

Pax Study Guide

Pax by Sara Pennypacker

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Plot Summary

“Pax” by Sara Pennypacker, tells the story of a boy named Peter and his best friend, a fox named Pax. When Peter’s father volunteers to go to war, Peter must give up the fox he has raised since it was a kit . Peter wars with himself as he feels guilty for abandoning his friend. However, at the same time, he is afraid to stand up to his father’s anger. When he decides to find Pax, Peter goes on a journey to rescue his friend. His mission leads him to recognize and accept his own feelings of anger.

Pax and Peter’s story begins when Peter and his father drop Pax off in the woods near an abandoned rope mine. Peter had chosen that spot because he believed his friend would be safe there. Pax soon meets the other foxes who live in the area. Bristle, a female fox, hates humans and blames them for the destruction of her family. Her younger brother Runt tries to befriend Pax even though his sister warns him away from the strange fox. Gray, the elder fox in the area, takes Pax under his wing because he had spent time with humans just like Pax.

Peter is unhappy with his grandfather because the man has the same anger in him that Peter sees in his father. Peter does his best to deny his own anger. It was because he had gotten angry and broken his mother’s gazing globe that he had not been allowed to go grocery shopping with her on the day she had her fatal car accident. Since that time he had sworn to himself that he would not allow himself to get angry. Peter feels he has slighted his responsibility to Pax, so he decides to go back to the spot where he left Pax and take him home.

Peter quickly has trouble on his trip when he falls and breaks his foot. He is taken in by a war veteran who believes she is too dangerous to be around people because she killed a man during the war. Vola sets Peter’s fracture and teaches him how to walk properly on his crutches. The two form a friendship, and Peter recognizes that Vola is not the threat to society she believes she is. He encourages her to stop punishing herself and to share her talents with the community. In turn, Vola encourages Peter in his search for Pax and tells him that anger is not completely bad.

Meanwhile Pax makes friends with and gains the trust of the other foxes. Together he and Bristle have nursed Runt back to health after he lost a hind leg when a land mine exploded. When Peter is able to return to the area where he left Pax he finds that his friend has made other friends in the wild. He knows that is where his friend belongs. Pax recognizes the changes in Peter since the two were separated. He notices his boy has gained the self confidence and emotional strength he needed to stand up to his father. Themes in this coming of age story include taming one’s anger and the effects of war.



Chapters 1, 2, and 3

Summary

In Chapter 1, Pax was surprised by Peter's anxiety as the car in which they were riding slowed near the woods. Pax tried to make Peter laugh but realized Peter was crying. He heard Peter talk to his father in a begging tone. The car stopped. Peter's father said something to Peter. Pax recognized what he was saying was a lie. The father lifted Pax by the scruff and set him down next to the woods. Peter pulled a toy soldier out of his pocket and threw it into the woods. Believing they were playing, Pax chased the toy. When he found it, he barked for Peter but got no response. He was distracted by the birds screeching overhead but then heard car doors shutting. Pax ran back to the road in time to see the car driving away.

In Chapter 2, Peter talked to his grandfather about the toy soldiers his father had played with as a child. Peter had found one of the soldiers on his father's desk and asked to keep it. Pax had taken it over as a toy. Peter pulled a picture out of the tin in which the soldiers were kept and showed it to his grandfather. His grandfather said the picture was of Peter's father and his dog, Duke. Peter's grandfather said the two were inseparable. He pointed out the black hair Peter and his father both had and said that the apple did not fall far from the tree.

Peter and his grandfather talked about what time school started the next morning before Peter said he was going to bed. He thought about the way he had to live with his angry grandfather for at least six months while his father was serving in the war. Peter's father had said that his father had gotten angrier after his wife had died. Peter had seen signs of this same anger in his own father after the death of his mother. As he lay in bed, Peter felt something bad was going to happen to Pax because Peter wasn't there to take care of him. The anxiety reached a climax when he heard a coyote howl. The coyote prompted one of the bad memories he had of his mother. Coyotes had killed a baby rabbit that he and his father had trapped because the rabbit was eating his mother's flowers.

Peter suddenly realized that leaving Pax was not the right thing to do. He decided to go after his fox. He put a few things in his backpack, including his mother's gold bracelet. He studied an atlas he found in his room and decided that if he cut through the mountains he would only have to cover about 200 miles before he reached Pax. He believed the fox would be waiting for him when he returned.

Chapter 3 gives insight on how Peter had found Pax and raised him from a kit after Pax's father, mother, and siblings died. Pax felt responsible for Peter. He found acorns, which reminded him of Peter. After cleaning his paws, he settled in to wait for Peter to return, even though he had the urge to head south. He knew that was the direction in which home lay. He was scared by olive green trucks that drove by on the road. The trucks smelled like the new clothes Peter's father had been wearing when they left Pax.



Analysis

Peter is forced to leave the fox he raised from a kit because his father is going to war and Peter must stay with his grandfather. The main characters are a boy named Peter and a fox named Pax. The story is told by a third person narrator. The story's focus alternates between Peter and Pax. Chapter 1 is narrated from the viewpoint of Pax, while Chapter 2 is narrated from the viewpoint of Peter. The narration continues as such throughout the book. Pax's chapters are symbolized with a picture of a fox's head in which the chapter number is embedded. Peter's chapters are notated with the picture of a boy's head in which the chapter number is embedded.

It appears this story will be a coming of age story both for Peter and for his fox. Peter is dealing with a good number of issues. He's been forced to give up the animal that has been his friend for many years. He has also not yet recovered from the death of his mother. Though the author has not yet specified, it appears that Peter is suffering with guilt because he believes his mother's death was somehow his fault. This can be inferred because he thinks that since he's not where he's supposed to be someone is going to get hurt again. The use of the word "again" indicates Peter believes his actions have already caused one injury. The story appears that it will be a coming of age story for Pax because Pax has never lived in the wild before. All he has known is life with Peter. Now that he is out on his own, he must find some way to protect himself and feed himself in an unfamiliar environment.

Peter does not like the way his grandfather lumps him together with his father when he indicates that "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." It appears that Peter does not want to grow up to be angry like his grandfather and his father. Peter indicates that he has tried to distance himself whenever he could from his father's anger.

Since Pax is a red fox, the author tries to represent the characteristics of red foxes accurately. The narrator begins by telling how Pax could sense the slowing of the car in which he and Peter were riding even before Peter could feel it slowing. Pax also has a fine tuned sense of smell. He is comforted by scents that are familiar to him, like his smell and Peter's smell. However, Pax finds that the charred metal scent from the new clothes that Peter's father was wearing was unpleasant to him. He associates that same scent with the olive green vehicles that drive past him later in the woods. Those are military vehicles. Notice also that although Pax has the strong instinct of a fox to head south, where he knows his home is located, he is smart enough to know the ways of humans. He believes that when Peter comes back for him he will return to the same spot where he left him.

There are two important symbols introduced in this section of the story. The first is the green toy soldier that Peter threw to Pax to make him run into the woods. This soldier was one of many that were favorite toys of Peter's father when he was a child. Peter had asked his father if he could have the soldier when he saw it sitting on his father's desk. The fox had soon taken it over as a toy. When Peter is at his grandfather's house on the first night, he learns that his father had many of these toy soldiers when he was



young. Another important symbol is the gold charm bracelet that had belonged to Peter's mother. Obviously, it is special because it was his mother's, but the reader will learn there is even more significance to the piece of jewelry later on in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Peter's idea that he will go and find Pax. Do you think he is prepared for the trip? Do you think he will make it?

Discussion Question 2

Consider Pax's situation. Why are the woods so dangerous for him?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Peter's reaction to his grandfather's suggestion that Peter is like his father. Why do you think Peter dislikes this idea so much?

