

Okay for Now Study Guide

Okay for Now by Gary Schmidt

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Plot Summary

Okay for Now is by then by award-winning author, Gary D. Schmidt. The author is the winner of the Newberry Honor for his novel *The Wednesday Wars*. The novel is set in Long Island and Marysville, which is in upstate New York in the Catskill Mountains. When the novel begins, it starts out in Long Island before the Swieteck family moves to Marysville in 1968. In this novel, Doug Swieteck, the youngest son in the family narrates the story. Doug is the only character that talks to the audience and the other members of the novel or his family, which consists of his father, mother and two older brothers. Part of the story includes the lives of the residents of Marysville when the Swieteck family moves there.

As the story unfolds, the audience learn about the family struggles and secrets in a light-hearted manner. The Swieteck family, or more specifically Doug's life, is symbolic of the title of the novel, *Okay for Now* because no matter where Doug and his mother are, as long as they are together, they say they are "okay for now." Doug seems to find a way to overcome the abuse in his own household and Doug's mother does too. Eventually, even the other two boys in the Swieteck family learn to be "okay for now" by learning to deal with the situation at hand in a positive manner and with a positive outlook.

Doug takes the readers through the various struggles and challenges the family faces, but from the perspective of a teenage boy. While the family struggles to make ends meet, there is also a focus on how Doug is handling an abusive father, finding his own identity, and falling in love for the first time.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

In Chapter 1, Doug Swieteck, which is the main character and narrator of the novel tells about how two famous baseball players came to their school and Doug winds up with a baseball cap signed by one of the them. Doug's brother steals it and so it's just one day that Doug owns something that was not pre-owned by one of his other family members. When Doug's father loses his job, he tells the family they are moving to upstate New York. The Swieteck family packs for the next three days. When Mr. Swieteck's friend, Ernie Eco, comes down with the moving truck, they load it up, but cannot fit Mrs. Swieteck's garden flowers so she gives them away in sets of three to the neighbors up and down the street. Before leaving, Doug's friend from school comes by and gives him the New York Yankees jacket he has signed by the same famous baseball player as the lost hat Doug once had. The family moves to a smaller house in Marysville , New York, near the paper mill where Mr. Swieteck will be working. Mr. Swieteck comes home mad and takes it out on everyone in the house, which lands Doug at home while the rest of the family goes out to eat at a diner. After his family leaves, Doug hides his Yankee's jacket in the basement and goes exploring. He runs into a girl on a bike that parks it in front of the library.

Doug goes to the second floor of the library, where he only finds a guard and table with a glass case on it. In the glass case is a big book of birds. It's open to a page where one bird takes up the whole page.

The next morning, Doug wakes to a very hot day. He waits outside until his dad and brother eat their breakfast and leave the house. Then he goes in and has breakfast with his mom and helps her unpack the kitchen boxes. They are throwing glasses of water on each other when Mr. Swieteck returns with Ernie Eco and Mrs. Swieteck sends Doug to the store for milk. Monday morning, Doug goes back to the library and sits on the steps outside. Eventually, the girl with the pink bike he met two days before shows up. She asks Doug to watch her bike while she walks into the store a few blocks away. She returns with two icy cold Cokes. While they drink the Cokes, she says her father owns Spicer's Deli, where she got the Cokes. She gulps down the Coke, belches and tries to get Dog to do the same, but the Coke shoots out of Doug's mouth and nose. Then, she introduces herself as Lil and offers Doug a job as a Saturday grocery delivery boy for her father's store.

In Chapter 2, on the following Saturday, Doug is waiting on the steps of the free public library when the librarian comes to unlock the door. The librarian tells him the library doesn't open until 10 am and that the steps are not made for sitting. Doug is rude to the librarian, just as he was rude to Lil the few times they met before. A man librarian come along and tells Doug the opening time of the library, but when he finds out Doug was already scolded by Mrs. Merriam, the man librarian, Mr. Palmer, lets Doug in early. Doug pretends like he is looking at books until the library officially opens and then goes



upstairs where the bird book is. Mr. Powell goes upstairs to turn on the lights and he and Doug have a conversation about the bird in the book. Mr. Powell is there to turn the page on the book, which he does once a week. He offers to keep it on the same page so Doug can look at it or give him a book on the author, John James Audubon, but Doug leaves before Mr. Powell finishes.

Doug goes to Spicer's Deli at 9 am the following Saturday to start his new job delivering groceries. Two wagons are loaded with brown paper grocery bags ready for delivery. Doug delivers the groceries in the first wagon and then returns to pick up the second wagon. The third and last wagon is for Mrs. Windermere, which Lil keeps asking her father if he is going to warn Doug about. Mr. Spicer tells Doug Mrs. Windermere is supposed to pay on delivery.

Doug arrives at the Windermere house, which is the biggest house he has ever seen. As he rings the doorbell, he hears someone using a typewriter inside. He rings the doorbell two more times and knocks before the typing stops and Mrs. Windermere throws open the door. Mrs. Windermere tells Doug she doesn't have time to deal with a rude delivery boy now so he should come back this afternoon. She slams the door in Doug's face, but he doesn't leave. He rings the doorbell and knocks again twice until Mrs. Windermere opens the door again. When Doug brings up her lemon ice cream, she tells him to go to the back door that leads into the kitchen and to put the groceries where they belong. When Doug tries the kitchen door, it's locked, but he finds a key under the mat. Doug puts away the groceries and then follows the typing sound to get the money for the groceries from Mrs. Windermere. It takes Doug repeatedly knocking to get Mrs. Windermere to open the office door. She pays him \$25, telling him to keep the \$2.22 as tip. On the way back to the kitchen, Doug gets lost and finds a room that has a John James Audubon bird painting hanging over the fireplace.

