

One Child Study Guide

One Child by Torey Hayden

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Plot Summary

One Child is the story of a lost little girl and the extraordinary teacher who works to find her. Sheila has been forgotten by the system, her family, and society itself. She has been shuffled between relatives and institutions before landing in Torey Hayden's secluded annex classroom. Even the school does not pose the potential for a "home", since Sheila is only waiting to be transferred to the state hospital. Over the course of five months, Sheila transforms under Torey's care into a more self-assured and happy child, headed for the second grade instead of the state hospital.

Torey Hayden is a special education teacher who seems to have a special knack for working with the children who are unclassifiable. The children in Torey's class have disabilities that prevent them from being placed in the regular special education classrooms and so Torey teaches the "garbage class". Most of her students are severely below grade level for their age and several hold no real hope of advancing far academically. Sheila appears to be the worst case of the bunch. At six years old, she is being shuffled to Torey's room because she has just burned a three-year old after tying him to a tree. The story made the newspaper, and as Torey read it she felt an odd connection to the little girl. When Sheila first arrives in Torey's room she refuses to speak or to move. She brings a whole new level of chaos to a room that Torey has worked extremely hard to civilize. On her first day Sheila plucks the eyes out of all the goldfish. The other students are appalled by Sheila's behavior and spin out of control. From this point on each day will be a struggle of trying to break through Sheila's tough exterior.

Torey remains astonishingly patient as she continues to work with Sheila. Torey does not place demands on Sheila and allows the little girl time to become comfortable in her new surroundings. Torey works first on getting Sheila to sit with the group, then to work on a few basic academic tasks, and then on her hygiene. No matter what Sheila does, Torey remains consistent and calm. Ever so slowly, Sheila begins to open up. Torey is surprised to learn that the little girl is brilliant and functions on the level of a fifth grader. Sheila delights in having her hair brushed and made pretty with clips. Sheila even begins to make friends with several other students.

Torey also learns more about Sheila's personal life. One day Sheila comes to school with blood all over the front of her. Sheila tells Torey that her Uncle Jerry cut her vagina with a knife while molesting her. Torey takes Sheila to the hospital for treatment. While Sheila heals physically, Torey is worried that the little girl still needs emotional counseling. Sheila continues to grow under Torey's care. By the end of the year, Sheila is no longer headed for the state hospital. Instead, she is taking part in a class play, and is cautiously eager to move on to the second grade. Torey too has grown. She loves working with special needs children and has decided to pursue more education in order to increase her potential to help disabled students. Torey is nervous about moving on and leaving the school behind but she feels ready.

Torey and Sheila travel a unique road together. Both of them learn a great deal and develop strengths they did not know they possessed. Torey Hayden tells their story in a simple yet warm style that draws one in and makes one part of the relationship.

Prologue

Prologue Summary and Analysis

In this brief introduction to the book, Torey Hayden explains her motivation for writing this story. Torey is motivated by a pure love for her students. While most people view her work as frustrating and sad, Torey refuses to pity mentally ill children. Instead, Torey views them with awe for what they can show her. She agrees that her work can be exhausting and that there is often very little reward for all the long hours, but one brief moment of peace, of learning, of understanding, is worth everything that she puts into her students. Rather than view her students as hopeless cases that she must somehow shove through the system, Torey Hayden genuinely cares about these children. Sheila is just one of the many children that have touched Torey's life, but the bond Torey manages to establish with this little girl motivates the creation of this book.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Torey reads an article about a six-year-old girl who burned a three-year-old boy after tying him to a tree. As she reads the article, she has a premonition that this child will resurface in her life. Torey is a special education teacher. The school district in which she teaches refers to the special education room as the "garbage class". Torey's class is comprised of all the children that do not meet typical classification and are not wanted in any other special room. A year ago Torey worked as a resource teacher helping another teacher in her classroom. Ed Somers contacted Torey to see if she would be interested in having a room of her own the following year. Although Ed warned Torey about the kind of students she would be teaching, she decided to take the position despite having reservations. Part of the reason that Torey decides to take the job is because Ed does not have a problem with her unconventional teaching methods. Torey wears jeans, allows the students to call her by her first name, and she is disorganized.

At the beginning of the year, Torey arrives at her new room ready for the year. State mandate stipulates that she have an aide in the room but does not require that the aide be highly qualified. Torey's aide is a Mexican-American who never completed high school, named Anton. Torey is given eight students: Peter, Tyler, Max, Freddie, Sarah, Susannah Joy, Guillmero, and William. In addition to Anton, Torey is aided by a fourteen-year-old girl named Whitney, who comes to Torey's room during study hall. Just after Christmas vacation, Ed comes to Torey's room to tell her that another student will be joining the class. Torey says that she already has the state maximum, but Ed insists that this is a special case. Ed does give Torey the option of transferring a child out, but Torey refuses to give up any of her students. In the end, Torey agrees to take the extra child and says that she will find a way to manage. Sheila comes to the classroom a few days later. She is the same little girl who burned the three-year-old boy and she needs a place to go until she is sent to the state hospital.

The reader is immediately struck by the audacity of the newspaper article describing the burning of a three-year-old by a six-year-old. To open the book with such a report is stomach-turning, and the reader hopes that such horrendous incidents will not be the focus of the book. Things do not look hopeful as the reader continues to read about the garbage class and the first eight students who comprise Torey's class. The reader may sit in awe that children of such young ages are capable of attempting suicide, of being schizophrenic, or of being so violent. With a classroom full of misfits and two outcasts serving as aides, the reader wonders at Torey's own sanity when she agrees to take the six-year-old accused of burning a three-year-old.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Sheila is dragged into the classroom by Ed on January 8th. Her hair is matted, she smells bad, and she has a mean expression on her face. Sheila does not respond to Torey or any of the other children.

In order to keep all the kids in the room, Torey must keep the door locked. Each morning Torey begins the day with discussion. The discussions focus on feelings or are used to work out problems in the room. After discussion, each child is given an opportunity to share what they have done since school the day before. On the morning that Sheila arrives, Torey uses discussion time to introduce Sheila and allow the students to ask questions about being new. While Anton works with the other children on math, Torey tries to show Sheila the room. However, Sheila refuses to move and Torey must pick her up and carry her around. Torey then sits Sheila in a chair and hands her a math paper. Sheila wads up the paper and throws it. After repeating the process with several more math papers, Torey sits Sheila on her own lap and wraps an arm around her so she cannot move. Every task with Sheila becomes a physical battle. Sheila refuses to respond and Torey eventually gives up and puts Sheila in a chair by herself. Sheila will not participate in any class activity. The only time she moves out of her chair is to go to the bathroom.

There are two rules in Torey's classroom. The first is that no one is allowed to hurt themselves or anyone else in the room. The second is that each student is to try their best. Sheila does not appear to listen to Torey's explanation, but when Torey moves away to collect the math papers, Sheila speaks. Sheila says that she does not like Torey and Torey cannot make her speak. Torey barely acknowledges the little girl until it is time for lunch. She holds out her hand and asks Sheila to come with her. Sheila follows Torey out of the room but does not touch Torey.

Surprisingly, Sheila seems rather tame for what the reader was expecting. Throwing papers and refusing to speak seems almost normal for a disabled child arriving in a new classroom halfway through the year. However, if Sheila had arrived at the beginning of the year, her first day might not have been so good. Torey has put in a large amount of work with Whitney and Anton's help in order to achieve the peaceful chaos that greets Sheila on her first day. For half of the school year, Torey has worked to wrangle the eight students she started with, and now Sheila's arrival is like starting from the beginning. Sheila all by herself equals the other eight in intensity and difficulty.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

During lunch, Torey and Anton are free to eat and take a break from the kids. Monitors in the lunch room are responsible for the children. Torey takes the opportunity to find Sheila's file and read about the little girl's background. Sheila's file is surprisingly thin, with only a few pages of family history, test results, and data from Special Services. Sheila lives with her father in a shack at the migrant camp. Her mother left the family two years earlier and took Sheila's younger brother with her. Sheila has been passed between family members and spent time in a juvenile center. Sheila's father notes that she wets the bed, sucks her thumb, and is a loner. Most surprising to Torey is the father's admission that Sheila does not cry. Torey cannot believe this statement and thinks that it must be miswritten.

Anton and Whitney join Torey in the lounge. Torey reflects on her helpers. Despite Anton's lack of formal training, he is patient and good with the kids. Whitney is an outcast in her own right. She is awkward and shy. Torey realizes that all of them are outsiders and that that makes them a group. Just then a piercing shriek emanates from the cafeteria. Tyler rushes into the room, screaming about eyes and the new girl. Torey runs into her classroom with Anton and Whitney right behind. Sheila stands defiantly on a chair near the aquarium, wielding a pencil and a goldfish. On the floor are several more goldfish with their eyes poked out. The rest of the room is in chaos as the other children cower in fear and astonishment. Sheila is momentarily distracted by Susannah Joy entering the room, and Torey takes the opportunity to snatch the pencil away from Sheila, but not before Sheila manages to stab Torey in the arm.

Peter goes into a seizure and Torey hands Sheila to Whitney. While Torey rushes to clear the area around Peter, Sheila kicks Whitney in the shins and runs from the room. Whitney heads out the door after her. The other students are scared and the room is in complete chaos. At this moment the principal, Mr. Collins, and the school secretary appear in the doorway. Mr. Collins does not generally approve of Torey's teaching style but at this moment she is glad to have another set of adults to help calm the situation. Together, Mr. Collins, the secretary, Torey, and Anton work to calm the children down. Once the other children are settled, Torey heads off to find Whitney and Sheila. Torey finds Whitney standing guard outside the gym. She sends Whitney off and quietly enters the gym. Torey reduces the size of the gym by closing off half of it with room dividers and then sits on the floor. Torey continues to talk quietly and reassuringly to Sheila while slowly inching closer to the scared little girl. Sheila does not respond to Torey, but watches her intently. A long time passes and Torey can tell that both of them are wearing down. Sheila wets her pants and becomes upset again, worried that Torey will whip her. Torey calmly says that she does not hit children and they will clean it up together. Together they walk back to the classroom where Anton has all the children busy and the dead fish cleaned up. The rest of the afternoon goes quietly. Once all the



other children are gone, Torey takes an opportunity to talk again with Sheila. At home that evening, Torey dresses her pencil wound and crawls into bed and cries.

The reader is as awe-struck as Torey is upon learning that Sheila does not cry. After all that Sheila has been through in her life, it seems that the little girl should do nothing but cry. The reader is intrigued to see how the story will develop and to learn if Torey will be able to connect with Sheila on a deep enough level so that the little girl will be able to unleash her emotions.