Vocabulary

distract, juddered, vulnerable, aloft, wrench, burled, pelting, rasped, inseparable, reeked, audible, verge, merged, thermals, carrion



Chapters 4, 5, and 6

Summary

In Chapter 4, Peter realized he had made a mistake by not taking a flashlight with him. It was so dark that he had to give up. When he woke in the morning, he tried to remember the map from the atlas. He hoped to have the worst of his journey, the part that would lead him through inhabited towns, behind him. About noon, he reached the town he remembered from the car ride with his father. The man in the hardware store where Peter stopped to buy a flashlight seemed suspicious of him. Peter told him he was headed back to school after a break. He followed Peter out of the store and pointed out to Peter that he was walking away from school instead of toward it. Peter went to the school to keep from arousing the man's suspicion any further. He decided to nap in a baseball dugout until school let out. He thought about how he felt at home only when he was on a baseball diamond.

In Chapter 5, Pax was startled when a female fox warned him that he was encroaching on her hunting territory. The scent of humans on him disturbed the fox when she sniffed him. He asked the female if she had seen any humans. She said that although she had not seen any humans there, she could sense they were coming. He watched as Bristle caught and ate a rat. Pax had never hunted. Only Peter had fed him. The female fox walked away into the woods. As she did, another fox sailed through the air and landed on her back. The small fox wanted to play, but his sister chided him. When Pax asked him how he'd flown through the air, Runt climbed the tree to demonstrate how he had done the feat. Bristle gave what was left of the rat she'd caught to Runt. After he finished eating, Runt played with Pax's toy soldier. Pax joined the game, but Bristle ordered the soldier be brought to her. She smelled humans on the toy and ordered Runt to leave it alone. Bristle told Runt to remember what had happened and communicated to him a picture of two foxes struggling with a trap in the snow. When he turned to go home with his sister, Runt looked back at Pax as if inviting him along. Pax followed, but Bristle warned him that he could stay only one night.

In Chapter 6, Peter woke to the sounds of baseball practice. He stood and watched. He noticed that one kid paid closer attention to the game than the others. The boy seemed to have the same feeling when he stood on the baseball field as Peter. The feeling was one that Peter never had been able to describe in words. He remembered going to a therapist just after his mother died. He did not want to talk. He crashed toy cars into each other during the sessions. The therapist commented at the end of each session that it must have been hard for him when his mother got in the car to buy groceries and then never came home. Peter had lied when the therapist asked if he felt angry. He had left the session, early and told his father he did not want to go back. Later, Peter wondered if the therapist had known he had been angry and had done something bad that had kept his mother from taking him with her to the store. He had found Pax only a few months later.



Meanwhile, practice was over, and Peter knew he needed to get going. He talked to the boy he had noticed on the field. When the boy learned Peter was from Hampton, the boy assumed he was scouting before the game coming up Saturday and called him a jerk. He imagined his grandfather would be getting off work about the time he made it to the highway. He was overcome with anxiety but calmed himself down. When he crossed the highway and found what looked like a dirt wagon track, he headed down it believing it was a road into the woods. When he came to a house and barn he realized he'd been walking down the road to someone's house. He sat down to eat. When he got back up, he saw a doe who seemed to look at him as if to accuse him of ruining everything. He walked back to the highway and tried to stay off the road to avoid the cars and their headlights. When he stepped into water he climbed back up to the road and caught his foot on a root. He fell, breaking a bone in his foot. Though he tried, he could not walk.

Analysis

When Peter leaves for his journey to find Pax and go back to his home he is very unprepared. He is thinking mostly about not getting caught and not so much about taking care of himself. He takes his baseball mitt, but he does not take a flashlight. He studies a map before he leaves but he does not take the map or make a copy of it. He sets off blindly, thinking he can walk 200 miles through the mountains with few supplies. He begins realizing his mistakes almost immediately. He does not have a flashlight so he cannot walk in the dark. A day later he realizes that he should have packed extra socks. A careless move leaves Peter with a broken foot.

One significant aspect of this section is the feeling that Peter gets when he plays baseball. He does not like the team talking and horsing around when they are playing the game. He feels as if that is where he belongs. It is home to him more than any other place. Peter, however, can't come up with a word that adequately describes what he feels when he plays baseball. He will later come up with the word that fits that feeling.

The reader learns more about Peter's relationship with his anger and his mother's death. He believes he is responsible for his mother's wreck because he did something in anger that made his mother punish him by not allowing him to go to the grocery store with her. It is during that trip that she was killed in a car wreck. Notice that when Peter's therapist asks him if he ever got angry he denies ever being angry. The topic of discussion upsets Peter so much that he leaves his session early and refuses to return.

The author gives accurate details about the characteristics of foxes. For example, foxes are very territorial. The female fox, Bristle, lets Pax know right away that he is not welcome in her territory. Foxes, apparently, are also oriented to their families. Bristle feels a responsibility to take care of her younger, smaller brother even though he is from a different litter. Because Bristle and Runt have lived in the wild all of their lives, they have never known humans as friends. They see humans as the cause of hurt and destruction. Bristle dislikes the smell of humans on Pax. She warns Runt not to get too close to Pax. The author makes a point to note that Pax was born with fear and suspicion of humans. It was only because he received continual, positive reinforcement



that humans were not cruel that he was able to overcome his instinct that they would hurt him.

The foxes communicate with each other. Although the author represents the foxes as “speaking,” they actually talk to each other through body language. When Bristle first approaches Pax, he understands that her erect tail and ears means that she expects him to be submissive to him. He lays back his ears, indicating that he does not mean her any threat. Later, when Runt “attacks” Bristle, he rolls over on his back and exposes his belly. This posture puts Runt at risk indicating that he is playing with his sister and does not intend her any harm.

Notice also that Peter began taking care of Pax just a month or so after his mother died. Pax was a creature that Peter could love and get love from in the absence of his mother. Because Pax had come to Peter so soon after his mother’s death, it must have been doubly hard to leave his pet. Peter found Pax after he saw a fox that had been run over near the road. Thinking he needed to bury the animal, Peter had searched nearby to find Pax sleeping with his dead litter mates.

An important symbol is mentioned in this section. When Peter hears the coyotes howl, he becomes anxious because he connects their howls with one of the bad memories he has of his mother. He remembers how hurt his mother was when Peter and his father had caught a rabbit in a live trap. The rabbit had been eating his mother’s tulips. The poor rabbit died of fear because a coyote had been digging and sniffing around the trap. Peter had asked to spend the night outside the trap so he could see when the rabbit was caught. He believed if he had been there he could have run the coyote off and saved the rabbit. This story and Peter’s guilt over the dead rabbit will surface again later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

What mistakes did Peter make when preparing for his trip? What could he have done to better prepare?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the meeting between Pax and Bristle. How do they react to one another?

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean that Peter has broken his foot? What choice does he have for the rest of his journey?

Vocabulary

culvert, remnants, vixen, submission, crude, sedge, poised, venture, lobbing, piteously, perpendicular, unison



Chapters 7, 8, and 9

Summary

In Chapter 7, when Pax awoke and found Runt sleeping next to him, he tried to order Runt back to his den. Instead, Runt invited Pax to play. Pax gave Runt the toy soldier as a bribe to get him into his own den. Runt took it. Exploring outside the old den in which he had taken shelter, Pax saw the dominant male fox that Bristle had warned him about. Pax followed his own scent back to the road. He was hungry and thirsty. The older male fox walked up to him and sat down. He told Pax that he had lived with humans at one time as well. He showed Pax where to find water. Gray told Pax that Peter would not be able to get to him because the road was closed because the humans were coming, bringing war with them. Pax decided he would go to his home to look for Peter. Gray asked to go along to see if it was safe for the foxes to go south. Gray asks Pax if the people who live there were false acting. Pax said that his boy was not. He remembered an instance when Peter's father had acted falsely. Gray also asked if the humans Pax had lived with were careless. If they weren't, he said, war would make them careless. Gray told Pax they would leave to go south that night.