After work, Doug goes to the second floor of the library. The same bird is in the display case, but someone has left three sheets of paper and some colored pencils on the case. Doug leaves without touching anything. The following week, Doug runs into Lil three times. The first time he is drenched from running through the sprinklers and the second time a bird pooped on his head, so Lil makes fun of him both times. The third time, Lil comes to Doug's house with daisies Lil's mom sent over because Doug is digging a garden. They plant the flowers and have a nice time until Doug's brother comes and spits on all of the flowers. Lil rides away on her bike.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Doug alludes to the fact that his father can be violent. Doug's mother backs this up when she suggests that Doug's father will end up taking out his lost job on one of his sons when Mr. Swieteck comes home drunk from a bar one night. Mrs. Swieteck passing out the flowers and plants from her garden to the neighbors represents a piece of the Swieteck family staying and growing in the neighborhood from which the Swietecks are moving away. Ironically, Doug has never been inside of a library before, even though he is in junior high school. While Doug wishes the snotty girl he meets will



trip on the stairs leading up to the library, it is Doug whom trips as he follows her in. Discovering the library is like discovering a new world for Doug.

It seems as if Doug has stumbled into an exhibit at the library, which features a bird artist. Doug relates to the bird on the page because the bird is alone and so is Doug. Doug doesn't get along with his family and now he is living in a new place where he doesn't have any friends. Mr. Swieteck catching Doug and his mom throwing water on each other in the kitchen foreshadows a beating for Mrs. Swieteck from Mr. Swieteck. The fine line between love and hate that exists between Doug and Lil suggests they will end up liking each other and become boyfriend and girlfriend.

Doug is learning how to treat people by the way his father and brothers treat people, which is to be rude. Doug's obsession with the bird foreshadows him returning to the library the one day a week it is open, on Saturdays, to see the new featured bird. It also predicts Doug taking an interest in John James Audubon. While Doug says he doesn't draw, he seems obsessed with the tracing the lines of the bird, which may lead to Doug learning how to draw after all.

Lil paints Mrs. Windermere as the old lady in town that everyone is scared of. Doug may be just the match for Mrs. Windermere since he doesn't care much of what people think of him. Mrs. Windermere owning a John James Audubon painting foreshadows that Doug and Mrs. Windermere will become student and teacher, where Doug learns more about John James Audubon and his bird paintings from Mrs. Windermere.

It seems as if Mr. Powell is encouraging Doug to draw the bird by leaving him the supplies Doug needs to do it. Lil and Doug are starting to connect when they plant the flowers, but as usual, Doug's brother wrecks the moment. The following Saturday, Doug makes all of his deliveries, ending at Mrs. Windermere's. After he puts away the groceries, he goes to stare at the John James Audubon painting and Mrs. Windermere sees him. Doug interprets the painting, but Mrs. Windermere tells him the real interpretation and Doug sees she is right. Doug goes to the library and Mr. Powell offers to teach Doug how to draw the bird from the book.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

In Chapter 3, Doug is going to the library every Saturday now for his drawing lessons from Mr. Powell. There are only three weeks left until the summer ends and school starts. Mr. Powell tells Doug to work on filling in the wings of the bird's feathers at home, which Doug does that night. Doug doesn't make the feathers perfect, but he is excited to show Mr. Powell his work on the following Saturday.

On the first Monday in September, Doug goes to the junior high open house with his mom. All of the kids and mothers seem to know each other, except for Doug and his mother. After a meeting with the parents, kids and principal in the auditorium, the parents stay in the auditorium to learn the school rules, while the kids are separated by grade and last name to learn their rules.

When Doug goes to the library on Saturday to show Mr. Powell how he drew the feathers, Doug discovers Mr. Powell turning the page of the John James Audubon book to a new bird. A few days before school starts, Spicer's Deli is robbed and Mr. Spicer suggests to the police that Doug's brother is involved. They question Doug's mother and Doug, which both say Doug's brother was home the whole night. When Doug's father finds out they questioned Doug's brother, he comes home drunk and beats up Doug's brother. The police come back to question the family two more times. While Doug's brother is not arrested, word gets around town that he is a possible criminal and everyone treats the members of the Swieteck family differently than they did before the deli robbery. Only Mr. Ferris, the science teacher, tells Doug that he is not his brother and doesn't treat Doug as if he is. When Doug returns home from the library that Saturday, his mother has a letter from one of Lucas's friends in the Army saying Lucas was wounded but is fine and will be coming home in two or three months from Vietnam.

In Chapter 4, during the month of September, Doug continues to work on his drawing of the second bird picture with Mr. Powell. School continues as usual. One night, Doug puts on his Yankee's jacket for inspiration while he works on his bird drawing. His brother catches him, makes fun of his drawing and rips it up into little pieces. The third Saturday Doug goes to the library, he goes upstairs to find the page of the book is now on a dying gull. Mr. Powell comes upstairs from a meeting to tell Doug that the two pages of the book were sold and the library is selling off one page of the book at a time.

The following week, Doug gets in trouble in gym class for arguing with the PE Coach. When he gets sent to the principal's office, he sees one of the John James Audubon birds hanging over the back of the principal's desk. When it is time to read Jane Eyre in English, the teacher starts by reading it out loud to the class and then permits each student to read out loud for seven minutes. Doug approaches the teacher to tell her he doesn't want to read it out loud to the class, but she tells him he must take his turn.



Detention is with Mr. Ferris the science teacher the same afternoon. During detention, Mr. Ferris works through the periodic table with Doug.

Doug carries Jane Eyre with him on his Saturday grocery deliveries so he can practice sounding out the words. Each customer comments on the book, one even landing Doug a babysitting job where he has to read the kids a goodnight story. Doug accepts the job because his father is keeping the \$5 per week he makes from making grocery deliveries but Doug keeps the cash tips his father doesn't know about. Mrs. Windermere shows Doug three first edition copies of Jane Eyre and then becomes inspired to work on her play and runs off to her office. After work, Lil and Doug go to the second floor of the library to meet with Mr. Powell. Lil gets close to Doug and even touches his hand, which Doug doesn't mind.

The hardware store is robbed and the police wind up back at the Swieteck house to question Doug's brother. When the police search for Doug's brother, he takes off on his bike and causes them to crash two police cars and call in the state police. One of the policemen is the father of the kids Doug is supposed to babysit for, so the police officers says they should hold off on the babysitting job.