The moment the reader has been waiting for since Sheila stepped into Torey's classroom finally arrives when Tyler comes screaming into the lounge. The new girl must have done something horrible. Indeed, Sheila's dissection of the goldfish eyes is horrific. The reader can imagine the flopping bodies of the goldfish lying on the floor, surrounded by their beady little eyes. The reader waits for Torey to explode in a rage and to have the little girl hauled out of her room in handcuffs. Torey is not a regular teacher and her response to the situation is not regular either. She somehow manages to remain composed enough to pounce on Sheila in a moment of distraction. What is more astonishing is that Torey continues to remain calm while talking to Sheila in the gym. Torey never becomes visibly upset and is constantly aware of the little girl's feelings. She recognizes that Sheila is scared and unsure of herself. Torey remains focused on the situation at hand instead of becoming flustered at the sight of the glowering principal or falling apart when Peter goes into a seizure. The reader is even more intrigued with this amazing woman and reads on to figure out how Torey can remain so stalwart in the face of such adverse conditions.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Torey wakes from her crying session and settles down with a sandwich to watch Star Trek. The hour-long program allows Torey time to decompress from work and switch to relaxation mode. As Star Trek is ending, Torey's boyfriend Chad arrives with ice cream. They sit together and Torey tells him all about her day. Chad suggests that Torey contact Sheila's previous teacher. Torey calls Mrs. Barthuly and listens as the woman lists incident after incident with Sheila. The conversation leaves Torey more discouraged because she realizes that everything has been tried with Sheila and she wonders what she will be able to do to help the little girl.

The next day, as Torey and Anton plan their day, Sheila is dragged into the room by a social worker. The social worker explains that Sheila will be arriving a half hour early and leaving two hours late every day. Sheila rides the bus with the high school students and no other transportation is available. Torey wonders what she will do with the little girl during this time and mourns the loss of her own personal free time. Torey decides to talk to Sheila about participating in class more and says that Sheila is expected to sit with the other kids but that she won't have to do anything until she feels comfortable. At morning discussion, Sheila refuses to join the group and Anton ends up chasing her around the room until he manages to capture her. The incident causes the other children to want to discuss Sheila. The discussion results in an agreement that if the other children can remain calm and continue working whenever Sheila has an outburst, Torey will reward them with ice cream on Friday.

Because of the goldfish incident the previous day, Torey decides to take her lunch with the children from now on. The rest of the afternoon goes relatively well. Sheila moves her chair according to where the rest of the group is but continues to do any work. After all the children are gone, Torey tries again to talk to Sheila. The little girl refuses to respond and sits in her chair watching Torey work until it is time to leave.

The reader is relieved that Sheila has made it through the second day of school without incident. However, there seems to be little hope for Sheila. Torey's conversation with her previous teacher provides a bleak outlook for the rest of the school year. If all of Mrs. Barthuly's tricks did not work with Sheila, how will Torey ever be able to reach her? Torey is resourceful and, above all, patient. She does not immediately dig into making demands of Sheila, and although precious time is ticking away, Torey's method seems to be working ever so slightly.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

The next morning, when Sheila arrives, Torey sits to talk with her again. She tells Sheila that today she will be expected to do her math and make chocolate bananas with the other children during cooking time. During math time, Torey tries to use blocks with Sheila, but the little girl whips the blocks across the room at Tyler. Torey immediately places Sheila in the quiet chair and goes to comfort Tyler. Sheila stands up and Anton goes over to put the little girl back in the chair. Torey tells Sheila that she must stay in the chair until she's ready to work. Throughout the morning and part of the afternoon, Sheila sits in the chair, screaming. During reading time, Torey feels a slight touch on her arm and finds Sheila standing next to her. Torey asks if Sheila is ready for math and the little girl sullenly nods. Using the blocks, Sheila completes a series of simple addition and subtraction problems. Torey tells Sheila to put the blocks away and returns to reading with the other children. Sheila retreats to her chair and works with the blocks on her own.

After lunch, the children make chocolate-covered bananas. Sheila watches the other children before making her own banana. She works to cover her banana in all four of the topping choices offered and holds the sticky mess up with a grin when finished.

At the end of the day the class has closing exercises. Torey once told the children about a Kobold that lives in the classroom and keeps things safe. One day she had brought in a box and told the children that this was where the Kobold would leave them messages. Torey says that the Kobold watches them, and every time he sees someone doing something nice he would leave a message in the box. The children are also encouraged to put in notes when they see someone doing something kind. At the end of the day, Torey reads the notes to the children. That day Sheila's name appears on several of the Kobold's notes in handwriting that is not Torey's. Sheila does not acknowledge the other children's applause but does quietly accept the notes when Torey hands them to her.

At the end of the day, after the other students are gone. Sheila goes into the bathroom to clean the chocolate from her hands. When she comes out she leans over Torey's desk and asks why none of the other children use the bathroom. Sheila declares that this is a crazy class but that she does not mind. She also proclaims that Torey is a crazy person too because she likes working with crazy kids.

It appears that Torey's patience is beginning to pay off sooner than expected. The simple act of touching Torey's arm breaks the reader's heart. It is impossible not feel a twinge of victory at that moment. Even if Sheila turns into a terror the next instant, at least for a split second there was communication. Even more heartbreaking is to see Sheila's ability with the math blocks and the banana. Clearly, Sheila is a bright and creative child, which makes her situation even more horrible. Here is a child who has

the chance to achieve something but because she was born to a poor, young mother, that opportunity has been taken away from her.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Torey decides to test Sheila's IQ after seeing how well the little girl did with simple math. Using a series of picture cards, Torey asks Sheila to identify certain words by pointing to the correct picture. Sheila wordlessly points out picture after picture. She gets one wrong every once in awhile, but does not miss the required six in a row necessary for Torey to stop testing. Before long, Torey is asking Sheila to point out words that are meant for adolescents. Sheila knows that she is not getting all the words right and says so to Torey. Torey reassures Sheila that she is doing an excellent job, especially since these words are meant for kids much older than six. When Torey computes Sheila's score, she finds that the little girl has reached the ceiling on this particular test. Torey asks how Sheila knows such big words and Sheila says that her last teacher let her read magazines. Sheila says that she has just always known how to read and does not remember anyone teaching her.

Torey next decides to work with Sheila on personal hygiene. One afternoon, when the other children have left, Torey calls Sheila to her. She gives the little girl a package of hair clips. Sheila is excited by the present but refuses to accept them because she knows her father will not let her keep them. Torey brushes Sheila's hair, but Sheila asks Torey to keep the clips at school for her. Torey agrees to keep them safe for her and then asks about Sheila's practice of washing up. Sheila says that the only water they have in the house is a pail kept for drinking. When Sheila leaves that night she says, "Bye, teacher". It is the first time that Sheila has referred to Torey as her teacher.

Sheila continues to amaze. The reader would never have thought that the same little girl who burned another child would possess such an astounding command of schoolwork. Also interesting is Sheila's obvious desire to please Torey. There seems to be a two-sided factor to Sheila's worry over wrong answers. Obviously she does not wish to incur Torey's anger and be whipped for incorrect responses. This fear has been instilled in her by her father who beats her for every misstep she makes. However, Sheila also genuinely wishes to perform well. She appears eager to learn and is able to recognize when she does not understand a concept. She does not want to be left out or left behind again. Torey's reassurances are new for Sheila. The little girl seems to already understand that Torey may be a person to trust instead of fear.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

The next morning Torey brings several towels, soap, shampoo, and a bottle of baby lotion with her to school. She also digs some clothes out of the church box in the school office. When Sheila arrives, Torey calls her over to the sink. She tells Sheila that they are going to practice washing up and that Whitney will take Sheila's clothes to the laundromat in the afternoon. Sheila is a little nervous about wearing other clothes because she doesn't want her father to find out. With a little reassurance, Torey manages to get Sheila undressed and into the sink. While giving Sheila a bath, Torey notices several scars on the little girl's body. When she inquires about a two inch long scar on her arm, Sheila says that she broke her arm playing. Sheila is matter of fact in her explanation and goes on to show Torey another scar on her leg. This scar she received after her mother pushed her out of the car. Torey cannot bear to hear any more and does not ask about any of Sheila's other scars. Sheila, however, continues to talk, and tells Torey about her mother and little brother, Jimmie. She says that she misses her brother and knows that her mother took him instead of Sheila because Jimmie is good and Sheila is bad.

By the end of the week, Sheila still has not talked to any of the other students and she only talks to adults when directly asked a question. The entire class is standing outside waiting for the bus and Torey begins singing "If You're Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands". When the class run out of verses Torey asks for suggestions. Sheila quietly raises her hand and suggests that they turn around.

After this first small foray into engaging the other children, Sheila starts to come alive. One thing that is never discussed though, is the incident that landed Sheila in Torey's classroom. The burning incident is not brought up by Sheila, Torey, or any of the kids. Torey is a little surprised because most of the other kids talk about their problems, but Sheila does not. Torey is also intrigued by Sheila's speech patterns. The little girl does not talk like the rest of the students and Torey cannot figure out where Sheila's distinct dialect comes from.

Torey makes several attempts to contact Sheila's father. She sends several notes home but when those fail to procure a response, she and Anton visit the migrant camp. However, when they arrive at Sheila's shack, no one is home. Torey finally gives up and focuses her attention on Sheila. Sheila follows Torey around the classroom asking questions, wanting to read, or play with the math cubes. Sheila also enjoys hearing her name mentioned on notes from the Kobold box. Her manners are severely lacking and Torey's continual prompts do not seem to matter. However, Sheila responds to the Kobold notes and her behavior slowly begins to improve. Sheila is obsessed with getting more notes than the other kids. One evening when she is alone with Torey, she asks why Tyler receives so many notes. Torey says that Tyler is just extremely polite and says "please" and "thank you". Sheila asks why Torey never told her to say those



things. Torey is astonished to realize that Sheila has never been taught basic manners. Torey apologizes for not understanding and explains basic manners to Sheila. After that, Sheila begins to watch the other children more and imitate their good behaviors.

Sheila is progressing more every day. Her interest in the bath items is intriguing. While Sheila does not exactly delight in being bathed, she does find the lotions and hair items interesting. Her interest in these things is typical of any little girl. Little girls love to smell and look pretty. With each stage of Sheila's development in Torey's room, the reader can better view her as a normal child. However, this perception of her only increases the effect of the horrors she must endure. A beautiful young girl should not have to suffer beatings or abandonment. The reader wishes he or she could reach out to Sheila, take her in, and show her the love of a real family.