In Chapter 8, Peter awoke to the sound of a ball being hit against a glove. A woman was standing over him holding his mitt and ball. When Peter asked why she had his stuff, she said he was the one trespassing because he had broken into her barn. He told her he hurt his foot and had to find some place to stay after batting practice. She questioned why he did not have a bat. He told her it was because it was too heavy to carry around. The woman showed him the wooden leg that she carried around with her all the time. When she asked Peter again about his bat, Peter told her the truth, that he didn't have a bat.

The woman, whose name is Vola, told Peter she was a medic. She examined Peter's foot and said he had broken the outer bone in his foot. Vola got Peter to admit that he was running away. He told her that his father was in the war and that he was looking for his fox. When Vola suggested that Peter was angry, he denied that he was angry. He insisted that he needed to go and look for Pax. Vola told him that his plans had changed. She told him he had to call his grandfather to come and get him. When Vola went to get something for Peter's pain, he looked at all the tools in the barn as well as a piece of burlap that looked like it covered human heads.

The woman brought him willow bark mixed in cider, but Peter refused to drink it. She put a poultice on his foot and wrapped it in a scarf. She made crutches for him. When she could not find her knife, Peter admitted that he had taken it. He told her that he was afraid she was going to kill him. She told him that she used the tools to care for the trees on her property and to carve wood. She showed him how to walk on the crutches and gave him directions to a gas station. When Peter hesitated, she told him he needed to go while he was still safe.



In Chapter 9, Pax and Gray returned to Bristle and Runt. Runt was pleased to see him, but Bristle warned her brother to stay away. When Pax challenged her by saying that his humans were not dangerous, Bristle told him that all humans were dangerous. She prepared to relay the story of what had happened to their parents, a story that Pax knew would end with blood and a steel trap.

Analysis

Peter meets Vola. She becomes a very significant character in his coming of age story. Notice how Peter gets riled when Vola suggests that he is just a child. She first suggests he is only a child when she tries to think what she can give him for his pain that is legal. When Vola tells him he cannot go ahead with his plans to look for his fox until his foot heals because the trip would be impossible for a child, Peter again argues that he is not a child. He points out that he is almost thirteen. Despite his belief that he is a grown up, Peter harbors child-like fears of Vola. He first believes she is crazy, and then that she is crazy and wants to kill him. He even goes so far as to steal her knife believing that will keep her from killing him. Vola also points out to Peter that he allowed himself to be lied to if he believed that his 36 year old father had no choice but to go to war. Vola tells Peter only 18-20 years olds were drafted for service. If his father had left him to go into the service it was because he wanted to do so.

Notice the emphasis that Vola puts on telling the truth. She can sense when Peter is lying and manages to get the truth out of him. One significant thing she does learn about Peter is that he does not have a bat. The significance of the bat will be explained later. Once again, denies being angry when Vola suggests to him that he must be angry because he was forced to leave his fox behind.

The author also gives the reader more information about red foxes and their characteristics. Even though Gray is the dominant male in the area, he allows Pax to stay because Gray had lived among humans for a while. Gray asks Pax if his humans were deceitful and careless. Pax could remember a time when Peter's father was deceitful, but he could not remember Peter being that way. Meanwhile, there is a young male wolf who is threatening Gray because he hopes to win the admiration of Bristle. Gray tells Pax that Bristle would be expected to choose a mate that coming winter. Notice that the female fox is referred to as a vixen, the proper name for a female fox. Pax has a need to not displease Bristle. He knows she does not want Runt around him, so he tries to discourage Runt even though it seems the younger fox only wants a friend. Pax seems to feel guilty when he realizes Bristle is treating Runt badly because of him. Remember also in this section of the novel what Gray says to Pax about Bristle. Gray tells Pax that Bristle will never allow him to be part of her family. She will never welcome him, because he had lived with humans.

The effects of war as seen through the eyes of a fox is discussed. When Gray describes the humans who have moved into their area, he describes them as the "war-sick." Gray remembers a previous war and tells Pax that everything was ruined in that war. Animals were killed and everything burned. Even women and children were killed in the war.



Two symbols are mentioned, the baseball bat and Vola's wooden leg. The reader senses Peter's lack of a baseball bat is a sensitive subject to him when he first lies to Vola about why he does not have one. Vola's wooden leg is another important symbol in the novel. When Peter tells Vola that he did not bring his bat because it is too heavy to carry around, Vola tells him that her wooden leg is much heavier than a baseball bat but that she drags it around anyway.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Vola and Peter's first meeting. Do you think she is kind to him? Give reasons for your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Pax try to dissuade Runt from playing with him?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Gray's attitude toward Pax. Why is he able to accept Pax when Bristle is not?

Vocabulary

predators, rejuvenated, taut, comportment, feigning, deception, cocked, scythes, metatarsal, hoisted, hypothermia, convulsion, poultice, hackles, defiant, conjured



Chapters 10, 11, and 12

Summary

In Chapter 10, Peter had not gotten very far from Vola's house when he turned around and returned to her cabin. He told her he would not leave because he felt he was going the wrong way. He asked her to teach him how to get around on one leg and told her that he would do whatever she asked. He told her that even if Pax was dead, he wanted to bring him home to bury him. Whether he was dead or alive, he would not let her stop him from getting Pax. Vola agreed to help him as long as he met three conditions.

In Chapter 11, Bristle told the story of the death of her parents. They had gone to the humans' farm to try to get mice from the barn for their babies one winter when the snow did not melt. Bristle had been taken with her mother on the hunt. Before her mother made it to the barn, she was caught in a trap. Her father came to help Bristle's mother as Bristle and her sisters watched. Runt whimpered as his sister told the story. A human came and began beating the two foxes with a stick until they were dead. Bristle and her sister stayed hidden keeping vigil over what was left of their bodies. When they tried to return to their den, it was snowing again. They could not find their scent trail. Bristle's sister died that next morning. After she finished her story, she asked Runt why they did not have a family. Runt said it was because of humans. Even though Pax knew Peter was not like those humans, he showed sympathy to Bristle.

In Chapter 12, Vola gave Peter the conditions he needed to meet for her to help him. First, he had to write to his grandfather so that no one would come looking for him. She did not want anyone disturbing her peace. The second condition was that Peter had to tell her why he carried the bracelet with him. The third condition was that Peter would agree to help her with a project that she needed finished. He agreed.

Vola lived in a log cabin that was bright and clean. She set him to slicing bread for dinner while she cooked. When he continued to fuss because he wanted to go after Pax, Vola told him that he needed to accept the way things were and plot a new course. Meanwhile, Peter learned that Vola grew and canned her own food. She was irritated with him when he was not sure if he wanted cheddar or Swiss cheese on his sandwich. She insisted he had to know for sure. As he looked around the cabin, he realized that Vola did not have electricity. Vola told him she had a refrigerator, water heater, and gas stove. She explained she had peace there because she was doing exactly what she needed to be doing.

When he asked where she got her money, Vola told him she got money from the government for her injury. He learned she lost her leg when scouting in a minefield. Peter asked why she did not get a prosthetic leg,. Vola told him that the wooden leg was her form of self punishment. Before she went out to work in the garden, Vola told Peter he would have to share the porch with François Villon, a raccoon whom she had



befriended. She left him with orders to keep his leg elevated and let the swelling go down so she could set it that evening.

Analysis

Peter takes a big step in his road to maturity by standing up for what he believes is right for him. Even though Vola has tried to send him back to his grandfather's house, he refuses to go. He seems to earn Vola's respect when he tells her that he knows that going back to his grandfather's is not the right step for him. Even though Vola had referred to Peter as a child when she spoke to him before, she comes to this conclusion: "Well, you're twelve. That's old enough to know your own self, I expect. I'm not about to go messing with that. So all right" (p. 89).