Doug tries to stay out of trouble after that because he thinks his mother has enough to worry about. Everything continues fine until the coach puts him on the skins team in PE class to play basketball. Doug mouths off to the coach and when the coach tries to forcibly move Doug to the skins team, Doug's shirt rips off and everyone gasps. After this, when Doug walks past the kids in the hall or into a classroom everyone goes silent and then starts laughing after he passes. When this happen when Doug walks into Mr. Ferris's room, Doug runs away but Mr. Ferris catches up with Doug and forces him to tell him what happened. Doug tells Mr. Ferris how his father came home drunk on the night of his twelfth birthday. After his mother told his father he missed Doug's birthday, Doug's father drives Doug forces Doug to get a tattoo, which says mama's Boy. The story makes Mr. Ferris cry.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

For the first time in his life, Doug is connecting with someone other than his mother. Doug finds Mr. Powell to be a teacher and a mentor. Mr. Powell is helping Doug to discover one of his passions in life, which is art, by teaching Doug how to draw. Doug being the class clown while Mr. Peattie, the principal is reviewing the rules with the class foreshadows Doug getting in a lot of trouble while attending eighth grade at Washington Irving Junior High. That night at home, Doug's brother insinuates that Doug doesn't know how to read, which also explains why Doug acted out in class and asked to go to the bathroom when the principal asked Doug to read one of the rules.

Doug mentions that he uses Lil's notes as his lab partner in science to write up the report, which implies that he can read. Doug knows that he is finally able to draw the foot of the bird underwater correctly because his brother says the foot looks like it is underwater before tearing up the drawing. Mr. Powell infers that one of the buyers is



Mrs. Windermere, which suggests that Doug may be able to see the picture of the bird again.

Doug is reacting to things in the same manner his father does. When something goes wrong in Doug's life, he takes it out on someone else and then suffers the consequences for his actions. For example, when Doug finds out the library is selling off the pages of the John James Audubon book, he takes it out on his PE teacher, which ends up landing Doug in detention.

Doug sees some characteristics of himself and some characteristics of Lil in the Jane Eyre character of the book. Mr. Ferris figures out that Doug cannot read and tells the English teacher. The English teacher then spends the rest of Doug's detention days using him as a guinea pig for a literacy unit she is developing and this teaches Doug how to read. It is ironic that Doug makes it to the eighth grade before a teacher or educator realizes that he cannot read.

Doug liking Lil getting close to him, how she smells and touching his hand insinuates that Doug is starting to have feelings for Lil other than friendship. Doug's brother implies that just because Lucas was a thief, it doesn't mean that he is.

The implication is that Doug has marks on his body from his father beating him, which is what makes the kids in gym class gasp.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

In Chapter 5, over the last few weeks of October, Doug gets in numerous fights and near fights in and out of school. For the instances in school, he gets detention and is threatened with suspension. The last Saturday in October is the family company picnic for the paper mill, which Mr. Swieteck makes the family go to because there is a trivia contest about baseball and Doug's father knows everything there is to know about Babe Ruth. When the family arrives at the picnic, two women sweep away Mrs. Swieteck to meet some of the other wives and the boys receive a Timex watch from the company.

While the contestants are gathering for the trivia contest, Doug is tossing horseshoes. A man comes by and tries to give him a quick lesson on how to toss horseshoes. Then the man asks Doug to be his partner in the trivia game. Doug and his partner get all of the questions right and get the tie breaker right to beat the other two teams. Doug finds out his partner is the owner of the company, Bob Ballard. When Doug goes by the paper mill to collect his winnings, he sees his father and Ernie Eco are parked in the two front parking spaces that were part of the trivia prize. When he goes into Mr. Ballard's office, Mr. Ballard says he sent the \$100 prize winnings and the signed baseball home with his father. Doug lies and says he received both, but Doug's father didn't give him either. Mr. Ballard takes Doug downstairs to play horseshoes. When the return to the office, the secretary is picking frames for one of the John James Audubon bird pictures. When Mr. Ballard asks which frame Doug thinks goes best with the phot, Doug says the picture belongs back in the book. Mr. Ballard tells the man to roll the picture back up and put it in the tube.

The next Saturday, Doug returns the picture to Mr. Powell and Mr. Powell puts it back in the case in the place of the book where it belongs. That night at dinner, Doug confronts his father about the parking spaces, cash and signed baseball. Doug's father calls Mr. Ballard a liar. Doug says someone is a liar, suggesting it is his father and then his father tries to beat Doug. Doug runs out to the library and stays there until it closes. When he comes home, his father is out., but his brother tells him that their mother was beat up by their father instead. Doug's brother gives Doug the signed baseball, which Doug hides in the pocket of the Yankees' jacket. Doug's brother also suggests that he has become a criminal because that is what everyone thinks he is anyway. He cries. After school, Doug and Lil go to play horseshoes at the plant and then they kiss.

In Chapter 6, instead of participating with his gym class in the wrestling unit, Doug and two other boys have been running outside instead. The principal calls Doug to his office and says he has to make up the wrestling unit during Doug's lunch period and still attend his regular PE session, which is now on volleyball. Doug starts babysitting for one of his grocery delivery customers, the Daughtery family, which has five kids. He also continues learning to draw with Mr. Powell. In November, Mr. Ballard provides all of the employees with a turkey. The Swietecks also receive a postcard alerting them Lucas



is coming home in mid-December. The boys in wrestling class help Doug play a joke on the PE teacher so they keep circling the mat and making each other dizzy instead of wrestling. Doug and the boys do this because the gym teacher tells one of Doug's opponents to call Doug a Mama's Boy, referring to his tattoo. That day when Doug changes in the locker room, nobody even looks at his tattoo.

The first Saturday in December, Doug waits outside the library door for Lil to come. In the middle of December, Doug and his parents drive to New Yprk City to pick Lucas up from the bus station. Everyone gets off the bus except for Lucas. When the bus driver asks if they are waiting for a kid in a wheelchair, Doug's mother runs onto the bus, where she finds Lucas in a wheelchair with both of legs missing and a bandage covering his eyes. When the war protestors pass the family on the street, they say hateful things to Lucas and even spit on him. When the family gets home, Christopher, Doug, and Luca's brother comes outside to help get Lucas out of the truck, into his wheelchair and into the house.