Despite the reader's increasing view of Sheila as a normal child, she is still lacking in basic developmental milestones. She does not use her manners because she does not possess any. Sheila has never been taught to say "please" or "thank you", but she is a quick study once manners are explained to her.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Despite Sheila's increasing interaction in class, she still will not do paperwork. Sheila will pretend to work on a paper, but when no one is looking she shreds it and throws it in the garbage. Torey tries several tactics to get Sheila to do written work, but any assignment that requires Sheila to write she refuses. Out of frustration, Torey copies one worksheet on an entire ream of paper. She then sits down with all five hundred copies and Sheila. Paper after paper Sheila destroys as frustration grows for both teacher and student. Torey tries forcing Sheila to write but the little girl continues to struggle. Finally Sheila breaks free of Torey's hold and runs to the other side of the room where she turns and shouts, "I HATE YOU!". Sheila continues to scream wordlessly as Anton takes the other children out to recess. Torey remains sitting at the table. Torey realizes that she did not act appropriately and was too hard on Sheila. The two continue to stare silently at one another as Sheila slowly moves toward Torey. Sheila stands at the far side of the table and says that Torey should not have been so mean. Torey apologizes and explains that she is frustrated because Sheila will not do papers. Sheila says that she will never feel like doing paperwork and wants to know why its important. Torey admits that papers are not all that important and gives up the battle.

Sheila is very skilled at exacting revenge. She is able to perceive what is most important to a person and use that information to get back at someone she feels has wronged her. She destroys Sarah's artwork and strangles the baby gerbils that Anton brings for the class. Sheila needs to be watched constantly which is not easy to do, especially at lunch time. One day, as Anton and Torey are finishing up their lunch, another teacher comes in screaming Sheila's name. It turns out that Sheila got into the teacher's room and in a matter of minutes had turned over desks, pulled down blinds, and overturned bookcases. Torey manages to get Sheila to stop wreaking havoc and coaxes her to the door. Just as Sheila reaches Torey, Mr. Collins appears and begins to yell at Sheila. Torey and Mr. Collins briefly play tug of war with Sheila before Torey releases her hold on the little girl. The group walks to Mr. Collins' office where Mr. Collins pulls a paddle out of his desk. Mr. Collins tells Sheila that he has had it with her and she will receive three whacks. Sheila does not look at Mr. Collins or give any indication that she has heard him. When he strikes her she falls down, but Mr. Collins picks her up and he continues with the punishment.

Torey asks Anton and Whitney to look after the class while she talks with Sheila. The only place Torey can find to talk with Sheila is a book closet. Sheila refuses to talk except to ask if Torey is going to whip her. Sheila says that whipping helps her be good. Her Pa hits her and since he hasn't left her on the side of the road like her mother did then it must be working. Torey scoops Sheila into her arms and asks what they are going to do. Sheila says she won't be bad anymore and that she was just mad at the teacher for yelling at Sheila. Sheila says she doesn't want to leave the school and so she'll be good. Torey asks why the little girl never cries. Sheila says that if she cries



people will know she hurts but if she does not cry then people cannot hurt her. Torey and Sheila talk about ways for Sheila to make it up to the teacher and the benefits of apologizing. Sheila agrees to apologize but asks if Torey will hold her for a while longer. Torey gladly sits with her arms around the little girl for a while longer.

The reader realizes in this chapter that helping Sheila is not an overnight task. Although Sheila has made impressive gains in the last few weeks, she is still the same scared and angry little girl who was dragged into Torey's room on January 8th. Unfortunately, Sheila attends a school with a less than understanding principal. Mr. Collins' response to Sheila's destruction of the classroom is that of an uncaring administrator who does not fully understand his role in relationship to special needs children. Mr. Collins adheres to the theory that every crime must be severely punished with brutality. He does not understand that beatings are all that most of the kids in Torey's room receive when they misbehave. Negative punishment does not positively alter behaviors. The only thing that Mr. Collins does for Sheila is to reinforce her image of adults as mean people who cannot be trusted.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Sheila apologizes to the teacher whose room she destroyed and the teacher accepts her apology. However, Mr. Collins is not as easily pacified. He has had it with Sheila and with Torey. Torey and Mr. Collins have different value systems and cannot come to an agreement. Torey tries to tell Mr. Collins about Sheila's progress in her room, but he refuses to listen. Ed Somers tells Torey that there is pressure from the other parents and that Torey should not have gotten so involved with Sheila. Ed reminds Torey that Sheila is at the school only until she can be placed in the state hospital.

That night Torey sobs out her story to Chad. They do not come to any better resolution, but Torey does feel better. Ed Somers manages to temporarily assuage the situation by giving Mr. Collins another lunch aide solely for Torey's room and promising that Sheila will only leave the room under Torey's direct supervision.

Sheila continues to do well academically and is also making social gains. She and Sarah become friends and Sheila works with Susannah Joy on her lessons. Sheila spends more time working on her own or with the other children and only clings to Torey when she is having a bad day. Torey is finally able to contact Sheila's father. One evening after school, Torey, Sheila, and Anton go to the migrant camp and find Sheila's father drunk. Sheila crouches in the corner while her father tells Torey that Sheila is not really his kid. He goes on to say that she is trouble and is not allowed to move out of her corner. Torey and Anton try to tell Sheila's father how well she is doing but he does not want to listen. Torey realizes that Sheila's father has also had a hard life and that contributes to his treatment of Sheila. She also realizes that they will never be able to remove Sheila from his care.

After leaving Sheila's hut, Torey goes to Anton's home. He also lives in a falling down shack with his wife and two sons. Even though the house looks dismal on the outside, it is clean on the inside. Torey is surprised at how verbal and engaging Anton's children are. Anton asks Torey about the possibility of going back to school to get his teaching degree. Torey is not hopeful that Anton will be able to achieve such a dream, but does not have the heart to discourage him in front of his family.

Sheila appears to want to improve herself. At school she is becoming more outgoing and has made friends with most of the other students. The reader continues to hold out hope that Sheila will make it despite all the odds stacked against her. However, Torey's conversation with Sheila's father rapidly dissipates that hope. It does not seem possible for a child to thrive when she must return every night to such a disparaging home. Even though Torey entertains the thought of foster care, the reader wonders if such a suggestion would be in the child's best interest. Sheila does not have much stability in her life, and although her father is not the best parent, removing Sheila from his care would most certainly unravel any progress Torey has made with her.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Torey reads to Sheila after school. Even though the little girl is able to read most of the books herself, Torey wants the opportunity to give Sheila extra closeness and talk with her about some of the topics broached in the books. One of the books Torey reads is *The Little Prince*. Sheila becomes enthralled by the conversation the Little Prince has with the fox. After Torey reads that section twice, Sheila asks if Torey has tamed Sheila. Sheila says that now she's special to Torey just like the fox is special to the Little Prince. Sheila continues to be captivated by the story. She says that in some ways she has tamed Torey too. Sheila asks why Torey tamed her and Torey replies that she just wanted Sheila to be her special girl. Sheila asks if Torey loves her and Torey nods. Sheila says that she loves Torey too.

Sheila asks Torey if she will ever leave her. Torey tries to explain that some day Sheila will go to another class and have another teacher. Sheila does not like this idea and insists that since Torey has tamed her she is now responsible for her. Torey tries to explain the situation to Sheila but Sheila only associates going away with her mother leaving her. Torey tries to explain about the difference in Sheila going to another class and her mother leaving. Sheila cannot fully comprehend what Torey is saying and finally says that she does not want to talk about it anymore. Torey agrees and the conversation is dropped.

The connections Sheila makes between *The Little Prince* and her own relationship with Torey are astounding for such a young child. Reader's familiar with *The Little Prince* may not even fully grasp the importance of the Little Prince's conversation with the fox or the meaning of the rose. However, Sheila has grasped the undertones of this simple story and applied them to her own life. At the same time, Sheila cannot comprehend the idea that people can part from one another and it does not have to mean that one of them is bad or unloved. Sheila's own experience at being left by her mother has left her deeply wounded. A six-year-old should not have to wonder what she did that could be so bad that her own mother would not want her.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

Torey has given up being obsessed about getting Sheila to do paperwork, but she is still concerned about Sheila's ability to adapt to a regular classroom. Sheila's preference for reciting her answers to Torey, Anton, or Whitney barely works in the special education class but will not be acceptable in a regular classroom with twenty-five other students. Torey wonders if Sheila's aversion to paperwork comes from her inability to handle failure. Sheila does not like to be proven incorrect and does not cope well with even the gentlest correction. However, Sheila is a curious child who wants to be able to do the same things as the other children. Torey puts a lot of emphasis on creative writing in her class and this activity is something the children really enjoy. Since Sheila does not do paperwork she does not engage in the writing. One day, Sheila's desire to be like the other kids gets the better of her and she asks Torey for a piece of paper. Torey takes the opportunity to swing the situation in her favor. She tells Sheila that she cannot have paper because Sheila has already said she does not do paperwork and creative writing is paperwork. Sheila insists but Torey remains firm. Sheila says she will write something secret about herself if she can have a piece of paper. After a bit of bartering, Torey gives Sheila a piece of paper. The little girl writes a note to Torey and insists that Torey not read it until much later. That night Torey reads the note in which Sheila reveals that she wets the bed and is often beaten by her father for it. After this initial breakthrough in the paperwork war, Sheila does more written assignments in class.

The school psychologist arrives with a battery of IQ tests for Sheila. Torey is a bit nervous about administering so many tests to the little girl and Torey is already convinced that Sheila is a very bright girl. The tests show that Sheila has an IQ on par with being a genius. Torey is not surprised at the results, but they do get her thinking. Torey realizes that most people understand why children with retardation have a difficult time in a regular classroom but few give the same understanding to genius children. If Torey is to help Sheila achieve academically, she needs to get busy because their time is running out.

The scene in which Sheila decides she wants paper is comical. First, the reader chuckles because Torey struggled for so long over the issue of getting Sheila to do paperwork and now the little girl has come on her own requesting paper. Perhaps if Torey had not pushed the issue to begin with, Sheila would have shown interest earlier. Second, Torey's use of reverse psychology to con Sheila into doing schoolwork is amusing. Sheila is usually able to sniff out Torey's games, but in this instance she seems so obsessed with being able to write like the other children that she is unaware of Torey's ulterior motives. The result of the event is what is most important. Sheila's note to Torey shows that the little girl is really starting to trust Torey. Sheila has indeed begun to be tamed like the fox. In addition, Sheila's slight willingness to do paperwork alleviates some of Torey's concern about placing the child in a regular classroom.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

Toward the end of February, Torey is scheduled to go out of town for a conference. She had left the class with a substitute for one day back in November, but this time she will be gone for two days and Sheila was not part of the class back in November. Torey is worried about how Sheila will react to Torey being gone. Torey uses discussion time to remind the class that she will be away from school for two whole days. She reassures them that Anton and Whitney will still be there and that things will go on as usual. While the other children go out to recess with Anton, Sheila hangs back. Sheila wants to know why Torey did not specifically tell her that she was going away. She is upset and associates Torey's leaving with her mother abandoning her. Torey tries to reassure Sheila but the little girl is too upset. Sheila says that she hates Torey and presses back a single tear.