Even though Peter has convinced Vola to let him stay with her and to help him learn to walk with the crutches, he does not have a good grasp on how long it will take for him to be able to go after Pax. Instead of sympathizing with him, Vola tells Peter that he needs to accept his current condition and learn to adapt. If Peter takes her advice to heart, the lesson will serve him well in life.

As Bristle tells the story of what happened to her and Runt's parents, the author continues to portray the foxes as being very family oriented. It appears from her description that foxes mate for life and that they are very dedicated to one another. This can be seen in the way that Bristle's father goes to help her mother when the fox gets caught in a trap. He stands by her even when the human begins to beat them both. Bristle and her sister stay with the remains of their parents even after they are dead.

Notice in this section what Vola says about the raccoon that she has befriended. She indicates to Peter that she leaves the porch door open for the raccoon and that he comes and goes freely. This idea of leaving the porch door open will come up again in the novel.

The symbolism of Vola's wooden leg is brought into the story. Even though she has a more modern prosthesis, Vola wears a handmade wooden leg. She tells Peter it is a form of self-punishment.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Peter senses a flash of fear on Vola's face when he tells her he will not go back to his grandfather's house?

Discussion Question 2

When Vola leaves Peter on the porch with the raccoon, she asks Peter if he is wild or tame. What do you think she means by this question?



Discussion Question 3

Consider what happened to Bristle's parents. Do you understand why she does not like humans? Do you think she is justified in taking her anger out on Pax?

Vocabulary

menaced, defied, rodents, consequential, pivoted



Chapters 13, 14, and 15

Summary

In Chapter 13, Pax was getting weak because he had not eaten in several days. He knew he would die soon if he did not get food. As Pax was looking for something to eat, Runt bounded into him. Runt sensed Pax was hungry and brought a worm, but Pax could not eat it without throwing up. Runt left again and brought a quail egg. Pax recognized eggs from his humans and was able to eat this gift. Runt kept bringing him eggs until Pax had eaten seven. Finally, Pax was able to sleep. Runt stood guard.

In Chapter 14, although Peter did not always like to talk about his mother when people asked, he found he was more comfortable talking about her to Vola when she asked about the charm bracelet. He said his mother had liked the phoenix charm because that bird was said to rise from its own ashes. His mother had believed the story taught that no matter how bad life got, a person could always make things right again. Vola did not respond to his story but told Peter he needed to go practice on his crutches outside. He got the feeling he might have said something wrong.

Peter was frustrated by the way everything in the cabin seemed to be just the way it should have been, even though he was not able to go after Pax. He took his frustration out on Vola who told him she was too busy trying to find her own answers to find his. Vola told Peter that he was angry, but Peter once again denied his anger and tried to fight it. He said he was just upset because he did not choose any of the things that had happened to him and his family. Vola again said he was angry, but Peter again denied his anger. He changed the subject by telling Vola she was in love with the word “dyableman,” a word he assumed was a curse word. Vola said it was a word her grandfather had always used. It had made her grandmother mad because she did not understand what it meant.

Vola sat across from Peter and kept eye contact with him. He admitted to her that he had hoped to be able to find Pax, his fox, in ten days. Now, he did not know how long it would take. Vola commented that Pax meant peace. Peter added it was ironic he had to give up the fox because of a war. Peter was ashamed of himself because he had not fought his father’s order to leave the fox. Peter had tried to stand up for himself at first. Then, he felt anger and realized his fists had come up when he had seen the anger in his father’s eyes and his father’s raised fist. Vola reached out and put both hands on Peter’s head. For a few minutes he felt like her hands were the only things keeping him from flying apart. After a few minutes, she told him that she was going to set the broken bone. Then, she was going to feed him until he asked her to stop.

He noticed Vola had cut up the quilt he’d seen on her bed in order to make his cast. He apologized for the comment he made about the philosophy cards she had tacked to her walls. She told him she actually kept the important ones in a different place. As she cooked Vola told Peter about her trip to a grocery store on the first day she was a



civilian. She'd almost had a breakdown because she couldn't remember what she liked to eat. She finally remembered she liked peanut butter sandwiches and bought a cartload of peanut butter and bread. She swore she wouldn't return until she had remembered something else she liked. Vola said others had told her she had PTSD but she believed she was sick because she'd forgotten everything that was true about herself.

It was when she was helping to clean out her grandfather's house after he went to a nursing home that Vola remembered she loved peaches. As she ate one of the peaches from the tree on her grandfather's property, she remembered a little piece of herself. She said while remembering what she liked to eat was a small detail she wanted to remember what was true about herself in her core. In regard to war she told Peter she was in favor of people know the costs of war. When she decided she needed to find more of herself, she moved into her grandfather's place and stay there until she'd gotten reacquainted with herself. Peter realized Vola was still living at her grandfather's place.

In Chapter 15, Gray told Pax they would travel two days before they reached human civilization. Pax thought of Peter as he and Gray walked. He had always smelled a hint of grief and yearning on Peter. Pax had tried to cheer Peter up whenever he sensed Peter was sad. As Pax and Gray continued on their journey they entered the territory of a competitor. This fox attacked Gray and bit him in the neck even though Gray tried to communicate to the other fox they were just passing through. Pax fought off the other fox and then urged Gray to go back but Gray would not do so. As they walked on Gray sensed the war was getting closer. Pax also felt the discord and coming danger.

When they stopped to rest Pax woke to the smell of roasting meat. It was coming from the war camp. Pax ran close. He determined Peter was not there. Even though the scent of danger was strong near the camp Pax went after the men had gone to bed. He found a discarded bone that still had meat and fat on it. While in the camp Pax saw a man he recognized. It was Peter's father.

Analysis

In prior sections Peter has not yet even acknowledged his anger. It is in this section when he remembers how he backed down when he recognized his father's anger in himself Peter gives his own anger issue a passing nod. It is perhaps his first baby step in acknowledging that he has the ability to be angry and be hurtful in that anger.

Peter almost loses control of himself and gives in to his anger when he thinks about how much time it will take to rehabilitate after breaking his foot and wonders if Pax will even still be alive when he is well enough to start after him. Although he doesn't physically hit like it appears his father did Peter does orally lash out at Vola. Even though Vola insists he is angry he insists that he isn't and struggles to push down his anger. Vola is patient but firm with him and doesn't lash back at him even though she does tell him that she doesn't have the answers for which he is looking. Notice that



Peter associates anger only with its negative consequences such as hurt feelings that no amount of apologies can ever repair.

When Peter and Vola discuss whether or not Pax could survive on his own in the wild Peter tells her that he doesn't think Pax could hunt because hunting is a skill taught to young foxes when they are about eight weeks old. Peter doesn't think Pax had a chance to learn to hunt because he was younger than eight weeks when Peter adopted him. Peter's comment that unless Pax ran into someone's picnic he'd starve is ironic because Pax did, in a way, run into a picnic being enjoyed by the army men. He swiped scraps from that picnic.

As Vola and Peter get to know one another Vola tells him about her feelings that war took away her true self. Some said she had PTSD but she thought she had just forgotten who she was. She had decided to live by herself in her grandparents' cabin until she could remember the person she was before she went to war. She criticizes the war and those who start wars because they never discuss the true costs of war. She wishes people were more truthful about the toll that wars took on people and their land.

As Gray and Pax continue to scout south they also talk about war. Gray tells Pax that the war will destroy everything in its path. Later in their travels even Pax notices how disturbed the crows are as they spread the news of the soldiers coming from the south. Their calls set Pax on edge. From the disorder he senses fire, smoke, death and a river running red with blood.