Doug stops into the coach's office to tell him his drawings are good. Doug also tells the coach that his brother just got home from Vietnam and they should help each other by talking. Doug also offers to keep track of the stats for the presidential fitness test and the teacher agrees.

At the library, Dog tells Mr. Powell that a girl heron should be in the background of the picture, instead of a hunter. Lil comes and holds Doug's hand.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Doug withdraws from school and even drawing after the tattoo incident at school. The only thing Doug continues to do is deliver groceries because he father makes him because of the money he is earning. Doug's father is a very selfish person. Unlike most parents that look out for their children and try to do what is best for them, Doug's father does whatever is best for Doug's father. It foreshadows that Mr. Ballard is going to return the John James Audubon picture to the book from where it came.

Returning the picture to the book is a turning point for Doug. This is the point in the novel and in his life where he realizes what kind of person his father is and that he is not going to be a person like that. This is the point in the novel where Doug vows to get the pictures back in the book to make it whole again and to start drawing again. Doug realizes that his brother is struggling with the same thing Doug is—trying not to become the man their father is but having a hard time not becoming that men when you don't know any other way to be.

With Doug starting to change his attitude, things start looking up. The postcard suggests that Lucas doesn't look the same as he did because of the war injuries he has suffered. This also insinuates that Lucas's attitude toward life may have changed as well. It might be a positive attitude change—to be grateful for his life—or the war may have wreaked havoc on Lucas's attitude, making it worse than it was when he left for Vietnam. Doug



draws a parallel between his situation and that of the bird he is working on drawing now with a hunter in the background. For now, the bird and Doug are okay, but that could change any minute or any day. Ironically, for the first time, Doug notices that Lucas has his mother's smile on the bus when he returns from Vietnam.

The author reveals the middle brother's name as Christopher for the first time in the novel. It is a symbol of Christopher's transformation from a "criminal mind" as Doug refers to him into a human being—someone who has compassion for his older brother's situation.

The gym teacher continues to pick on Doug during both periods of PE. At the end of one class, Doug finds drawings on the PE teacher's clipboard of scenes of the Vietnam War, from when the PE was in the military. When the PE teacher catches Doug looking at his drawings, he yells at him and the English teacher writes Doug a note to get him out of PE and to help her on the literacy unit again.

Not only is Lucas in a dark world because he is blind, but he lives in a symbolically dark world as well. He lives in constant pain and he has nightmares at night about what he did and saw when he was in Vietnam. For the first time, Doug understands why the PE coach is the way he is.

With the landing of the man on the moon, Doug starts to see possibilities in life for the first time.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

In Chapter 7, every Saturday in December, it seems to snow in Marysville, which means Doug has to delivery groceries in the cold, wet weather. Each of his delivery customers offers him a hot beverage or food to help him along the way. Mrs. Windermere always gives him black coffee. She's now writing an adaptation of Jane Eyre. Mr. Spicer replaces the wagons with a toboggan so it's easier for Doug to deliver groceries in the snow. When Doug returns to the deli, Mr. Spicer heats up some chicken noodle soup for Doug and Lil and then they head over to the library. The town continues to have money problems so they are selling more and more of the John James Audubon pictures. Doug continues to help the PE teacher with recording the Presidential Physical Fitness charts and the teacher gives Doug a new PE shirt so he doesn't have to keep wearing his tshirt.

Lucas continues to go through his depression and feel sorry for himself. He barely talks except to make sarcastic remarks about his legs missing. One day, Doug confronts him and tells him to stop feeling sorry for himself and to be happy for what he does have, such as two good arms. When Doug rips the bandage from his brother's eyes, Lucas says he thinks he can see.

The doctor appointments every two weeks for Lucas ended when Doug's father decided he didn't want to drive in the snow. When Doug says he thinks he can see though, they take him back to the doctor. The doctor says his eyes may heal and gives Lucas exercises to do for his arms and chest.

In gym class, one of Doug's classmates tells him his father bought one of the John James Audubon pictures. The classmate, James Russell, takes him home to see the picture and meet his dad, who has a secret job as a flutist for the Philharmonic Orchestra.

During a delivery to Mrs. Windermere, Doug looks through her book piles and finds a book on the composer Copland. Doug trades the book with James Russell's father for the Audubon picture and returns the picture to the library. One night after dinner, Christopher and Doug take Lucas to the library to see the Audubon picture of the puffins. When the three enter the library, Mrs. Merriam welcomes Lucas home and asks if she knows Lieutenant Leonard Merriam. Lucas says he doesn't. After the three take the elevator to the second floor, Lucas tells them Lieutenant Leonard Merriam is MIA. Lucas also says he's lucky to be home.

In Chapter 8, Doug starts to have a more positive attitude, thinking that every time something is going good that something bad is waiting around the corner. In the middle of March, Doug notices his Yankees' jacket and signed baseball are both missing. At the end of March, the hardware store is robbed again. The police come to question



Christopher, inspect Christopher's bike, which is missing a pedal, and then pull a pedal out of a pocket that fits Christopher's bike. Doug goes to the plant to get his father. When Doug tells his father about Christopher, Doug's father looks at Ernie Eco and then goes to bail Christopher out of jail. Rumors start spreading around town again about the Swieteck family.

The following day, Doug cuts several classes and gets called to the principal's office. Doug makes a deal with the principal that when they find out the thief is not his brother that the principal has to return the pelican picture hanging over his desk back to the library and that Doug can continue taking advanced algebra. They shake on the deal. On the walk home from school on the third day of detention, Mr. Ballard drives by and offers Doug a ride home or a chance to play horseshoes. Doug opts to play horseshoes. When they return to Mr. Ballard's office, he gives Doug an orchid plant to give to Mrs. Swieteck. As Doug is about to cry, Mr. Ballard gives him a jacket he says doesn't fit him anymore and drives him home.

On his Saturday deliveries, all of his customers comment on how nice his new flight jacket is. When Doug goes to the library in the afternoon to meet Lil and Mr. Powell, they both say he looks good in the flight jacket too.