In the afternoon, Sheila refuses to participate in the cooking activity. Suddenly Peter announces that Sheila has just puked and probably has a virus. Torey cleans Sheila up and talks to her again about Torey's absence from the classroom. By the time Sheila and Torey return to the classroom, the other kids are getting ready to go home. Anton takes the others out to the bus and Torey sits down in the rocking chair. Torey watches Sheila for a few minutes, thinking about the fragile bond between them. She can see from Sheila's expression that the little girl is trying to believe Torey. Finally Torey reaches out a hand and asks Sheila to come sit with her. Sheila curls into Torey's lap. She says that Torey has tamed her and was suppose to be responsible for her. Torey tries one last time to reassure Sheila that she will be back on Monday.

Since the conference is being held on the West Coast, Chad accompanies Torey to soak in some warmer weather. The time alone together rejuvenates their relationship and Torey is able to relax for the first time since the start of the school year. On Monday, Torey is back in the classroom ready to get back to work. Anton tells Torey about Sheila's behavior in her absence. Sheila pulled things off shelves, gave Peter a bloody nose, and tried to break the glass out of the door.

Sheila's bus arrives late and Torey does not get a chance to talk one on one with her before the other kids arrive. The other students stream in, each telling of another bad behavior of Sheila's. Guillermo reports that the substitute spanked Sheila. Peter says that the substitute yelled at Whitney and they all ended up crying. The children's reports turn Torey's disappointment to anger. When Sheila arrives, Torey calls her over to a private corner. Torey asks for an explanation, but Sheila refuses to speak. Torey becomes upset and grabs Sheila's shoulders and shakes her. Sheila shrieks that she never said Torey could trust her and runs off to hide beneath a table. Torey tells Sheila that since she cannot be trusted then Sheila will not accompany the class on their field trip that afternoon. Sheila becomes enraged and starts banging her head against the floor. Anton dives for her to pull her up. Suddenly Sheila stops and the room is



completely still. Torey rushes to make sure the little girl is okay. Sheila asks again to go on the field trip but Torey remains firm in her decision. For the rest of the morning Sheila remains lying on the floor in a heap.

Over lunch, Torey and Anton discuss the situation. Torey realizes that she was upset with herself more than Sheila. Sheila had not acted any differently than she always had, but Torey had deluded herself into thinking that Sheila would not seek revenge against Torey. Torey has put herself on a pedestal thinking that she has tamed Sheila, but the little girl is correct that she never told Torey she could be trusted. After lunch, Torey apologizes to Sheila and lets her go on the field trip. After school, Sheila refuses to talk to Torey for the first hour. Eventually Sheila asks why Torey came back. Torey explains that she never intended to be gone forever. Sheila stands quietly for a few minutes and then asks Torey to read *The Little Prince* again.

This chapter, more than any other, shows just how fragile the relationship is between Torey and Sheila. Sheila has only known disappointment and pain for her entire life. Torey mistakenly assumes that she has the power to undo all that pain in just a few months. While Sheila has made amazing progress in Torey's classroom, she still has not been able to let go or work through all the bad things that have happened to her. There is still a very long road for Sheila to travel before she will be able to fully trust again. There is no stronger bond than that of mother and child. Sheila's mother-child bond was broken in a way that defies normality. Torey will not ever be, and cannot ever be, a replacement for Sheila's mother. However, Torey's absence from the classroom shows that in some ways both she and Sheila thought that Torey could be a replacement.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

March arrives, bringing much needed warmth and sun. The warm weather also brings the return of the migrant workers. As truckload after truckload arrives, Anton becomes quieter and more reserved. Torey asks him if he misses that lifestyle. Anton explains that there is nothing about the migrant lifestyle for a person to miss. The change in his mood is the result of his realizing how much he has changed since the fall. Torey and Anton sit, contemplating all that has happened since the start of the school year. Both of them realize that, despite their numerous differences, they have both changed and been changed by each other.

Sheila is blossoming like the flowers outside. Each day she comes in and washes herself and brushes her teeth. She has made friends with Sarah and Guillermo, and she has even gone to play at their houses. Academically, Sheila is making excellent progress. Torey has Sheila working at a third grade reading level and a fourth grade math level. Sheila is capable of doing higher levels of both subjects, but in order to keep her fragile confidence from suffering, Torey keeps the work at an easier level. Sheila also quickly rebounds from Torey's absence, although Sheila still likes to discuss the incident over and over. Torey is at a loss to fully understand Sheila's desire to rehash the event but humors the little girl anyway.

Torey asks Sheila about her peculiar speech patterns. Sheila does not understand why Torey takes issue with the way she talks as long as Torey understands her. Torey continues to send tapes of Sheila's speech to experts. The experts inquire whether Sheila is black or if it is a family dialect. When Torey says that Sheila is not black and that her father does not speak in the same manner, the experts are at a loss for an explanation. Chad suggests that Sheila speaks only in the present tense because she does not want to acknowledge her past. He further says that Sheila may feel more in control by speaking about things in the present. Torey finally accepts this speculation and drops her obsession.

Sheila is still obsessed with the issue of abandonment. Torey suspects that Sheila's fear of failure and abandonment are directly linked. One day, Sheila completes a fifth grade math test that she found in the trash and gives it to Torey as a surprise. However, the test was on long division, something Sheila does not know how to do, and she gets all the answers wrong. Torey tries to explain that it is not Sheila's fault because she did not know how to correctly do the problems. Sheila says that if she had been able to do the problems then her mother probably wouldn't have left her. For the millionth time, Torey tries to explain that it was not Sheila's fault that her mother left. Sheila then asks if they can have a party for Jimmie, whose birthday is next week. Torey says they cannot have a party because Jimmie isn't there. Sheila asks if she will ever feel better and Torey tells her she will someday. Sheila gets off of Torey's lap, saying that she doesn't think someday ever really comes.



Spring is generally a time of rebirth and growth. At the same time, there are still patches of melting snow and spring rains create mud puddles. Torey's classroom follows the same pattern. Sheila is able to rebound fairly quickly from Torey's absence. She makes friends and continues to do well academically. The fact that Sheila is allowed to go play at Sarah's house and Guillermo's house shows the progress she is making. After the burning incident, it would seem that any parent would be hesitant to have such a child in their home, but Sheila's improved character enables her to engage in more normalized childhood activities. Sheila's joyfulness is still overshadowed by her abandonment issues. She has a distinct fear of abandonment that she feels results from failure. There is little that Torey can do except continue to reassure Sheila and find small ways to show her that making mistakes will not always result in being left behind.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

Torey admits that, even though often inappropriate, their room has its fair share of laughter. One of the biggest sources of amusement is Whitney. Whitney is prone to practical jokes. Torey is surprised that the bumbling teenager would enjoy playing pranks. As the end of March draws near, Torey grows increasingly suspicious that no pranks have been pulled recently. Torey finally chalks the lack of things popping out of unusual places up to Whitney's absence due to a bad cold.

Freddie's mother, Mrs. Crum, pays Torey a visit near the end of March. She is concerned because Freddie has been coming home and vomiting recently. Freddie's vomiting is not really the cause of her concern, but rather the substance he vomits up—small brightly colored balls about a quarter inch in diameter. Torey is equally perplexed about the substance because she does not keep candy in the room. Torey assures Mrs. Crum that Freddie is not getting the items from school but that she will continue investigating. Several days later, Torey finds Sheila in the cupboard under the sink, muttering to herself. When Torey asks her what is wrong, Sheila says that someone has taken her things. Sheila refuses to say exactly what has been taken and Torey drops the conversation. Not long after this encounter, Mrs. Crum shows up again. This time she has brought some of the small balls with her. Torey pokes one with a pencil to reveal a greenish-brown center. Sheila comes over to see what Mrs. Crum brought, but Torey brushes her off. Sheila persists and when she finally gets a glimpse of the small balls, she falls off her chair. Torey asks Sheila what the balls are, but Sheila does not want to answer. Torey continues to ask her until Sheila says that they are rabbit turds that she painted. Sheila and Whitney had concocted a plan to paint the poop like Easter eggs and add it to the class's holiday mosaic. Sheila apologizes profusely and Torey assures her that she is not mad at Sheila.

Torey and Anton decide that Whitney needs to be brought in and talked to about the situation. Whitney's mother becomes extremely upset and berates Whitney in front of Torey and Anton. Torey finally manages to calm Mrs. Blake down and Anton takes her to the lounge for coffee while Torey talks with Whitney. Whitney sobs into Torey's shoulder. Torey tries to reassure her and explains that Whitney just needs to be more careful around the students because they aren't like other kids. Whitney starts to calm down and confides that Torey's room is the only place she feels normal. She says that other kids tease her about it, but she finds the kids to be more fun than kids her own age. Torey agrees with her.

Sheila and Whitney's practical joke is hysterical. The reader is glad, and slightly grossed out, that Freddie is not harmed by eating the rabbit poop. However, the situation shows more of Sheila's growth. Instead of engaging in destructive behaviors like burning toddlers, Sheila has learned how to have fun with others. She has collaborated with Whitney in planning a reasonably safe prank that has, at its core, a smirking double



meaning. The reader will get an extra chuckle while thinking about a bunny trail made of rabbit dung.

The reader is finally given more of an insight into Whitney's character. Other than being told that she is good with the children, shy around her peers, and clumsy, the reader does not know anything about Whitney. In this chapter, the reader finds out more about her and realizes why she is such an excellent addition to Torey's garbage classroom. Whitney, like Torey and Anton, understands the truth behind these children. To the rest of the world they are different or crazy, but their innocence is warming and comfortable compared to the rest of the world.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

The third week in March, Ed Somers calls to tell Torey that there is finally an opening at the state hospital. Torey has been dreading this call and asks if Sheila really has to go. Ed tells her that they all knew the situation was temporary and that Torey should not have got so involved. Torey hangs up the phone and delays returning to her classroom for awhile. When she finally goes back to her room, she stands in the doorway watching as Sheila helps Anton set up a project for the next day. Torey looks around the room, wishing that she had a teacher's desk to hide behind. Instead, she sinks down onto the pillows in the corner. Sheila soon comes over to see what is wrong with Torey. Torey does not tell Sheila about her conversation with Ed Somers. Instead, Torey says that she loves Sheila and no matter what happens, Sheila should remember that. Sheila looks at her confused, but does not press Torey for more information.

That night, Torey asks Chad if there is any legal way they can contest Sheila's being sent to the state hospital. Chad says there could be a possibility if they could get the little boy's parents, Sheila's father, and the protective services workers together. Torey asks Chad to take Sheila's case on and he agrees. When the school superintendent hears that Torey has hired a lawyer, he calls a meeting immediately. Sheila's previous teacher, Ed Somers, the school psychologist, Anton, Mr. Collins, the superintendent, and Torey are all present. Torey presents several video tapes of Sheila in class and the school psychologist discusses Sheila's IQ scores. The superintendent is not completely convinced, but does agree to back Torey's attempt to keep Sheila out of the state hospital. Anton keeps an eye out for Sheila's father and calls Torey as soon as he spots him at home. Torey and Chad spend a long evening trying to convince Sheila's father to let them fight to keep Sheila out of the state hospital. At last Sheila's father agrees, and now they have only to convince the judge.