An important symbol is discussed in this section as Peter tells Vola about his mother's charm bracelet. The charm is in the shape of a phoenix, a creature that his mother said rose from its own ashes, a reborn creature able to start anew. Another symbol introduced is peanut butter, Pax's favorite treat.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of Runt's dedication to Pax. Why do you think the younger fox is trying so hard to befriend Pax?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Vola's ideas about the cause of her PTSD. Do you agree with her belief that PTSD comes from a loss of one's true self? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Talk about Peter's fear of his own anger. Why does he not insist that his father let him keep Pax? Why is he ashamed of himself?



Vocabulary

cache, rancid, exploratory, civilian, traction, acquire, superficial, discord, differentiate, cant, redolent



Chapters 16, 17, and 18

Summary

After two days of working Peter hard with his crutches, Vola decided it was time to tell Peter about the third condition. She pointed toward the barn and told him he was going to work some puppets for her. She removed the piece of burlap from the wall that had covered what he thought were human heads the first day he had been with Vola. Now he saw that they were very lifelike marionettes. There were several humans as well as animals. One was a bird that had a wing span of almost five feet.

She told him the story of how she killed an enemy soldier during war. She remembered this particular soldier because she had to search him after he was dead. Instead of looking for weapons, she found herself trying to find out what had made that soldier an individual. She found the book "The Seven Voyages of Sinbad" on the corpse. In the book's story, Sinbad escaped the Roc (the bird's nest) and made his way back home. Since the soldier had marked the story, Vola decided that the story had been significant to the soldier. She had carved puppets to tell the story of the scene as a way to pay the soldier back for what she believed she had taken from him. She wanted Peter to help her see what the play was like from the audience's point of view.

In Chapter 17, even though Gray had been resting from his wound for two days, his condition had not improved. Pax tried to catch food for Gray, but he was unsuccessful. He swam across the river and watched the humans as they unrolled wires, dug holes, and buried boxes attached to the wires. He had memorized their routine. As soon as he was sure they were all occupied and away from the food tent, he made a run for that tent. He grabbed a ham. After eating and burying some of the ham, Pax headed back to Gray with some of the meat. He could smell an electrical scent he hated coming from the wires. Looking toward where he had left the older fox, Pax saw Gray walk out and trip. There was an explosion. The humans were excited and ran to the area where the explosion had taken place. When they went back to their camp, Pax went to Gray. He was just barely alive. Pax stayed with him until he died and then ran back to Bristle, Runt and Gray's mate. They knew Gray was dead before Pax told them. Pax told Gray's mate about Gray's final hours. Bristle also learned it was not safe for them to go south. Pax went back south, but Bristle attempted to stop him. He would not listen.

In Chapter 18, Vola continued to ask Peter to work with the marionettes. Peter resented the work because it did not get him closer to Pax. He still did not have the hang of the strings. The puppets' motions looked twitchy. Vola demonstrated for him how he should work the puppets. When Peter still balked, Vola took Sinbad apart using a screwdriver. She told Peter to put him back together. By doing so, he would understand better how the puppet worked. Even though her advice was right, Peter still had trouble with the bird. He believed that if he could read the story himself he might better understand what he was trying to portray. When he pulled out the book Vola kept hidden in the barn, he found a small box hidden in the niche. Inside the box were Vola's private philosophy



cards. Even though Peter tried to get the box closed before looking at them, he noticed the top one bore Vola's belief that she would have been a good teacher.

When Vola returned to the barn, Peter asked if they could go ahead and perform the play. Vola told him they needed to build a stage first. Even though he was frustrated with her, Peter watched what Vola was doing. He was amazed as she made a new handle for her hoe. He asked her if she would show him how to make something from the wood. When he told her that he wanted to make a fox, she said that the first step was finding the right piece of wood. As she talked about the different types of wood, Peter volunteered that white ash was a good wood from which to make bats. Vola again questioned why he did not have a bat. Peter knew that if he did have a bat he would always see broken blue glass over white roses every time he picked it up. He knew the vision would eventually destroy him. To change the subject, Peter selected a piece of wood he thought would be good for carving a fox. Before he went to sleep that night, Peter thought of both his mother and Pax. As he studied the block of wood he had chosen, he saw the fox in it.

Analysis

The fact that Peter does not have a baseball bat is discussed again by Vola and him. Peter tries to make it appear as if he really does not need a bat. In reality, he does not have one because he associates the bat he had with a bad memory. He believes that if he ever has a bat again it will remind him of broken blue glass on white roses. The reader can infer that Peter broke something with a bat that caused him shame. That shame still haunts him.

Notice that the symbolism of the baseball bat is very similar to the symbolism of Vola's wooden leg. Vola wears her heavy wooden leg because she wants to remind herself of the pain that she caused another. She believes she is punishing herself by keeping the memory close in her mind. Peter, on the other hand, also associates his bat with causing another pain. Instead of keeping a bat with him to remind him daily of this pain, Peter has discarded the symbol of his pain. He believes that if he ever owns another bat the guilt he feels about what he did with the bat will overcome him.

Peter is very sensitive. He remembers a time when he was punished by his father for taking Pax to school without permission. Even though he was sent home from school in addition to getting his father's punishment, the punishments did not have the most effect on Peter. The thing that discouraged him from taking the fox to school again was the way the visit had scared and upset Pax. Peter learned more because he was scared he had hurt Pax than from the fear of punishment.

Pax gets an up close look at the effects of war as his friend, Gray, is killed by a landmine. He had been watching the humans bury these mines and attach them to electrical wires. So, there was no doubt to Pax that the humans were responsible. He notes how the humans get excited about the destruction they caused when the mine went off. Notice also how differently Bristle responds to him when he returns with the



news that Gray is dead and that it is not safe for them to go south. She had tried to run him away before. Gray had gone so far as to tell Pax he would never be accepted by Bristle because he had lived among humans. When Pax leaves Bristle and Runt to head back to the war camp, Bristle tries to convince him to stay with them, but he refuses. Earlier he had realized that he would be allowed to stay with them if he wanted to do so, but he feels more strongly pulled toward trying to help Peter. It appears that Pax finally believes himself worthy of Runt's affection because he allows the smaller fox to groom him and sleep with him, acts that he had not permitted before.

Vola talks more about some of the effects that war had on her. Her most upsetting experience came when she killed an enemy soldier and then had to search his body. It was at this point that Vola realized she and the others were fighting against real people. She was killing people with real lives and real dreams for their lives. She tells Peter that when young people sign up to join the army they are not told they are signing a contract that states they will kill or be killed. Just as Peter had earlier thought his father had no choice but to fight in the war, he believes his father's words that he would not be among the men who were doing the active fighting. He tells Peter he would be doing basically what he did as a civilian which was laying wires. The reader knows from Pax's section of the novel that Peter's father didn't necessarily tell Peter the truth. Peter's father is laying wires, but those wires are attached to land mines set to kill the enemy.

Vola made an earlier comment to Peter about how she could tell a lot about a person by what he decided to carry into battle. She used this reference with him when she asked about the charm bracelet that he carried with him. Vola probably came up with this idea when she was in the war and tried to put together a picture of the life of the soldier she killed by what she found on him. When Peter told Vola about the charm bracelet, she got very quiet. He thought he had said something wrong to her, but her silence was because she was comparing the story he told about his mother to the story she wanted him to help her tell. She was weighing in her mind how he might be even better suited to help her tell her story than she had originally thought.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the change in Bristle's attitude toward Pax. What do you think brings about this change? Support your answer with examples from the novel.

Discussion Question 2

Peter's father lied to him about volunteering to serve in the war and not being in active combat. Why do you think Peter's father lied?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the damage done to Vola because of the war. In your opinion, what might a person feel after having killed an enemy soldier during a war? Do you think the penance she chose is appropriate?