One sunny afternoon in March, Lil and Doug go to play horseshoes. As they are heading to the horseshoe pit, Doug sees Ernie Eco on a smoke break with his father and Ernie is wearing Doug's Yankees' jacket. Ernie Eco doesn't come to The Dump for dinner that night and Lucas announces he's going to start looking for a job so he can pay for Christopher to go to college.

While babysitting the Daugherty children one night, one of them has an asthma attack. Doug has to run him to the doctor's house. In the end, Doug saves the boys life. Christopher watched the other children while Doug ran to the doctor's house. Christopher told Doug it was a piece of cake, but Mr. and Mrs. Daugherty say that when they got home, the children were attacking Christopher on the floor. When Mr. Daugherty got home from the doctor's house, the children were all sleeping on top of Christopher. Mr. Daugherty picks Doug up from school in the police car with sirens blaring to drive him home to say thank you for saving his son's life.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

The new picture Doug is working on shows two birds with the winds blowing them in two different directions. The birds represent Lil and Doug, who come from different worlds but have overcome these differences to form a friendship, and what may transform into a boyfriend girlfriend relationship. The bird picture also represents the choices Doug has in life. Just because his background may be pushing him in one direction does not mean that Doug cannot change the outcome by changing his own actions.

Doug, inspired by the two birds with the wind blowing them in different directions, helps Lucas to see that he doesn't have to give up just because the war changed his life.



Lucas has a new sense of hope when he thinks he may be able to see again. When the coach asks about Lucas and his dreams, Doug believes it is the birds in the photo circling each other and meeting in the middle rather than getting blown in different directions.

Mrs. Merriam infers that either her husband, son or other family member is fighting in Vietnam and that he is stationed in Saigon. Her gratitude toward Lucas shows that she understands what he and the rest of the Swieteck family is going through. This is a transition for Mrs. Merriam, who at first just thought that Doug and Christopher were criminals. Now, she realizes that there is more substance to the boys than she originally thought.

The look that exchanges between Mr. Swieteck and Ernie Eco suggests that it is the two of them whom have been robbing the local businesses. Doug is learning that everyone's life has its ups and its downs. He is learning to deal with his emotions regarding these situations without raging as his father does and without acting like he did when he first moved to Marysville. Doug has not perfected controlling his emotions yet, but he is getting better at it because he is maturing at the same time.

Through a drawing lesson on one of the pictures, Mr. Powell is teaching Doug the difference between stability and instability. While Mr. Powell is talking about the two using pictures as examples, he is also talking about life. When things are stable, you know what direction life is going. When things are unstable, you don't know the direction that life is going.

The silence that falls over The Dump is a symbol of the liar and thief that Doug now knows his father is. From his interaction with other families and other households in Marysville, Doug is also learning that his family dynamic is not the same as other families.

Doug realizes that Christopher has feelings too and that his brother is not as mean and brusque as he pretends to be.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

In Chapter 9, it's April and springtime is finally in Marysville. One Saturday, Lil delivers groceries with Doug to Mrs. Windermere. They find her meeting with the producer of her play and Mrs. Windermere says they should cast Lil as Helen Burns, but Lil doesn't want to act in the play. When the teachers at school find out about Lila acting in the play and Doug acting like a shrieking woman locked in an attic offstage, all of the classes focus in somehow on acting.

Three days a week Mr. Spicer drives Lil and Doug into the city for play practice. By May, Lucas is hired and fired from three different jobs. By the time it is opening night for the play, Lil is so nervous that she is eating pencils at school. After school, Mr. Spicer drives Mrs. Spicer, Lil, Doug and Mrs. Swieteck into the city for opening night. Doug sees famous people in the audience, such as the Mayor, Jimmy Stewart and the Yankee's player Joe Pepitone, which is the autographed hat and jacket he once owned. Lil gets sick and Doug is the only one that knows her lines from practicing with her, so he has to go on stage in her place while her parents take Lil to the hospital. Doug does a great job filling in as Helen Burns and keeps in mind that he will be returning two more pages of the book back to its rightful place. Joe Pepitone comes backstage to congratulate Doug on his performance as Helen and the old shrieking woman offstage. Joe remembers playing ball with Doug and giving him his autographed hat. This time, Joe asks Doug to sign the play program for him. When Doug gets home with his mom that night, his brothers tell him the Spicers called from the hospital and that Lil's stomachaches are not from eating her pencils.

In Chapter 10, the doctors give Lil one in five chances of surviving. The Saturday after Lil goes into the hospital, Doug goes to the deli early to help load the wagons, which is usually Lil's job. Mr. Spicer says he has to let Doug go because he can't afford to pay him because of the high hospital bills. Doug delivers the groceries anyway. Each of the grocery customers gives Doug something for Lil. Mr. Powell insists they paint one of the John James Audubon birds for Lil and then Doug takes it to her when he visits her in the hospital.

In June, Lucas shows Doug how he can wheel himself up the marble steps at the library. When the PE coach comes out of the library, he offers Lucas a job as assistant coach. The next Monday, Lucas starts as assistant coach. The last two weeks in June are the last two weeks of school and the teachers are piling on the work.

As the rest of the family starts to talk around the dinner table and share their good news, Mr. Swieteck remains quiet. He hasn't spoken to Doug since Doug caught Ernie Eco wearing his Yankees' jacket. By June, Mr. Swieteck doesn't eat dinner with the rest of the family at the table anymore.



One week before Christopher's trial Doug is visiting Lil at the hospital. Lil tells Doug not to worry because Christopher isn't guilty. The cops come to the Swieteck house to tell Christopher that the person who robbed the hardware store and deli confessed and they got the merchandise back, so the charges are dropped against Christopher. The good news changes the family dynamic and they all eat dinner together at the table, laugh and act like a normal family.

The next day at school, the principal apologizes to Doug and tells him to pick up the John James Audubon page after school to return to the library. He also tells Doug he can go wherever and do whatever he wants. Finally, the principal thanks him for helping the coach.