The hearing is held on the very last day of March. Sheila's father arrives late but sober in a too small suit. His attempt to look presentable warms Torey's heart. Sheila is dressed in her usual overalls, but Torey did make sure to bathe her and brush her hair. The hearing proceeds quietly, which Torey had not expected. Each side presents their case, the parents of the burned little boy are questioned as is Sheila's father, and then everyone except the lawyers and the judge are dismissed. As Torey sits in the hallway waiting for the judge's answer, she watches the parents of the burn victim. She feels sorry that they have had to relive that horrendous incident yet again, but hopes that they have enough compassion to forgive Sheila. Sheila sits on Torey's lap and describes a picture she has drawn of Susannah Joy in a beautiful dress. Sheila has always been envious of Susannah's wardrobe and longs for a dress of her very own. Finally the door to the judge's chamber opens and Torey can tell what the ruling is based on Chad's expression.



Chad suggests that they go out for pizza in celebration of their victory. Sheila is excited even though Torey doubts the little girl fully understands what is going on. Chad asks Sheila's father to join them, but he declines. Sheila's father does not mind Torey and Chad taking Sheila out and even hesitantly accepts twenty dollars from Chad so that he can have a private celebration. Sheila is lively and animated at the pizza parlor. She downs her pizza and sits on Chad's lap, listening to the piano player. Chad asks Sheila what one thing she would like to have best in the world. Sheila is quiet for a moment and then says a dress like Susannah Joy's. Chad says it is Sheila's lucky day and the three of them head to the mall to buy Sheila a dress. At the mall, Sheila is a ball of energy, running from one dress to another. She finally picks out one and climbs into Torey's lap. She says that she wishes that Torey and Chad were her parents. Torey tells her that Chad and her are better than parents, they are Sheila's friends. Sheila asks if just for that night they can pretend that they are both family and friends. Against Torey's better judgment, she agrees, and Chad is delighted to learn that he has become a father. They take Sheila back to her father and on the ride home Chad says that he enjoyed pretending they were a family because it felt right.

The victory at the hearing is a major milestone for Sheila. Torey told Sheila's father that Sheila is not crazy, but if she were sent to the state hospital she would end up that way. The reader can see the full truth of her statement in this chapter. Sheila is a normal little girl caught in an abnormal life and trying to make the best of it in the only ways she knows how. Any crazy behavior Sheila exhibits has been forced upon her by her environment, but once she is placed in more loving and safe surroundings, she flourishes like an average child. Sheila's father can see and understand this and that is why he agrees to let Torey fight for Sheila. Sheila's father is powerless to help his daughter on his own, but he recognizes that she needs help. It is a huge step for Sheila's father to allow Torey and Chad to help Sheila, because he does not like charity. The entire chapter is an example of breaking down barriers, swallowing one's pride, and looking to the heart of the matter. The reader rides the same wave of high excitement and feels sure that Sheila's life is now on an upswing.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

The beginning of April comes in with a snowstorm that shuts down the school for two days. When classes resumes, Sheila shares during morning discussion that her Uncle Jerry has just been released from jail and is staying with them while he looks for a job. Sheila is excited by her uncle's presence because he played with her outside during the snowstorm. Every day Sheila wears her new dress and tells the other students about her trial day with dinner and shopping. Finally, Torey asks Sheila not to dwell on the topic and Sheila cuts back on her telling the other kids but continues to hash it over with Torey after school. Like Torey's absence in February, Sheila seems to gain something from rehashing the event over and over again.

One day Sheila comes to school in her old coveralls and t-shirt. She is quiet and sits at the edge of the group without participating. Later in the morning, when Torey sits Sheila on her lap for math, she finds the little girl extremely rigid. Sheila insists she is okay, but Torey looks down to see blood covering her jeans. Torey strips Sheila down to find that the little girl has been stuffing paper towels in her pants to stop the blood flow coming from her vagina. Torey realizes that Sheila is very pale and wonders how much blood she has lost. Torey asks what happened and Sheila quietly explains that her Uncle Jerry tried to put his penis in her and when it would not fit he used a knife to make Sheila's vagina bigger. Torey grabs Sheila and her car keys and runs out of the room while telling Anton to watch the class. Torey quickly stops at the school office to tell them that she is taking Sheila to the emergency room and someone needs to find her father. On the way to the hospital, time seems to slow down and Torey tries to keep Sheila awake.

At the hospital Sheila begins to scream in pain and will not let Torey leave her. Torey stays with Sheila until a shot puts her to sleep. The doctor comes to talk with Torey and Sheila's father, who has finally arrived, albeit stone drunk, that Sheila has lost a lot of blood and will need surgery once she has been stabilized. Torey realizes that there is no more she can do for Sheila and heads back to the school, stopping at her apartment to change clothes. Torey calls the hospital later that night to check on Sheila and learns that the little girl is in surgery. The doctor says that Uncle Jerry has been taken into custody. Chad arrives and Torey relates the chain of events to him. Chad become enraged, threatening harm to Jerry. As Torey watches Chad pace the floor, she realizes that this must have been how the little boy's parents felt upon learning what Sheila had done to their son. Torey sadly realizes that both Sheila and Jerry are victims.

Torey calls the hospital the next day to learn that Sheila made it through surgery and is doing much better. She asks the doctor to tell Sheila that she will visit right after school. Torey then turns to the task of telling the other children what happened to Sheila. Torey is unsure how to handle the subject of sex and violence, although the class has discussed improper touching before. In the end, she tells them that Sheila was hurt at home and had to go to the hospital. At closing time, the children dissolve into tears.



They are upset about what has happened to Sheila, but even more upset about Torey's lack of discussion. Torey sits down with the kids and they engage in a discussion about topics that are sometimes too hard to discuss. The discussion lasts long after the final bell and the buses departure. Finally, Torey loads all eight children in her car and takes them home.

After dropping the other children off, Torey heads for the hospital to see Sheila. Sheila is lying in a crib with an IV dangling above her. Torey is upset that they put Sheila in a crib, but the little girl tries to be brave and say that it does not bother her. Sheila says that she was scared last night because she did not know where she was. She asks Torey to hold her, but Torey says she can't because of all the wires. Instead, Torey offers to read her some of the books she brought with her, and Sheila asks to be read the story of the Little Prince.

This chapter is heartrending and stomach churning for the reader. In the previous chapter the reader saw Sheila as she truly is: beautiful, talkative, and happy. Unfortunately, the previous chapter was not the reality of Sheila's life. Sheila may not have to go to the state hospital but she does have to live in her home. Uncle Jerry's moving into the home is not unusual. Family members often reach out to one another. Sheila's father is obviously in no condition to make wise choices and probably feels pressure from his brother to let him stay. Whether Sheila's father knew about Jerry's tendencies or not is not clear, and his drunken appearance at the hospital is probably the result of his trying to numb his own feelings about what happened to Sheila.

The reader wishes more than ever that Sheila's wish to be Torey and Chad's daughter could come true. It does not seem possible that Sheila should be allowed to return home even though Jerry has been removed from the house. Sheila has suffered through so much that the reader wants things to change for her. Unfortunately the likelihood of that happening is very slim.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary and Analysis

Sheila remains in the hospital for the rest of April. Jerry is sent back to prison and Sheila's father does not visit her once because of his own phobia of hospitals. Torey visits Sheila every night after school and Chad comes to play checkers with her, staying even after Torey goes home. Anton and Whitney also visit several times. Torey is surprised to enter Sheila's room one Saturday and find Mr. Collins playing a game with her. Sheila's attractiveness makes her very popular with the nurses on the ward. Torey is almost glad for Sheila's hospitalization. She is receiving lots of attention and three meals a day. Toward the end of her stay, Sheila becomes restless and cranky. Torey begins to worry about Sheila's emotional state. Like most traumatic events in her life, Sheila has not talked about the molestation. Torey views Sheila's lack of emotional response as a sign of a severe disturbance.

While Sheila is in the hospital, Torey learns that her class will be broken up at the end of the year. The district has decided that Susannah and Freddie can be part of a regular special education class and the others have made such strong progress that they can be put in regular classrooms. Furthermore, Congress passed a bill promoting the mainstreaming of handicapped children back into regular classrooms. Torey is not surprised by the news, but feels the same sadness she does at the end of every school year. The school district has already offered her another position but Torey has also been accepted to graduate school. She is thinking about pursuing her doctorate and additional certification. If Torey accepts the offer to attend graduate school, she will have to move across the country and away from Chad and Sheila.

Sheila returns to school at the beginning of May. She comes back happy and eager to get back to a normal routine. Torey worries that Sheila's outward excitement is hiding a mountain of internal pain. Sheila is still wearing the same overalls as always, except now they are bloodstained. Torey finally asks Sheila what became of her pretty dress. Sheila says that she was wearing the dress the day Uncle Jerry molested her. He thought the dress was pretty and he could easily reach underneath it. The dress has since been thrown away. Sheila asks if Torey and Chad ever do what Jerry tried to do to her. Torey says that what Jerry did was wrong and should never been done to children. Sheila says that she is never going to love anyone if she has to have sex. Torey tries to tell her that love is a feeling, not an action, but Sheila is too young to understand. Sheila puts her head on the table and says she does not want to be herself anymore. She says that she has tried to figure out how to stop being herself but does not know how. Torey watches her, thinking that things can always get worse and that she will never be numb to the horrible things around her.

Sheila has a lot of emotional work to do before she will be able to move forward. She has made outstanding gains socially and academically, but those mean little if she cannot work through all the bad things that have happened to her. Sheila has become a



professional at building walls and compartmentalizing the evils in her life. Torey has come to realize that all her work in the classroom will be lost if she cannot find a way to break through Sheila's emotional walls. Sheila is very perceptive in her observations. She realizes that by not crying others will not know that they have hurt her. However, by not crying she is doing more harm to herself. Sheila's statement that she does not want to be herself anymore is true. How could she want to be a little girl on the edge of normality but constantly forced back into her miserable life?



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary and Analysis

Torey decides to put on a Mother's Day program as a final big project for the class. Torey works hard to devise a program that will allow all the children to participate. Finally, with the help of several parents, a program of songs, poems, and a skit is pulled together. As the date nears, Torey asks Sheila if she would like her father to attend. Sheila does not think he will attend, but Torey says that it would be good for him to see how far Sheila has come. Finally, Sheila agrees that she would like her father to come see her perform.