Vocabulary

niche, brandishing, caches, reproach, relented



Chapters 19, 20, and 21

Summary

In Chapter 19, Pax ran all the way back to the place where he had left Gray's body. He saw the camp was empty and realized the men had taken to their trenches. He sensed they were anxious. He swam the river and made his way to a granite slab where he could see what he needed to see. He was careful to dodge the wires. He began chewing one of the wires that was draped across the granite and was attacked from behind by Bristle. Bristle tells him he should leave the wires for the other humans to find. Pax suddenly realized another fox was in the area. When he saw the animal, he knew it was Runt. Bristle tried to get Runt to stop but it was too late. Even though Pax tried again to chew through the wire, Runt tripped one of the mines. Pax was blown from the rock and one of his teeth was broken. When he was finally able to breathe into his scorched lungs again, he realized he could not hear. He continued to bark and call for Runt and Bristle. His hearing slowly returned. It was an hour before he was able to locate his friends. Bristle's only injury was a burned tail. Runt lay beneath her. He was breathing, but he was missing one of his hind legs.

In Chapter 20, even though Peter thought he was ready to continue his search for Pax, Vola had taken his crutches away from him and had ordered him to elevate his foot. She had given him some tools to clean in the meantime. When Vola walked up behind him, Peter said he was worried about Pax, but he also believed that Pax might be okay because he might be smart enough to figure out how to take care of himself. He tells a story about how Pax he chewed through the wiring of a fan that had a short in it. Peter believed the fox had chewed the wire in order to protect Peter. Peter also shared with Vola he believed he would know if Pax was dead, that sometimes he felt the same thing the fox was feeling. Vola said the idea was a Buddhist idea that everything was connected. Peter asked Vola if she thought it was possible that Pax was alive, and she said yes. He knew she meant it because she always stressed the importance of telling the truth.

Peter also asked Vola if she believed an inherited wild trait could be overcome. Peter realized he did not really want to know the answer, and Vola did not give him one. Instead, she asked if he always depended on someone else to answer his questions for him. Peter recognized when Vola was baking muffins for him the night before that she had seemed happy. He asked her why she was still living by herself even after twenty years. After he asked her to tell him the truth, she told him it was because she knew herself well enough to realize that she had the ability to hurt others. She did not want to do so. Peter tried to comfort her by telling her that he knew in his core that she would not hurt him.

After Vola left Peter alone in the barn, Peter became anxious. He wished that he could be on his way to find Pax. Vola kept putting off building the stage though so he couldn't complete the third condition. He realized he would have to take matters into his own



hands and make the stage himself, so he did so. Vola was surprised when he told her that he had finished the stage but agreed to watch his production that night. He begged to be allowed to leave afterward, but Vola said he had to pass a challenge first. He was to hike five miles, make a camp on one leg, and then hike five miles back. If he could do that she would clear him to go search for Pax. As he watched her clean a chicken, however, Peter realized that after he left Vola would do nothing different with her life but would go on living the same way she had.

In Chapter 21, Pax and Bristle kept watched over Runt until he finally awoke. Bristle lay beside her brother and watched while Pax carefully cleaned Runt's wound. Bristle worried because the humans were so close to where they were hidden. She told Pax they were not safe if even one human was around. Pax argued that Peter was different, and it was not just because he was young. He tried to help Bristle understand that when Peter had gotten older he still cared for Pax, even though he was hurting himself. Pax was confused by Peter's action of throwing the toy into the woods to get Pax to follow it and then leaving.

Analysis

Peter and Pax both take a step toward coming of age in this section. Peter's biggest movement toward maturity comes when he changes his focus from himself and his own desires to Vola and her situation. He recognizes how she has walled herself off from society. He does not believe she is the weapon of hurt which she believes herself to be. Peter has seen how his new friend seems to enjoy taking care of him and worries that when he leaves she will go back to her life of solitude, just as she had lived before they met.

Previously, Pax had not allowed himself to think that Peter had the ability to be like other humans, he recognizes a flaw in his boy in this section. As he and Bristle talk about the dangers of humans, Pax tries to convince her that his boy is not bad. A bit of Pax remains unconvinced, however, when he thinks that Peter was false acting when he threw the toy into the woods and then did not wait for Pax to return with it. Without having been separated from Peter, Pax never would have made friends with Runt or Bristle. He also would not be learning how to be a fox and how to take care of himself. Even though Pax sees Peter's action as a sign that he could be false acting, Peter's treatment of Pax was really for his own good even though neither of them realized it at the time.

Pax's compassion for Bristle grows as he sees how Runt's injury affects her. Runt is the only member of her family that she has left after the humans kill her parents and she watched the rest of her siblings die. Now the humans have hurt Runt as well. Even though Bristle tries to keep Pax from chewing through the wires on the land mines, hoping they would kill the humans, she is now more accepting of him after she realizes these land mines are hurting the foxes as well. Bristle no longer runs Pax away from Runt. She now allows him to look after the smaller fox.



Peter realizes that he is not really interested in learning how to tame his anger. He realizes this when he asks Vola if there is any way for a person born with an inherited trait of wildness to overcome this trait. Vola criticizes him for expecting her to have the answers for him. In a way he is glad she did not give him an answer because he realizes he is still not ready to deal with his own anger.

In an earlier chapter, Peter indicates that he sometimes feels that Pax has eaten and that Pax is safe. Peter has referred to this phenomena as a way in which his soul and Pax's souls merged to the point he could feel what the fox was feeling, even without being physically close enough to him to know for sure. It is in this section of the novel that Vola gives the concept a name. She calls it "two but not two" and tells Peter it is a concept from Buddhism. The Buddhists believed that even things that seemed to be separate were often connected to one another.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the concept of "two but not two." How do you think it relates to Peter and Pax?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Bristle not want Pax to chew the wires to the landmines?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Pax's realization that Peter has the ability to be false acting. What does this mean for their relationship?

Vocabulary

slaked, eddied, sheathing, crest, menacing, vital



Chapters 22, 23, and 24

Summary

In Chapter 22, as Peter prepared to put on the puppet show for Vola he realized that she was right about being a good teacher. He thought she was wrong, however, about being too dangerous to be around anyone. When Vola came into the barn, Peter was surprised because she was wearing a purple skirt and had combed her hair. He wondered if he was about to do the right thing. Instead of telling the story of Sinbad, he told Vola's story. After he was finished, she sat with tears streaming down her face. Peter apologized and told her that he only wanted to make her understand that she was not dangerous. He tried to explain to her what he was trying to say, but she said she knew what he was saying. She asked him to leave her alone. Back in the cabin Peter lit the lamps and laid a fire. He did not want Vola to come back to a cold, dark cabin. He thought back over the play, but he could not think of anything he had said in it that had not been the truth. There was nothing he regretted.

As he crumpled more newspaper for the fire, he noticed a headline about the war. He quickly put his things in his bag, leaving the charm bracelet where Vola would find it. She was coming in as he left. He told her the place where the army was closing off was close to where he had left Pax. As he described how he knew the place because he and his friends used to play war there, his words caught in his throat. Vola discourages his trip telling him it is crazy since the war is there and he is only on one leg. She shows him the map, telling him that her friend Robert Johnson the bus driver could take him to a city closer to where Pax was left. It would leave him only about 40 miles to cover on foot. He said they had a deal on three conditions.

In Chapter 23, Pax was hungry again. He had dug up the ham he had hidden and given it to Bristle and Runt but hadn't eaten any himself. He made another trip to the food tent in the human's camp. He found a hunk of cheese and ate some himself before preparing to leave with some for Bristle but stopped when he smelled peanut butter coming from the trash can. When he retrieved the jar from the can the lid fell alerting one of the humans. Pax went under a table when a man he recognized came in. It was Pax's father. He crouched and looked at Pax who had the peanut butter jar clamped in his jaws. He laughed and raised the flap of the tent, motioning for Pax to leave.