On Saturday, Doug makes his normal deliveries and all of the customers give him something for his mother's garden. After he takes the plants home to his mom, he heads to the library. Mr. Powell is waiting to return the picture from the principal to the book. Mr. Powell replaces the last missing picture with the one Doug paints so that the book is once again complete.

After the last day of school, Lil comes home from the hospital for two weeks. Then she has to check into the community hospital. The day Apollo 11 blasts off, Doug crawls into Lil's hospital bed with her and they watch it blast off. He tells her to close her eyes and imagine birds all around her.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

The spring not only represents the start of new season, but also symbolizes the blooming of new relationships and new directions in life, such as Doug and Lil officially becoming boyfriend and girlfriend. Mrs. Windermere uses one of the John James Audubon pictures she bought to indirectly blackmail Lil and Doug into playing parts in her play. The science teacher uses Lil and Doug as a metaphor for success because they are the first junior high school students to play in a Broadway play and the first residents of Marysville to star in a Broadway play. He compares this success to that of the NASA getting Apollo Ten on to the moon. It foreshadows that Lil has a major illness that is causing her stomachaches and they she may even die.

The police officer infers that Mr. Swieteck is the one that confessed. By Mr. and Mrs. Swieteck's reactions, it is Mr. Swieteck.

Mr. Powell infers that they might be able to retrieve the final missing page of the book from the overseas investor.

The flapping of the wings Lil and Doug hear over the hospital machines are hope that they can go wherever they and whenever they want. This symbolizes their hope that Lil will live. The kerchief Lil wears on her head to cover the loss of her hair suggests she has cancer, but her will to live might be just what she needs to beat it.



Characters

Doug Swieteck

Doug Swieteck is the main character and narrator of the novel. He is in junior high school, in the summer between seventh and eighth grade, when the novel opens. Doug speaks both as a character in the novel and directly to the reader. When he speaks directly to the reader, the other characters in the play are not able to hear what he is saying or thinking.

Doug is a huge Yankees' fan and has met two of the professional baseball players on the team. Doug even receives a signed hat from one of them. His friend receives a signed jacket from one of the players and gives it to Doug. Doug is the youngest of three boys. He has an abusive father and a mother that takes what his father says and does. Doug is dealing with living in a new city in upstate New York, Marysville, rather than Long Island, where the family previously lived.

As the novel unfolds, Doug goes through many transitions in life in just a one-year period. He learns how to draw. He learns the meaning of life through the drawing lessons. He lands his first job delivering groceries and he falls in love with a girl.

Mr. Swieteck

Mr. Swieteck is Doug's father. When the novel opens, Mr. Swieteck works at the lumber company in Long Island. When Mr. Swieteck expresses his anger at his boss one day, Mr. Swieteck loses his job and has to move the family to Marysville, New York, where one of his friends has landed him a job at the paper mill.

Mr. Swieteck is a drunk. He also has trouble controlling his anger. Mr. Swieteck, according to Doug, is "good with his hands," which means that he beats up Doug, his brothers and Doug's mom.

Mr. Swieteck is an expert of Babe Ruth Trivia. He knows all of the statistics, data and information that there is to know about the Yankees' baseball player. Mr. Swieteck also has an uncanny ability to find the bad in every situation, no matter how good the situation is.

Mrs. Swieteck

Mrs. Swieteck is Doug's mom. She tries to keep the peace in the family as much as possible in an effort to keep from receiving a beating from her husband. She also tries to keep the peace so one of the two boys still living at home does not get beat by their father. Doug describes his mother's smile as being more beautiful than that of Elizabeth Taylor.



Lucas Swieteck

Lucas Swieteck is Doug's oldest brother. He is fighting in the Army in the Vietnam War. Lucas was drafted into the Army and has been away from home for a year and half when the novel opens. Lucas is abusive to Doug, which indicates that he learned the abusive behavior from their father, Mr. Swieteck.

When Lucas comes home from Vietnam, he does not have his legs and he is blind. Eventually, Lucas gets his sight back and learns how to work with his arms and chest. He becomes more independent as the novel comes to an end, even landing a job as a junior high school PE coach with one of his fellow Vietnam soldiers.

Lil Spicer

Lil is the daughter of the man that owns Spicer's Deli in Marysville, New York. Lil is short for Lilly, which is short for Lillian. Doug meets Lil on his first day living in Marysville. She rides a pink bike and locks it up with a pink chain. She goes to the library on Saturday with a stack of books and she and Doug have words outside. Doug runs into her again on the first Monday he lives in town and Lil offers Doug a job delivering groceries for her father's store.

Lil and Doug become very close friends and eventually boyfriend and girlfriend. Lil also comes down with cancer and is hospitalized toward the end of the novel for treatment.

Mrs. Windermere

Mrs. Windermere lives in a big house with pillars in the front that is on the same street past the library. She is an old lady with white fuzzy hair that she wears in a bun with red rubber bands and yellow pencils sticking through it. She is a playwright. Mrs. Windermere also owns a painting of a mother bird and two baby birds by John James Audubon. She also buys another of the pictures as a gift.

When she writes a play adaptation of Jane Eyre, Mrs. Windermere casts Lil and Doug to play characters in the play. Opening night of the play is when Lil falls ill and is taken to the hospital. Doug fills in for Lil and Mrs. Windermere ends up returning both pictures to the library in return for Doug playing both roles.

Christopher Swieteck

Christopher Swieteck is Doug's older brother and the middle child. He is known for his criminal activity and hanging around with thugs. Christopher beats up on Doug, picks on him and appears to be a mini-version of Mr. Swieteck. As the novel unfolds, however, Christopher reveals that he is not the criminal everyone says he is and that he only acts like he does after years of people expecting him to be that way.



Mrs. Merriam

Mrs. Merriam is the lady librarian at the public library. At first, she scolds Doug for sitting on the steps waiting for the library to open. As the novel unfolds, she starts to see Doug as a good boy. Finally, when Lucas comes into the library after returning from Vietnam, Mrs. Merriam asks if Lucas knows Lieutenant Merriam, indicating she has a loved one that is MIA in Vietnam.