The day of the program Chad arrives with a large box for Sheila. When she opens it she finds a long dress inside. Torey had told Chad that Sheila's other dress had been thrown away and because the last one was short Chad buys a long one this time. Sheila pulls the dress out and holds it up before announcing that she does not wear dresses anymore. Chad tries to cajole her into wearing the dress just this once for the play, but Sheila refuses. Torey asks for a minute alone with Sheila. Before Torey can say anything, Sheila dissolves into tears. Torey has been waiting for this moment for a long time. Torey pulls Sheila into her arms and holds her as she sobs. Finally, Torey scoops Sheila up. She tells Chad that she will explain later and asks Anton to watch the class for her. Torey takes a still sobbing Sheila out to a book closet where they can be alone. After a while the tears stop and Sheila is a limp pile on Torey's lap. Sheila asks why Chad bought her the dress. Torey explains that Chad knew her other dress had been ruined and he wanted her to have another one. She tells Sheila that Chad would never hurt her like Jerry did. Sheila accepts this answer and apologizes for crying. Torey says it is okay and takes her to the nurse where Sheila can rest. Before Torey returns to the classroom, Sheila asks if she can still have the dress; Torey says yes.

The program goes off about as well as could be expected. Sheila gets long winded in her monologues, Freddie refuses to move, and Susannah Joy floats about lost in her own little world. Sheila's father shows up dressed in a too small suit. After the program, Sheila runs to her father and for the first time Torey sees him smile at the little girl. Torey explains about the new dress and Sheila's father gives her ten dollars to take Sheila shopping for some everyday clothes. Torey knows that the money will not go far, but is glad to see that Sheila's father is finally making an attempt to do the right thing.

In this chapter is the moment the reader has been waiting for: the moment when Sheila's life takes a turn for the better. Although Torey and Sheila do not discuss what has happened to her, Sheila's tears do her a world of good. The walls are starting to crumble and Sheila is learning that her emotions are good. She is not afraid to cry in front of Torey anymore. Sheila has learned that Torey will not hurt her or leave her for simply showing normal human feelings. Additionally, Sheila's father is finally taking responsibility. He still has a very long road to go and there will probably be more setbacks, but he has taken a step in the right direction. By attending Sheila's play, her



father shows her that he cares. His acknowledgment of his drinking problem also shows that he knows he needs to make some changes. Both of them are taking tentative first steps towards much needed healing.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary and Analysis

Soon only three weeks remain of the school year. Torey begins to hurry in her planning, trying to get last minute lessons taught and worrying over things that should have been done. She is also busy packing up her apartment in preparation for her own move. Torey has not yet told the class that they will not return to this room next year. William is going to a regular fifth grade class with a resource teacher. Tyler is going to another self-contained room. Peter will always be in a special classroom because his violent tendencies prevent him from joining a regular room. Max, Freddie, and Susannah are all being placed in special programs. Guillermo's family is moving away. Only Sarah's fate is still undecided, but Torey is confident that another year in a special setting will do much for the little girl.

Torey has put off telling Sheila because she does not know how the little girl will react. In an attempt to see how Sheila would do in a regular classroom, Torey begins taking her to the second grade room for math. Sheila does not like this idea and does everything she can to protest the change. Sheila says she will be bad if Torey sends her to another room. Exasperated, Torey sits down to find out why Sheila is so against this move. Sheila refuses to talk about it. On Monday morning Anton, has to go retrieve Sheila from the second grade room. In the fifteen minutes Sheila spent in the other room she threw things, ripped papers, and tripped another student. Anton settles her in the quiet corner and Torey takes time to calm herself down before approaching Sheila. Torey ignores Sheila for the rest of the day and does not talk to her about the situation until all the other children have left. By this time, Sheila is unnerved and worried that Torey is mad at her. Torey finally tells Sheila that they need to think about next year. Sheila immediately gets upset and says that she will be badder than ever. Torey explains that there will be no more class because all the other kids are going to other rooms and Torey is moving too. Sheila sits quietly while Torey talks and then goes to the other side of the room without saying a word. Torey watches her, worried about the little girl. Finally, Torey goes over to Sheila. She does not wrap Sheila into her arms like usual. Instead, she tells Sheila that Sheila, not Torey, is what makes the girl good. Sheila has the ability to be good all on her own. She also says that she will always be her friend if Sheila wants her to be. Sheila eventually looks up and smiles. She says that they have tamed each other and that is why they will always be friends. Sheila says she now understands why the Little Prince and the fox were always crying—because it hurts to be tamed.

Sheila grows up in this chapter. Even though she is still only six years old, she becomes much more mature here. Torey's act of not holding Sheila while she cries shows Torey's own recognition of Sheila's growth. Sheila is no longer the fragile child about to break at every instant. Sheila has suffered a great deal but she has finally learned to be strong and move forward. She is learning to stand on her own and to love someone else despite the pain sometimes involved. Like the Little Prince and the fox, Sheila realizes

that she can either go through life suffering or she can accept that people will leave her but that they will still love her. Torey tells Sheila it is possible that it was very hard for Sheila's mother to leave her. Sheila will never know for sure why her mother left, but she cannot continue to blame herself.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary and Analysis

The next day, Sheila goes back to the second grade room and makes it through the entire math period without too many problems. Sheila is still not completely accepting that the school year will end and that Torey will leave. Sheila keeps The Little Prince near her at all times and clings to the fact that the Little Prince and the fox were able to separate and remain friends. Sheila also spends a lot of time crying whether she is playing or working, even though she often does know why she is crying.

Torey's birthday comes and she brings in cake and ice cream for a celebration. The day does not go very well and everyone seems to be in a bad mood. When Whitney goes to get the ice cream, she discovers that the fifth grade class took it by mistake. Torey brings in the cake anyway, but playtime gets out of hand and the cake gets destroyed. At this point, Torey loses her patience and hollers for everyone to sit down with their heads down. After a few minutes, Torey tells the kids that if they can behave they can get up and help pick up cake before they leave for the day. All the children get up except Sheila. When Torey goes over to talk to her, Sheila says that this is Torey's birthday present. Sheila will stay seated so that she won't cause any more trouble for the rest of the day.

After school, Torey and Anton are sitting in the teacher's lounge when Anton hands Torey an envelope and says "Happy Birthday". Torey opens the envelope to find a letter announcing Anton's acceptance to the local community college and the recipient of a scholarship. Torey is excited for Anton, but words fail her and the two smile wordlessly at each other.

Torey speaks with Ed Somers about Sheila's placement for next year. Torey is trying to place Sheila in an elementary school closer to the migrant camp where a good friend of Torey's works. Ed is not in favor of Torey's plan because he does not like advancing children past their actual age. After much discussion, it is agreed that Sheila will go to the new elementary school and be in Torey's friend's class. Torey tells Sheila about the plan, but it is too much for the little girl to take in all at once and Sheila announces that she will never go to another class. However, Sheila changes her mind after the other students learn that Sheila will be skipping a grade and becomes excited by the news. One day after school, Sheila and Torey drive over to the new elementary school to meet her new teacher, Sandy. On the way over, they stop for ice cream. Sheila chooses licorice flavor, and by the time they arrive at the school, she is covered in black. Torey is nervous as Sandy and Sheila meet, but Sandy proceeds to sit down and discuss the ice cream with Sheila. Before long, Sheila is exploring the bookshelves and the gerbil cage. Sheila asks Sandy about her policy on whipping kids and is excited to learn that, like Torey, Sandy does not whip children. On the ride home, Sheila asks if she could go over to Sandy's class sometime and Torey says she will arrange it. The last week of school Anton takes Sheila over to Sandy's class to spend the entire day. When she returns at



the end of the day, Sheila happily reports that the day was a success. She tells Torey about getting her own lunch and how she had sat with a girl named Maria. As Sheila talks excitedly about next year and Sandy, Torey realizes that she has been outgrown.

On the last day of school, the class takes a trip to a neighborhood park. A number of the children's parents join the activity. Sheila's father does not come, which is not surprising, but Sheila's attire is: she is wearing a sunsuit that exposes a lot of her skin. Sheila seems uncomfortable, but soon her excitement bubbles over. The outfit is the first thing her father has ever bought for her and she is excited by the gesture. As they watch Sheila twirling around the park, Whitney remarks that Sheila looks free; indeed, that is exactly what she is. Before they know it, the end of the day arrives and everyone must say good-bye. As Anton leads the other children in singing songs, Torey breaks away to Sheila, who is squatting near where the animal cages used to be. She is crying, and when Torey approaches, Sheila says that she does not want school to end. The final bell rings, and after saying good-bye to the other kids, Whitney, and Anton, Sheila takes Torey's hand to walk to the bus. They walk in silence, since words would ruin the moment. Sheila boards her bus and then gets back off to hug Torey. Torey sinks to her knees and embraces the little girl. Sheila says that she didn't mean it when she said she would be bad. Sheila says she will be good for Torey but Torey tells her to be good for herself. Sheila looks confused but smiles and gets back on the bus. Torey and Sheila wave and then the bus pulls out of sight.

The end has finally come but this end is more of a beginning. Sheila has made amazing strides in her short time in Torey's class. Torey can take a lot of the credit for Sheila's transformation. She has provided Sheila with a stable environment in which she was able to stretch out her fingers and grow. Sheila learned more than math and reading in Torey's room. She learned to trust again, to love, and to cry. Sheila learned that it is okay to be tamed and that those who truly love you are never far away. Most of all, Sheila learned how to look past all the bad in her life in order to let the good in. As much as Sheila has learned, she has also taught. Torey took a special attachment to Sheila. This relationship led Torey to believe that she was an amazing teacher. When Sheila did not constantly act as Torey expected, Torey learned that she was not so amazing. Torey learned to pull back and let Sheila learn for herself. Together, they both taught the reader that patience and compassion can go a long way to resolving differences.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary and Analysis

The epilogue is very short. It is comprised only of a poem that Sheila sent to Torey. The poem is entitled "Love". The poem is a thank you for all that Torey did for Sheila. It is simple and pure and beautiful. Sheila's words strike the heart of the reader in much the same way as they must have struck Torey. The reader has traveled the long journey with Sheila and Torey and has invested just as much energy in the relationship, even though the reader was only a bystander. The poem is the final indicator that Sheila will be okay. She may still have a long way to go, but the reader can be assured that Sheila will survive and be happy.



Characters

Torey Hayden

Torey Hayden is an extraordinary teacher, although she does not like being praised for her work. Torey works with special needs children and has a unique teaching style. The most interesting thing about Torey is her compassion. She connects with her students in a way that most teachers do not and she is able to reach even the most disturbed child.

Torey has been working as a teacher's assistant when Ed Somers contacts her to take over the special education room in the school where she's already working. Torey will be working with the most severely disabled children. She is at first excited at the prospect of having her own room, but when Sheila arrives, Torey has many misgivings. Torey takes a special interest in Sheila. It seems as if Torey can sense that there is something unique about this little girl and ends up devoting a large portion of her energy to bringing Sheila out of her shell.