When Pax arrived at the spot where he had left Bristle and Runt, the smaller fox was trying to get up. Pax recognized that he needed water. When Runt tried to get up he realized one of his legs was gone. He was able to get up only with Pax helping to support his back quarters. When Runt got his balance, Pax helped him walk to the water. After he drank all he needed Runt closed his eyes to sleep but Bristle woke him indicating he needed to go back to cover. He followed her slowly and clumsily. Both Bristle and Pax were startled by a loud crashing made by a deer in the woods but Runt didn't notice. The deer tripped a land mine and Runt screamed in fear. Bristle told Pax



they had to leave. She called Runt to follow her, but he did not pay any attention. Pax realized Runt could not hear.

In Chapter 24, Vola filled Peter's pack with food and supplies the next morning. He noticed she was wearing her prosthetic leg and was surprised. She reminded him it had been condition number one. Vola was not sure what to do with the old one, so Peter suggested that they burn it in the fire, just like the phoenix. He asked her if she was okay with the other two conditions as well. She said she would not be sure until they got to the library but that she already had the marionettes loaded on the tractor.

Before he left, Vola handed Peter a bat she had made. As he held it he remembered his anger as a seven-year-old. He had use the bat to break his mother's blue glass gazing globe in the garden. He could remember his mother telling him that he needed to learn to control his anger. She did not want him to be like his father. When he picked up his pack, Peter noticed the newspaper clipping lying on the table. The clipping had been underneath the pack. He noticed the date and realized that when they had dropped Pax off his father had know the location Peter chose was the spot where the fighting would be.

Vola tried to calm him by telling him that she knew he was angry, but Peter again denied that he was angry. He said he did not get angry because it was too dangerous. Vola advised him that would be a problem as all humans got angry. She said anger could be used constructively but a person had to learn to tame his anger. He begged Vola for a piece of wisdom he could take with him. She said it was his trip, not hers. She did give him a blank index card. She told him that he would find some truth about himself to put on it during the course of his trip. Peter felt as if he had been on his own for far too long. Vola advised him that even though he was on his own he would not be alone as he took his trip. She kissed his hair and told him he would not get lost because he had been found.

On the tractor ride into town, Peter asked Vola about the feathers that she always wore around her neck. She explained that when she was born she had reminded her parents of a bird. All of the cultures in her background were people who revered birds, so they named her Vola which meant fly in Italian. Peter gave Vola some privacy when she presented the marionettes to the librarian. As he wandered outside, he happened to run into the shortstop he had talked to earlier. The boy got angry with Peter when Peter asked how the game had gone. Before he could leave, Peter asked if the boy if he thought the feeling he got on the field was the feeling of peace. The boy glared at him at first but later turned and shot him a peace sign.

Back inside the library, Vola tried to leave after the librarian had taken all of the puppets out of the boxes. Peter reminded her that she has another condition to fulfill before she could leave. Vola went back and told the librarian she would come twice a week to teach the children how to work the puppets. A girl stopped Vola as she was leaving and asked her how to make the elephant dance. Vola told her that she would be back to help her do it.



Peter and Vola grabbed Peter's pack. They had just enough time to make it to the bus station to buy a ticket. When Vola talked to the bus driver, Peter was surprised that she referred to him as family. He questioned her about the reference, but she said that she had never made a truer statement. As the bus was pulling away, she hollered to him that she would leave the porch door open for him.

Analysis

Although Peter is afraid he has hurt Vola by telling her the truth about herself in his play, he does not regret what he has done. All the kind things that Vola has done for Peter have made an impression on him. Even though she has treated him roughly at times, she has also taken extra steps to see that he has been well taken care of. In exchange for her help, Peter lights the lamps in the cabin and lays a fire when he returns to the cabin after having put on the play for her. He has decided that the least he can do is to ensure that she does not return to a dark, cold cabin. Peter prepares to leave when he sees the newspaper headline and realizes the war is close to the place where he left Pax. He leaves his mother's charm bracelet where Vola can find it.

The bracelet's image of the phoenix rising from the ashes is one that is repeated several times in these chapters. Peter uses this image to show Vola that she can create a new version of herself, just as the phoenix does. When they discuss what should be done with Vola's wooden leg, Peter suggests they burn it in the fireplace. This is a good decision since it means Vola will not be able to easily go back to using her old reminder of her guilt. It is also a physical symbol of the changes that Peter hopes that Vola will make in her life.

When Peter gets on the bus to look for Pax, Vola says two things to him that show how much he has come to mean to her. First, she tells the bus driver that Peter is her family. Even though Peter is not technically family, Vola has grown close enough to him that she feels the reference passes for the truth. Vola also tells Peter she will leave the porch door open for him. Remember these words from Vola and Peter's discussion about the raccoon that lived with her. She left the porch door open for him. This indicates that Peter, like the raccoon, is not required to come back, but he is always welcome.

Peter finally talks to Vola about his anger. He realizes how dangerous and hurtful anger can be and believes the only way to avoid hurting people with his anger is to try to deny that emotion. Like Peter, Vola has struggled with a bit of this herself. Though it was not anger that caused her to kill the enemy soldier, Vola still fears a part of herself that can hurt others. For this reason she has decided to stay away from everyone in hopes of never hurting anyone again. Vola recognizes, however, there is no way to run from one's anger. She tells Peter that he needs to learn to tame that anger and to realize that anger can be used for good as well as bad.

This recognition that anger can be used for good as well as bad is important because Peter learns how many lies his father told him about the war. Peter is upset when he



realizes the fighting is taking place in the area where they dropped off Pax. He is even more upset when he looks more closely at the newspaper which described the location of the evacuated area and realized that his father knew the area would be in the middle of the fighting when they left Pax there.

Significant in this section of the novel is the encounter between Pax and Peter's father. When Peter's father scouts the food tent to see what made the noise, he immediately recognizes Pax. One reason he is able to recognize the fox so quickly is because Pax is holding a jar of peanut butter in his mouth, one of Pax's favorite treats. From the way Peter describes his father's relationship with the fox, it seems like his his father does not like Pax. However, Peter's father allows Pax to leave the tent with the peanut butter jar without hurting him.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the conditions that Peter gives Vola for staying one more night with her.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the ways that Peter's father lied to him. How would you feel about these lies? Why does it make it so important that Vola is always careful to tell him the truth?

Discussion Question 3

How does Pax earn Bristle's respect in this section of the novel?

Vocabulary

apprentice, ambush, canted, sated, hefted, treacherous, revered, penance, hermit



Chapters 25, 26, and 27

Summary

In Chapter 25, Pax was so anxious that he was digging as he stood watch over Runt. When Bristle returned, Pax walked out. He sensed that something was coming. Bristle took Pax to show him how to hunt. It took him a while to get the hang of hunting but he finally caught his first mouse. He was so happy he celebrated by jumping off a tree branch the way he'd seen Runt do. In his joy he shared his peanut butter jar with Bristle and Runt. After she finished, Bristle allowed Pax to groom her. As it got darker Pax sensed a dangerous animal. He ordered Runt into the den.

In Chapter 26, as Peter tried to walk past the guard station, he was stopped. He had been successful in his trip so far as he had made his way through deserted towns. The only living things there were the animals people had left behind. When Peter told the guard he was going after someone that was left behind, someone that was not a person, the guard assumed it was a dog. Because he had a dog himself the guard allowed Peter to go past. When Peter got to the spot where he left Pax, he called but got no answer. He continued to walk looking for the toy soldier Pax had been holding in his mouth. As he walked, it occurred to Peter that Pax might have tried to go home to find him. Peter headed for the old mill knowing he could find his way from there.