Mr. Powell

Mr. Powell is the man librarian at the public library. He is also the one that gives drawing lessons to Doug, using the John James Audubon book as their learning and teaching tool. Mr. Powell is responsible for turning the page of the book to a new page the one day a week that the library is open. In teaching Doug how to draw, he is also teaching Doug valuable life lessons, which help Doug to learn and grow outside of learning how to draw.

Mr. Ferris

Mr. Ferris is the junior high school science teacher for eighth grade. He is the only teacher that encourages Doug that he can be and do what he wants no matter what his brother is. For a long time, he is the only teacher that believes in Doug. Mr. Ferris is also responsible for realizing that Doug cannot read and makes arrangements for the English teacher to help Doug learn how to read during detention.

Mr. Ferris is also a symbol of hope and possibility for the kids in his class. By teaching the kids about the Apollo 11 launch to the moon, he also teaches them that dreams do come true. Along with the scientific knowledge he provides, he also instills self-esteem and hope in the students in his life, especially Doug and Lil.

Coach Reed

Coach Reed is the PE teacher. He is a former soldier from Vietnam. He gives Doug a hard time until Doug discovers that the coach is suffering the same way Lucas is suffering from his time in Vietnam. Not only does Doug learn compassion for Coach Reed, but Coach Reed learns how to forgive himself for what he had to do when he was fighting in the Vietnam War. The coach ultimately offers Lucas a job as an assistant coach, which helps Lucas to get on track with the rest of his life.



Objects/Places

Long Island, New York

Long Island, New York is the place where the Swietecks live when the novel opens. The Swietecks leave Long Island to move upstate after Mr. Switeck gets in a fight with his boss and loses his job at the local lumber company.

Camillo Junior High School

Camillo Junior High School is where Doug attends school in Long Island. While a student there, two famous Yankees' professional baseball players go to the junior high, play baseball with the boys and give a few of them, including Doug, autographed items.

Marysville, New York

Marysville, New York is the city where the Swietecks move to in upstate New York. Mr. Swieteck's friend, Ernie, Eco, gets Mr. Swieteck a job working at the paper mill in town. Marysville is in the area of the Catskills Mountains.

The Dump

The Dump is the name Doug calls the new house the family moves to in Marysville, New York. The house is smaller than the house they rented in Long Island. It is a two-story house that sits behind a bar. The Dump is in walking distance to the paper mill where Mr. Swieteck works.

Spicer's Deli

Spicer's Deli is the store that Lil's father owns. Lil gets Doug a job there delivering groceries every Saturday. During the hot months, Lil and Mr. Spicer serve Doug ice cold cokes. During the cold months, Mr. Spicer prepares a hot chocolate to Doug when he picks up the grocery wagons and makes him steaming chicken noodle soup for when his deliveries are over and before Doug and Lil head to the library. Spicer's deli is robbed right after the Swietecks move to Marysville and everyone thinks it is Christopher Swieteck that is responsible.

Marysville Free Public Library

The Marysville Free Public Library is where Lil and Doug meet for the first time. The library is only open one day a week, which is on Saturday. The first time Doug goes into



the library is the first time he has ever been in a public library. Doug discovers the John James Audubon book of birds in a display case on the second floor of the library and goes to visit it every week. One week, Mr. Powell sees Doug admiring the bird and encourages Doug to learn how to draw it. Eventually, the second floor of the library becomes the sanctuary Doug and Lil retreat to every Saturday after the grocery deliveries are done. Mr. Powell teaches Doug how to draw and paint while Lil does her homework or reads books.

Washington Irving Junior High School

Washington Irving Junior High School is the school Doug and Lil attend in Marysville. As the new boy in school and after the teachers find out his brother may be a criminal, they treat Doug poorly. As the novel unfolds, Doug learns how to win most of the teachers over and by the end of the novel, they have a much more positive attitude about Doug. The English teacher at the school is responsible for teaching Doug how to read. Doug learns a lot of educational and life lessons in the one year he attends the junior high school.

Paper Mill

The paper mill is where Doug's father works with Ernie Eco, Doug's father's friend. The boss's office, Mr. Ballard, becomes a refuge for Doug after Mr. Ballard and Doug win the trivia contest at the company picnic. Behind the paper mill, Doug and Mr. Ballard practice how to throw horseshoes. The paper mill loading dock is also where Doug learns that his father is a liar and a thief after seeing Ernie Eco wearing his stolen Yankees' jacket.

Mrs. Windermere's House

Mrs. Windermere's House sits on the same street as the library, but it is further out of town. The Windermere house is the biggest one Doug has ever seen. The house is so big that it has pillars in front of the house. Doug finds warmth and comfort in Mrs. Windermere's kitchen when he delivers her groceries every Saturday. He also finds a friend and mentor in Mrs. Windermere and her eccentric ways. The house is also the location of one of the John James Audubon pictures that Doug works to return to the book throughout the novel.

John James Audubon Book

The John James Audubon book is a book of bird pictures the author drew and painted. The book is on display in the Marysville Free Public Library on the second floor. It is the book that Doug falls in love with and Mr. Powell uses as a learning tool to teach Doug how to draw. Doug also learns valuable life lessons from the symbolism that the birds represent in the book.



Themes

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that runs throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age. In some way, each of the characters learn lessons about growing up and dealing with responsibilities in life. Doug deals a lot with puberty and the changes in his feelings and his body as a teenage boy. He also deals with an abusive father and the fact that he has made it into the eighth grade without being able to read.

Christopher's coming of age comes after Lucas comes home from Vietnam without his legs and blind. Christopher realizes that he has to help his brother find his way and that Christopher does not want to turn out like Mr. Swieteck. Even though Chris is heading down the same path as Mr. Swieteck, he alters his behavior, as does Doug and Lucas.

Lil comes of age when she faces death after coming down with cancer. Doug and Lil learn how valuable life is and that they should live it to the fullest. Even Mr. Swieteck comes of age when he realizes what he is doing to his family by being abusive and a thief. In the end, Mr. Swieteck gives back the stolen goods to sacrifice himself and get his son Christopher out of trouble for crimes he didn't commit but that everyone thinks he did.