The reader is often amazed at Torey's ability to keep working with disabled children. After reading about her adventures with Sheila, let alone the other eight students, the reader wonders how Torey remains sane. However, the reader also realizes that Torey has a gift for working with this population. Torey continues to expand her knowledge base and her research into special education. She chooses to further her education and increase her credentials so that she can better serve "the garbage class".

Sheila

Sheila is six years old and small for her age. Sheila has dirty blond hair and dirty clothes to match. She lives with her father in the migrant camp because her mother abandoned her two years earlier. Sheila has a younger brother named Jimmie, but when the mother left she took Jimmie and not Sheila. Sheila is very defensive. She refuses to talk or participate in class. Torey often has to physically move Sheila to where the other students are and Sheila usually makes Torey chase her down. Sheila is also very violent. The reason for her placement in Torey's class is that she burned a three-year-old boy after tying him to a tree. On her first day in Torey's room, Sheila plucks out the eyes of the class goldfish with a pencil. Sheila also destroys another teacher's classroom, regularly rips up paperwork given to her, and takes revenge on the other students for making her angry.

Sheila is an amazing child in many respects. The reader will be amazed that such a young child can be so destructive. However, Sheila's destructive tendencies are the result of a painful life that should be equally amazing to the reader. Sheila has been abandoned without explanation by her mother, her father regularly whips her, and her uncle cuts her vagina with a knife while molesting her. The fact that Sheila is not more destructive is amazing given the things she has suffered. At the same time, the reader



slowly learns that Sheila is a genius. She can read, despite not being taught, and recognizes words on the middle school level. Sheila's gifted ability has gone unnoticed because the emphasis has always been on her bad behavior.

As the story evolves, Sheila moves from being a destructive little girl into the gifted child that she is. Sheila slowly learns to trust Torey. Torey works patiently with Sheila to clean her up, both physically and emotionally. Although Torey is not able to completely heal all of Sheila's wounds, Sheila does learn that not everyone is bad. She can love someone and have them leave her without it being a bad thing.

Peter

Peter is eight years old and a large black boy with an Afro. He suffers from severe seizures, which are destroying his neurological system. Peter is also becoming increasingly violent as a result of his disorder. Peter bursts into Torey's room, shouting and cursing and insisting that he won't stay. Peter is very verbal and says what he thinks even if it is not nice. When Sheila arrives, Peter promptly pronounces that she smells.

Tyler

Tyler is eight and is a girl. She has dark curly hair and is very shy when she first arrives at Torey's room. Tyler has tried to commit suicide twice. Tyler's last attempt involved drinking drain cleaner and now her throat has a scar from where an artificial tube has been inserted since part of her esophagus was eaten away. Tyler proves to be very polite and well behaved in class. Sheila becomes envious of Tyler's good manners, but learns to copy the little girl and the two become friends.

Max

Max is six years old and big for his age. He has blond hair and has been diagnosed with infantile autism. Max's mother appears relieved to be free of her son for a few hours as he twirls about the room, flapping his arms.

Freddie

At seven years old, Freddie weighs is obese, weighing ninety-four pounds. The fat pours out of his tight fitting clothes. Freddie lays on the floor, crying, and does not move on the morning he is first brought to Torey's room. The reports on Freddie are mixed. One report says he is autistic, another says he is profoundly retarded, and another does not know what is wrong with Freddie.



Sarah

Sarah is seven years old, but Torey has known her since she was four. Torey started working with Sarah when she was in preschool, so she is familiar with the little girl's background. Sarah has been physically and sexually abused and as a result is angry and defiant. The previous year she refused to talk to anyone but her mother and sister, and that is why she is being placed in Torey's room this year. Sarah and Sheila become friends as both girls learn to come out of their angry shells.

Susannah Joy

Torey describes Susannah Joy as "doll-like". Susannah is six years old and has never been in school before arriving in Torey's classroom. She has beautiful blond hair and her mother dresses her very stylishly. Susannah suffers from childhood schizophrenia and has visual and auditory hallucinations. She spends most of her days at home rocking back and forth while crying. However, in Torey's classroom, Susannah does very well. She is polite and gets along well with the other children, and does become easily upset.

William

William is nine years old. He is tall and pale complected. William suffers from several fears. He is afraid of water, the dark, cars, vacuum cleaners, and the dust under beds. In order to protect himself against these fears, William engages in rituals. He regularly touches himself and chants spells under his breath.

Guillermo

Guillermo is a Mexican-American whose family lives in the migrant camp. He is nine and suffers from severe anger but is able to be controlled. Guillermo is also blind and has been placed in Torey's class because the classroom for the blind did not feel equipped to handle him.

Ed Somers

Ed Somers is the Director of Special Education for the school district in which Torey works. Torey and Ed have a comfortable relationship. Unlike some of Torey's colleagues, Ed does not openly disapprove of Torey's relaxed teaching style. Ed also believes in Torey's ability to reach the more severely disabled children. While most teachers would not be allowed to keep all nine students against state regulations, Ed allows Torey to retain all her students. Ed is not prominent throughout the story, but the reader still gains a sense of his supportive nature from his brief interactions with Torey.



Chad

Chad is Torey's boyfriend. They have been dating for several years and have discussed the topic of marriage but have not yet made any definite plans. Chad is a junior partner in a local law firm. He handles mostly court-appointed cases and usually ends up losing because his clients are typically guilty of the crime. Chad is a sounding board for Torey at the end of her long days. He can be the voice of reason or of encouragement when she is at her wit's end. Chad also befriends Sheila and provides the little girl with a positive male role-model. He takes Sheila shopping and buys her two dresses during the course of the story. Chad also encourages Sheila when she takes part in the class play. He is a support system for both Torey and Sheila, and the reader finds himself wishing that he and Torey could adopt Sheila.

Whitney

Whitney is a fourteen-year-old junior high student at the school where Torey works. Whitney is like Torey's students in the respect that she does not fit in with her classmates. Whitney is clumsy and awkward. However, she enjoys working with the children, and Torey's dependence on her gives the teenager confidence.

Anton

Anton is a tall, gangly Mexican-American who lives in the migrant camp and is hired as Torey's classroom aide. Anton does not speak much English and his lack of education is a concern for Torey. However, Anton proves to be an excellent addition to Torey's room. Anton works well with the children, and he forms a strong bond with Torey so that they are able to work efficiently as a team. Anton grows personally during his time in Torey's room. By the end of the story, Anton has worked toward receiving his GED and has been accepted to the local community college with the hope of studying education.

Mr. Collins

Mr. Collins is the principal of the school where Torey works. She has worked under him before and has not had positive interactions with him. Mr. Collins is not tolerant of Torey's teaching style or of the children she teaches. Throughout the book, Mr. Collins remains the figure of inflexibility and misunderstanding.



Objects/Places

The Garbage Class appears in non-fiction

Torey teaches special education and her classroom is referred to by the other teachers as the "garbage class". Her room becomes a dumping ground for all the children that do not fit in or are not wanted in regular classrooms.

The Goldfish appears in non-fiction

On Sheila's first day she exhibits her defiance by taking the goldfish out of the aquarium and plucking their eyes out with a pencil.

Hair Barrettes appears in non-fiction

In an effort to connect with Sheila and improve the little girl's hygiene, Torey buys Sheila hair barrettes. Every morning, Sheila counts the hair bands and chooses the ones she wants to wear that day. At the end of the day, Sheila replaces the bands that she wore because she doesn't want her father to take them from her, and she counts them all again to be sure they are all there.

Dresses appears in non-fiction

Sheila goes shopping with Torey and Chad one day. Chad buys Sheila a beautiful dress because she has never had one before. This first dress becomes ruined when Sheila's Uncle Jerry molests her. After her uncle cuts her with a knife, Sheila refuses to wear another dress. Chad buys Sheila another dress to wear in an end-of-the-year play. Sheila becomes very upset when she sees the dress because she thinks that Chad wants to hurt her too. Torey explains everything to Sheila and after a long cry, Sheila agrees to wear the second dress.

Paper appears in non-fiction

Sheila has an issue with paper. Torey is unable to comprehend Sheila's aversion to paper, but every time Sheila is given a piece of paper in the beginning she crumples it up and throws it.

The Annex appears in non-fiction

Torey's classroom is housed in an annex to the school. Her room and the gym are the only rooms located in the annex. Torey's room is a dumping ground not only for



unwanted kids, but for broken and unwanted school items. She struggles to find room for everything, including her students.

The Migrant Camp appears in non-fiction

At the edge of town is the migrant workers camp. The camp is a conglomeration of races living in poverty. Sheila and her father live in the migrant camp, as does Anton.

The Kobold Box appears in non-fiction

Torey invents the Kobold box as a way to encourage the children to behave and learn to compliment other children who act nicely. She tells the students that the Kobold lives in their classroom and watches to see if the children do kind things. Torey expands the Kobold box by encouraging the children to leave notes in the box whenever someone does something nice. The Kobold box becomes a favorite of the children and they eagerly look forward to reading the notes at the end of each day.

Rabbit Droppings appears in non-fiction

Sheila covers the rabbit poop in paint so that they look like M&M candies. She does not mean any harm, but Freddie likes candy and eats the rabbit droppings. His mother brings the issue to Torey's attention after Freddie comes home several days in a row and throws up. Neither Freddie's mom nor Torey are able to immediately recognize the "candies" as poop. It takes several days for the story to come out. Sheila admits that she had been painting the rabbit poop to use in an Easter mosaic.

The Little Prince appears in non-fiction

Torey reads *The Little Prince* to Sheila when she first comes to the school. During their time together, Sheila comes to love the book. At the end of the year, Torey gives it to Sheila.



Themes

Failing Schools

Torey's class is referred to as "the garbage class". While Torey says that this is an affectionate label, the reader fails to see the love. The truth of the matter is that the school dumps the more severely disabled children into a classroom of their own, cut off from the rest of the school so that no one has to be inconvenienced by their presence.

The issue of how to handle disabled children in the school system is a constant debate. Standards change each time a new theory is broached by the latest research. For years, the thought was to keep disabled children isolated from the rest of the school, and then mainstreaming became the fashion. Many schools mainstream the child for the majority of the day, but send him to a special class based on his specific needs. Other schools insist that the child receive additional help outside of school, but leave these arrangements up to the parents. Unfortunately, most of the decisions on how to manage the academic careers of disabled students is dictated by funding. One year the funds may exist for a separate class or additional aides in the regular classroom, but the following year those funds may be exhausted or not maintained. The underlying impression is that the school tries to do what is easiest for them and not best for the student.

Torey's school is no different. Mr. Collins appears to have little patience for the students in Torey's class. He does not mind them as long as they do not affect the rest of the school. So when Sheila disrupts another classroom or the lunch room, he takes issue with her and Torey. Instead of listening to Torey explain Sheila's behavior and point out the progress she has made, Mr. Collins paddles Sheila for her behavior. Mr. Collins lacks the compassion necessary to work with a disabled population. To him they are a nuisance to be shoved to the side and he would prefer not to interact with them in any capacity.

