the book. Much focus is placed on Early's fantastical story about the star Polaris in the Ursa Major constellation. He tells Jack the story of Polaris, or Pi, who is on a quest but becomes lost. He parallels that story with his own missing brother who has been pronounced dead. Polaris winds up in the catacombs among translucent people who are half dead and half alive. Jack and Early go on a quest to find Early's brother and wind up in a cavern searching for him. The story of the real boys who are also "lost souls" in many ways runs parallel with the story of Pi. There is also focus on the number pi, 3.14, which Early considers analogous to the story of Pi and his brother because of pi's infinite number.

Structure

"Navigating Early" by Claire Vanderpool is told in a mainly chronological order. There are 35 chapters that cover the story of 13-year-old Jack Baker who has just lost his mother and is being transplanted to a boarding school in Maine. His father, who he barely knows, is a navy captain who is stationed in the shipyard in Portsmouth, ME. He enrolls his son in the boarding school because it will be relatively near to his headquarters.

Jack meets Early Auden who is a bright but weird kid in his class who is going on a quest to find his brother who he thinks is missing, although the U.S. Army notified Early that Fisher Auden was killed in action in France. The story then follows Jack and Early on this quest. There are some flashbacks that explain what happened to Fisher on his mission in Europe during World War II. The story is told from Jack's perspective. He has many flashback thoughts about his life with his mother whom he misses terribly.

There is a parallel story that is woven throughout the main story. Early is an imaginative young boy and tells Jack the story of Polaris, or Pi, the star in the Ursa Major Constellation. The quest and adventures of Pi closely parallel those of Jack and Early and, to a degree, Fisher.

In the Epilogue, Jack cleans up some missing pieces. Fisher recovered and met a cute hospital helper during his stay. Gunnar and the school librarian were getting together – she was his love, Emmaline. The other boys at school looked at Jack and Early as heroes after their long trek. And Jack realized how much he learned from his strange little friend, Early Auden.



Quotes

Last spring, the war in Europe started winding down, and my mom and I were looking forward to my dad's homecoming. We'd have our own welcome-home parade, with streamers and cowbells and homemade ice cream.... But when father came back to Kansas, it wasn't for a parade. It was for a funeral. My mom's.

-- Jack (Chapter 1 paragraph Page 8)

Importance: This quote captures part of the premise of Jack's story. Jack has lost his mother unexpectedly. He was very close to her, and throughout the story he suffers with grief and guilt associated with her death.

Last year he [Early] walked out of biology class and never came back. Mr. Nelson said there are no venomous snakes in Maine. Early insisted there are still timber rattlesnakes up north and walked out.... He's all fire sure about most things. Sometimes he has these weird fits when his eyes go all blank and he kind of twitches. They think having those fits messed up his brain somehow.

-- Sam (Chapter 3 paragraph Page 28)

Importance: Jack is new at the Morton Hill Boarding School. He's noticed that a boy named Early Auden is absent in most classes. He hears firsthand about the odd little boy who, at this point in the story, is his mysterious classmate. Jack's curiosity grows after he hears about him from the other boys.

Remember that part I told you, when he set out on his voyage? Remember that, Jackie?' I hit me like a wave of ice-cold water, and I found myself holding my breath. My mom was the only one who called me Jackie.

-- Early/Jack (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 59)

Importance: Jack is grieving for his mother and has encountered Early Auden, an odd but smart little boy at school. There is something eerie about Early and even mystical. When Early calls Jack the same nickname that he was only called by his mother, Jack senses that there is something eerie about Early and that there is some unexplained connection between them.

That Professor Stanton thinks he (Pi) is dead, but he's just missing. I'm going to find him, and then Professor Stanton will quit saying he's dead. He's not dead.

-- Early (Chapter 11 paragraph Page 94)

Importance: Early conflates Professor Stanton's theory about pi the number with the story of Pi. Pi was the star Polaris in the Constellation Ursa Major. He had lost connection with his mother the Great Bear which is another name for the constellation Ursa Major. Pi was therefore lost and adrift. Early doesn't want the number pi to end because it would symbolize the death of Pi. Polaris or "Pi" also represents his missing brother. The "end" of pi therefore would also symbolize the death of his brother.



I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Early was shaping the Pi story to match what he knew of his brother's life in the army.

-- Jack (Chapter 14 paragraph Page 139)

Importance: Early is in denial about his brother's death during World War II. He is applying the story of Polaris who survived a long voyage that was fraught with danger.

This was a land of lost souls. Human beings who had weathered great storms in life, had suffered unspeakable loss, had been put to painful tests to existence, and still remained standing – but just barely.

-- Early (Chapter 16 paragraph Page 165)

Importance: Early continues his story of Pi, the lost voyager finally found where he belonged. It was on the island of lost souls among transparent people who were dead but their souls were restless because of the suffering they experienced in life.

I was pondering what might be in the stew when Early said, 'Jack, did you know Gunnar's missing a toe?' I gagged a little on the stew.

-- Early/Jack (Chapter 20 paragraph Page 194)

Importance: Early had the knack of saying just the right - or wrong - thing at the right time depending on how you looked at it.

All of it was starting to see less and less crazy. I was beginning to worry.

-- Jack (Chapter 26 paragraph Page 252)

Importance: Jack has always shrugged off Early's crazy stories about Pi and finding the Great Bear so they could find his brother. After they find huge bear tracks, he's starting to believe Early – which makes him worry about his own sanity.

The jacket was caught on something, so I gave it a tug, then jumped back as if I'd seen a ghost. Only it wasn't a ghost. It was a skeleton – bony white fingers and all.

-- Jack (Chapter 27 paragraph 271)

Importance: This is an eerie part of the story when Jack and Early are trying to escape from pirates and pursue Early's quest of finding his brother. They have an unexpected encounter with the skeleton whose identity is unknown. However, later the skeleton plays into a subplot of the story.

I remembered the day of my mother's funeral. It was raining outside, and I could see my dad lingering at her grave in the downpour. Could it have been raining even harder inside him?

-- Jack (Chapter 33 paragraph Page 312)

Importance: Jack is finding resolution with his father. His father had been away much of his life in the military. Jack was much closer to his mother. Jack is thinking back and



realizing that although his father didn't show much emotion that he was torn apart by Jack's mother's death. He is beginning to understand his father.

Fisher might have once been a school hero and legend. But now he was a soldier. And I needed to find another person who could speak the language that a soldier would understand.

-- Jack (Chapter 33 paragraph 323)

Importance: Fisher, Early's missing brother, had been traumatized by his tour of duty in Europe during World War II. Jack sensed that no one could really understand him or get through to him other than another military man who had similar experiences. It is obvious that Jack is thinking of his own father, a naval captain, as the perfect person to speak with Fish and try to convince him to come back home.

When my dad laid eyes on me, he didn't seem mad. He just hugged me for a long time. I think he didn't want to let go because he was crying.

-- Jack (Chapter 34 paragraph Page 325)

Importance: After Jack had left on the quest with Early, everyone was concerned about their welfare. Jack thought his tough military father would be upset with him and punish him. But finally, the formerly unemotional father allowed his feelings to come out to the delight of Jack who wanted nothing more than to be close to his father.