Identity

Identity is another primary theme in *Okay for Now*. When the novel first opens, Doug and both of his brothers have found their own identities by mimicking the actions of their father. They are sarcastic, pretend as if they don't care about what people think and can be downright mean. As the novel unfolds, all three of the Swieteck boys finds their own identity in life.

Doug learns through his art how to express his feelings. He also learns compassion when he realizes that the PE coach is suffering in the same way Lucas is from what they did and saw in the Vietnam War. Christopher learns that he does not have to be the criminal that everyone thinks he is. Christopher denies being a part of the robberies in town and learns how to help someone else when Lucas comes home from the war.

Even the PE Coach, Coach Reed, learns that he is not defined as a person by the atrocities he committed during the war. Rather than dealing with his emotions by taking it out on the boys in his PE class, Coach Reed learns that he is not alone and changes his attitude toward life by being nicer to Doug and even making a connection with Lucas.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family, the Swietecks. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Doug's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families living in their area. Dealing with an abusive father is one of the tribulations of the Swietecks. Another is that Christopher is accused time and again for being a thief. In addition, Lucas struggles with his injuries from the Vietnam War and the way the people treat him when he comes home without his legs and blind.

By being in contact with other families in Marysville and meeting different people, Doug learns that his family is not the perfect family. He also learns what it means to be in a relatively normal family. Even Mr. Swieteck changes his abusive and thieving ways after witnessing the positive changes in his sons and his wife after the generosity of the people of Marysville surrounds them.

Style

Point of View

The novel is in the first-person point of view. The narration is from the point of view of an eighth grade boy, Doug. While the narration comes from Doug, he has short monologues where he speaks directly to the audience. The narrator is telling the story as it unfolds, but he also gives insight to the past and things that have happened that has brought the family to where they are today.

The point of view of this novel provides an intimate point of view to allow the audience to connect closely with the main character, who also happens to be the narrator of the story. The point of view also allows the author to inject his own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place to him and his family members without having to move out of character or interrupt the flow of the narration. For these reasons, the point of view works well with this play and the author's writing style.

Setting

The novel starts out in Long Island, New York in 1968 in the home of the Swieteck family. The remainder of the novel, which goes into 1969 unfolds in Marysville, New York. The setting of this novel is important because the story revolves around the culture, family dynamics and coming of age of this particular family. The Swieteck family is also very representative of what a lot of families similar to them were going through during the Vietnam War. The main characters of the novel are a family that consists of a father, mother and three sons.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. Initially, the audience is not aware of all of the family secrets that exist. However, as events unfold, one secret after the next is exposed, as interpreted by the narrator.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is not stiff, but it is also not overly modern. Although the language of the novel is not formal, it uses some language that is not in use in modern daily life. Some of the language is from the sixties, which is the time period when the novel is set. The language is educated, strong, and descriptive enough that it creates a flow that leaves the reader impressed with the words as much as the plot when the novel is over.

The language of the novel is appropriate to the plot because it is accurate to the characters in the play. The words in the play are descriptive enough that the reader finds enjoyment in the words as well as the plot. The language is not difficult to

understand, however, and everything is clear in its context. Hence, the language of the novel fits well with the plot.

Structure

The novel has ten chapters. Each chapter is approximately 20 to 40 pages long. The novel tells the story in exposition and dialogue. The narrator is the main character of the book, so he injects his own voice throughout the novel. This allows the narrator to provide his own opinions of the events surrounding the setting of the novel, as well as the actions taking place within the plot, but from the eyes and words of Doug.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows the trials and tribulations of the family. The subplots involve identity and coming of age.

Quotes

"Do you think you're going to be happy here?" (Chapter 1, p. 23).

"You see how things never go right when you're feeling good?" (Chapter 2, p. 63).

"It means, Doug Swieteck, that in this class, you are not your brother" (Chapter 3, p. 102).

"With your shirt off, Swieteck. You have to have your shirt off if you're on the Skins team" (Chapter 4, p. 142).

"Do you ever wonder what it's like to be so angry that you...And then something happens, and after that, everyone figures that's what you're like, and that's what you're always going to be, and so you just decide to be it? But the whole time you're thinking, Am I going to be like him? Or am I already like him? And then you get angrier, because maybe you are, and you want" (Chapter 5, p. 180).

"It would be a different story" (Chapter 6, p. 226).

"I know. Not everyone gets to see who they want to see again. I guess I'm lucky" (Chapter 7, p. 259).

"Do you know what he's telling you?" (Chapter 8, p. 287).

"Little brother, it isn't a stomachache" (Chapter 9, p. 324).

"You think the moon's all there is? There's a whole lot more for us to see" (Chapter 10, p. 360).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Doug? Why does he feel like his father blames him for everything and that he is always in trouble for something? What is the biggest challenge that Doug faces? How is it changing his life and his viewpoint of life?

Discuss the relationship between Doug and his mother. Is there guilt or a sense of obligation in their relationship? How does Doug feel about his mom? How does Doug's mom feel about Doug? Why does Doug's mom often take the brunt of Mr. Swieteck's anger? What does she do about changing it?

How does Lil get sick? How does this affect the future for Doug and Lil? How does each character react emotionally and what actions do they take to compensate for her illness?

Who is Christopher Swieteck? Why does he feel like he is a criminal even when he is not? Why does he use sarcasm and beat up Doug? What causes Christopher to finally confess his true feelings to Doug? Why does Doug not reveal Christopher's name until about halfway through the novel?

Who is Lucas? Why does he feel so responsible for contributing financially? Why is the approval of his father so important to him? Why does Lucas return home? How does Lucas react when protestors and the people in town treat him bad for fighting in the war?

Discuss the culture of the Swieteck family. What impact does the culture have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them or hold them back? Why is the culture an issue to the characters? Does the culture have anything to do with way that the family relationships develop and evolve? What impact does it have on the overall desire to help each other emotionally and financially?

Who do you think was the real criminal in the novel? Do you think it was Mr. Swieteck, Ernie Eco, both or someone else altogether. Why does the real criminal confess? How does this change the future for each of the members of the Swieteck family, especially Christopher?