Mr. Collins represents the common perspective on disabled students, while Torey represents a new model of teaching. Torey takes the child into consideration. She evaluates his or her strengths and weaknesses in order to best help that child. Neither side is particularly correct in their method. There needs to be a concerted effort to intertwine the standard and the non-standard with the emphasis being placed on the child. Instead of running the school like a factory that outputs children after the required amount of time, schools should be focusing on the quality, not the quantity, of their product.

Suffering from Genius

Most readers will read Torey Hayden's book and assume that it is about a disabled child struggling to fit the regular world. However, a close reader will pick out the real focus of



the story: that Sheila is a genius child trying to fit in the regular world. For most of the story, it seems that Sheila is more like the other students in Torey's class. She has difficulty fitting into a regular classroom because of her behavior, but in Chapter 11, Sheila's IQ is tested and shown to be at the genius level. Sheila is not like Torey's other students, except that she has been shoved in the "garbage class".

When the reader is first introduced to Sheila, it is without her name. She is the six-year-old girl who burned a three-year-old boy. This introduction allows the reader to assume that Sheila is a delinquent child—in order to commit such an atrocious act she must have severe psychological problems. Sheila's actions once in Torey's room do not alter the reader's initial diagnosis. In fact, Sheila seems to be trying to maintain the world's perceived image of herself. She acts out in horrible ways so that no one can see the real Sheila. As Sheila herself says when telling Torey why she does not cry, if she does not let people see her vulnerable then they cannot hurt her. Sheila is an extraordinary child who has not been allowed to be extraordinary. Her mother abandoned her, presumably because Sheila was bad. However, the reader should be able to reflect on this and realize that Sheila was abandoned because her mother was too young and irresponsible to handle a child of Sheila's level. The same can be said for Sheila's father. He is a man whose own life has been less than pleasant and he is ill-equipped to deal with a precocious youngster whose mind needs constant stimulation. Mr. Collins also fails Sheila. As an educator, Mr. Collins should be willing to work with Sheila so that she can reach her potential, because if adequately taught, Sheila will be able to excel beyond everyone's expectations.

When Torey realizes that Sheila is of genius ability, she also realizes that this little girl needs extra care just like her other students. What is different about Sheila is the kind of care she requires. She does not need to be babied or coaxed into achieving. Sheila achieves naturally. What Sheila requires is someone willing to push her past the norms so that she is challenged. Sheila needs the room to grow according to her higher abilities instead of stifled in the garbage room.

Accepting Differences

There are all kinds of differences pointed out in *One Child*. The most obvious is the difference between Torey's students and those in a regular classroom. There is also the difference of opinion between Mr. Collins and Torey regarding her teaching style. There is the difference between Sheila and the rest of the students in Torey's room. There is a difference between Whitney and her classmates, between Anton and some of the other migrant workers, and between Sheila and Jimmie. There are many differences to account for and understand, but it is the acceptance of all the differences that is difficult.

Some of the differences in the story are accepted, but not all of them are. When Anton first talks to Torey about returning to school and getting his teacher's certification, she is skeptical that a migrant worker would be able to achieve such a thing. She doubts that he fully understands how much work is involved. However, by the end of the story, when Anton shows her his acceptance into the local community college, Torey has accepted



that even a uneducated migrant worker can achieve his dreams. Another difference that becomes accepted by some, but not all, is that Sheila is not disabled. Mr. Collins refuses to accept that this little girl could be of genius ability, but Torey and Chad encourage Sheila, so that by the end of the book she is ready to move into a regular classroom. The difference between Sheila and Jimmie is never fully understood. Why Sheila's mother took Jimmie with her and not Sheila, or both children, is never explained. Unfortunately, this is a difference that will probably never be resolved unless Sheila is someday able to find her mother and extract an explanation from her.

The idea of accepting differences is not special to One Child. People must learn to accept differences every day. What is unique about One Child is the way Torey Hayden subtly points out the variety of differences and how each is resolved. Torey's calm nature that she uses with the children spills over to the reader, so that the reader becomes more aware and more compassionate while reading. The hope is that the reader is able to take away a strengthened ability to recognize and accept differences after watching Torey eloquently handle all the ones in her story.



Style

Perspective

Torey Hayden writes with a wealth of compassion and true enjoyment. The reader immediately senses how much Torey enjoys her work, despite the intensity of working with such a range of disabled children. Although Torey states that she did not write the book for personal glory, the reader feels awe at Torey's strength and perseverance. Torey embodies the qualities of a good educator even if she does not follow standard teaching methods and incurs the disapproval of her colleagues.

Torey says that she chose to write the book in order to catalog the bond between a teacher and one particular student. Her emphasis is more on Sheila and the strength and courage that the six-year-old possesses. However, the reader will also see that Sheila may have never learned to trust herself if it had not been for the strength and courage of one particular teacher. Torey Hayden may not desire praise for doing a job she loves, but most readers will readily admit that they could never perform Torey's job.

Torey's firsthand account of her relationship with Sheila draws the reader into the annex classroom. The reader stares in horror at eyeless goldfish, smells the putrid stench of unwashed clothes, and feels their heart wrenched out when Sheila is molested. Torey's perspective also allows the reader to understand the necessary components of being an excellent teacher. Torey is slow to anger, compassionate, understanding, and above all, patient. She is able to see past the outer disabilities of her students and see their personal strengths. By writing in the first person, Torey is best able to share her experience and teach the reader at the same time.

Tone

The tone of the book is objective. Torey tells the story as it happened and leaves it up to the reader to add any subjectivity. However, Torey's compassion spills over and the reader wonders if her perception of Sheila is not altered because of their relationship. Torey does not hold back in her description of events. She does not shield the reader from the harsh reality of Sheila's difficult life.

The overall feeling that the reader gets from the book is one of intense love. Torey's perspective is open and honest. She shares her feelings openly with the reader so that the reader can fully appreciate these extraordinary children. Torey's matter of fact but compassionate writing style compliments the nature of her story. She honors the children by refusing to shield the reader from the truth of their situation. The reader rides a wave of constantly changing emotions alongside Torey. At each step, the reader and Torey are appalled, frustrated, and deeply in love with Sheila. Torey's simple style allows the real Sheila to shine through. Torey does for the reader what she did for Sheila: she allows the reader to grow at one's own pace, neither overwhelmingly fast, nor so slow



that one is left behind. By the end of the story, both the reader and Sheila have grown by leaps and bounds and are better equipped to continue their journey in the large world outside the annex room.

Structure

The story is told in twenty chapters with a prologue and an epilogue. Each chapter is numbered but lacks a title. The lack of a chapter title serves to aide the story. The reader does not become concerned with titles and so is more in tune with the events of each chapter. In some respects, the reader wonders why Torey Hayden bothered with chapter distinctions at all. The story is so gripping that the reader moves quickly through it and may fail to notice the separation of chapters at all.

The chapters move quickly because the author's style of writing is clear and concise. The first person point of view draws the reader quickly into Torey's life. The reader also becomes enchanted with Sheila. Despite the viscousness of Sheila's previous actions, the reader falls in love with her and feels a connection with her.



Quotes

"But belief in the human soul escapes all reason and flies beyond the frail fingers of our knowledge." Prologue

"Nor was I ready to give them up, nor give up on them." Chap. 1, p. 16

"Then without further urging she got off the chair and came with me, careful not to touch me." Chap. 2, p. 25

She looked at her overalls. 'My Pa, he gonna whip me fierce when he sees I do this.' Chap. 3, p. 37

"The other children were watching me anxiously, and I realized, not for the first time, what a con job my position was, because I was honestly as frightened as they were." Chap. 4, p. 45

"A school nurse came once a week for an afternoon. I had tried to send my children down. Most of them had had impetigo or rat bites or other evils of poverty." Chap. 6, p. 63

"To see this little kid - who thus far had never spoken to the other children, who came in with a history of uncooperativeness - standing there with her hand up was a heart stopper." Chap. 6, p. 69

"For all of her six years she had been unwanted, ignored, rejected. Pushed out of cars, pushed out of people's lives." Chap. 7, p. 74

"Her voice quivered. 'Do they gonna make me go away?'" Chap. 8, p. 89

"'That be what you do, huh?' 'What do you mean?' 'That's what you done with me, huh? Tamed me.'" Chap. 9, p. 102

"When I was working, I could never perceive how tense the involvement left me. Now, on the sunny beach, I felt the weariness drain away." Chap. 12, p. 121

"Like the daffodils, Sheila bloomed in spite of the harsh winter." Chap. 13, p. 130

"I wish you was my Mama and Chad was my Daddy." Chap. 15, p. 163

"'Unca Jerry,' she began softly, 'he tried to put his pecker in me this morning. But it wouldn't fit. So he tooked a knife. He said I was keeping him out, so he put the knife inside me to make me stop.'" Chap. 16, p. 168

"Beyond the children's incomprehensible behavior and my own vulnerability, beyond the discouragement, the self-doubts, soared a dream which admittedly was seldom



realized, a dream that things could change. And being a dreamer, my dream died hard." Chap. 4, p. 39

"She smiled softly, as if I were the one to be comforted, and reached up to touch my face. 'Don't cry, Torey. I don't mind.'" Chap. 16, p. 180

"I feared that like her absurd ability to keep from crying, she had sublimated this misery, making it seem as if it had never happened. That was to me a greater indicator of the seriousness of her disturbance than anything else." Chap. 17, p. 183

"I ain't never gonna love anybody if I have to do that." Chap. 17, p. 186

"She pressed her fingers to her temples in an effort to keep the tears back, but for the first time since she had come to my class she was unable to. Over her cheeks coursed rivulets and she dissolved into sobs." Chap. 18, p. 191

"If only there could be enough people to care, enough people to love without reservations, I thought sadly." Chap. 18, p. 197

"She did not speak the entire way. Neither did I. We had gone beyond needing words. Talking would have spoiled what we had." Chap. 20, p. 219



Topics for Discussion

In the Prologue, Torey Hayden remarks that the children she works with are courageous. What do you think she means by this statement?

What role, if any, do you think that parents and home environment play in the development of behaviorally/emotionally/mentally disabled children?

Torey describes the condition of her room at the beginning of Chapter One. What does the condition of her room say about the way disabled children are viewed by the school system?

How does Sheila make you feel? Do you pity her, dislike her, want to help her?

How do you feel about the integration of disabled children to "regular" classrooms? Take a stand, pro or con, and support your side.

Torey notes that her teaching style is usually met with disapproval in the school district. What do you think about her teaching style? Does it work? Why or why not?

Are standardized tests useful in schools or should tests be adjusted for the capabilities of the student?