In Chapter 27, Pax woke with the realization that Peter was close. He did not see him anywhere, but he sensed he was coming.

Analysis

The idea of inseparability is the main thought in these short chapters. As Peter looks for Pax in the spot where he left the fox, he realizes that Pax had never considered that they were not inseparable. "Pax would never have thought he'd been abandoned — they were inseparable. Pax had known it all along. Peter was the one who'd had to learn it" (p. 243). Realizing that Pax would never have thought that Peter would have abandoned him, Peter decides that his fox has gone home looking for him. He does not realize what he is headed toward when he reaches the area of the old mill.

The author notes how highly sensitive foxes are. Even though Pax has not seen or smelled Peter yet, he knows he is near. Pax is anxious knowing that Peter is headed toward danger.

Also take note of the guard's warning to Peter that there were coyotes in the woods. Remember that when Peter heard the coyotes howl at his grandfather's house, he became anxious thinking about how he had not been able to protect the baby rabbit caught in the cage against the coyote. His mother had been upset that the rabbit had died. The coyotes, which are a symbol of Peter's memory of the time he hurt his mother, will become significant again.



Discussion Question 1

In a real war, how likely do you think it would be that a guard would let a young boy into a war zone?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Pax's ability to realize that Peter is near even though he cannot see him or smell him yet. Why is this significant?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbol of the toy soldier as it is presented in this section of the novel. Why is Peter looking for it? What does he think it will prove if he finds it?

Vocabulary

perimeter, cleft, primitive, vantage, composure, barricade, ominous



Chapters 28, 29, and 30

Summary

In Chapter 28, as Peter walked he felt that Pax traveled that same path. He stopped out of exhaustion but soon started again when he thought he saw a coyote in the woods. It took him an hour to climb a rock wall, but once he was finished he stopped to eat. He could not eat the peanut butter sandwich Vola had put in his bag. It reminded him too much of Pax. He thought about the abandoned animals he had seen and thought about what Vola had said about the costs of war. As he had been lost in thought, it had begun to get dark. He got up too quickly and one of his crutches slipped. He fell onto it and heard a snap. He believed he had broken a rib but realized his crutch had broken. He used the baseball bat to repair the crutch. He decided he had gone far enough for the night and made camp there.

In Chapter 29, when Pax returned to the den the next morning after hunting, he found Bristle and Runt playing together. Pax joined them until Bristle jumped up in fear. A coyote was coming. Bristle ordered Pax to guard her brother and then tried to lure the coyote away from that area. Pax knew Bristle would fight to the death to keep the coyote away from her brother. He ordered Runt to stay in the den and went to help Bristle.

In Chapter 30, Peter was shocked when he saw the place where he and his friends had once played. Nothing was recognizable except the old mill. The trees were not gone were singed. The river was a muddy mess. Peter saw vultures circling and checked out those three places. At the third, he found a fox's hind leg. He thought it might be too small to be Pax's, but he wasn't sure. As he tried to bury the leg, he found the toy soldier.

Analysis

Remember in Chapter 26 that Peter had been looking for the toy soldier that he had thrown to Pax on the day that he and his father left him. He believed it would be solid proof that his fox had been in the area. When Peter finds the toy next to a fox's hind leg, it is not the type of proof he had wanted. Even though Peter believes the leg he found might be too small to be Pax's, there is still the lingering fear that his fox is dead or has been badly injured. The reader knows that Pax is alive and well, but the fear and anxiety can still be felt as Peter tries to find Pax.

It is finally in this section of the novel that Peter admits to himself that he felt abandoned by his mother when she died. He admits this because he connects with the abandoned animals he sees as he walks through the evacuated towns. "He wished he could tell them that he knew how it felt to have the one person who had loved you and taken care of you suddenly vanish" (p. 250). When he thinks about how Vola told him that people



should be honest about the costs of war he wonders if the abandoned animals and children who lost parents because of the war were not also part of the war costs.

The story climaxes as Pax arrives at the old mill's former location. He is torn between his desire to protect Runt and his need to help Bristle fight off the coyote. He also senses Peter is close and worries his boy will be hurt. If Peter goes to Pax's location, he will find himself in the middle of a fight between the foxes and a coyote. Remember that the coyote is a symbol of one of Peter's bad memories of his mother. He believed he had disappointed her because he failed to protect a rabbit from a coyote.

Discussion Question 1

Research foxes and coyotes. How might a fox fare in a fight against a coyote? Does Bristle have any chance at all?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss what Peter sees when he first arrives at the abandoned rope mill.

Discussion Question 3

Consider the abandoned animals that Peter sees as he walks through the evacuated towns. Do you believe these animals are among the ill effects of war? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

plateau, immensity, pistoning, levered, diverted, eddies, obliterated, keeled



Chapters 31, 32, 33, and 34

Summary

In Chapter 31, Pax joined Bristle's fight against the coyote. Just as he was creeping toward the coyote, he heard Peter's voice. The coyote called. Two more coyotes joined the fight. Even though Bristle yowled a threat, Pax could see the terror in her eyes. He heard Peter call him again. This time ran to the ridge line. He could see the soldiers running toward a figure that Pax thought was Peter, but this boy stood with his head high and faced the soldiers in defiance. He saw one man, whom he thought was Peter's father, run toward Peter and hug him. Pax had never seen that happen either. Smelling the coyotes, Pax ran back to help Bristle.

In Chapter 32, Peter let his father hug him but suddenly realized what was happening. He accused his father of knowing what was going to happen there but letting him leave Pax at the abandoned mill anyway.

In Chapter 33, Pax came back to the ridge in time to see Peter raise Runt's leg above his head. When Peter cried out Pax's name again, Pax barked in response.

In Chapter 34, Peter thought he heard a responding bark but was afraid to hope. Peter gave his father the fox leg with orders to bury it. He went to the place where he had heard Pax bark, even though his father warned him about wires. He saw Pax complete and unharmed with all four legs. As Peter neared Pax, Pax ran away into the trees. Peter followed. Pax led him to a clearing and then stopped. He took Peter's wrist in his teeth and then let go to race toward a tree. Peter saw two coyotes circling the tree.

Once he got closer he saw the female fox in the tree. He understood that Pax and the female were working together, but they could not defeat the coyotes. Peter shouted at the coyotes, but they ignored him. When one bit Pax on the neck, Peter threw his crutch at the tree. It was extra heavy with the weight of the bat. Both coyotes ran but one came back. Peter yelled again swinging his crutch over his head. The second coyote ran.

Peter sat shaking, and Pax was on him licking and smelling him. Bristle leaped out of the tree and disappeared into the brush. A few minutes later Peter saw a smaller fox enter the clearing. He was small and walked on only three legs. Bristle was encouraging him on. Peter realized the leg he had found had belonged to this smaller fox. Runt hobbled to Pax as Peter offered his hand. He allowed Peter to touch his neck before running back to Bristle. Even though it hurt Peter, he knew that Pax had a new family. He encouraged his fox to go with them. He told Pax he would always leave the porch door open for him and pulled the toy soldier out of his pocket. Pax watched as Peter threw the toy into the woods.



Analysis

Significant in this section is that Peter won this round with his anger. He had every right to be angry with his father for not telling him that the soldiers would be laying land mines near the area that Peter thought would be safest for Pax. Peter uses the opportunity to tell his father that he has responsibilities of his own of which he needs to take care. He had let his father talk him into abandoning Pax once and did not intend to allow it again.

Notice that when Pax sees Peter for the first time he does not recognize him. Not only has Peter gotten stronger with his time of working with Vola, he has also gained self-confidence. Instead of walking with his head down, Pax notices that Peter's head is up. Even though he is faced with a whole group of men with guns, Peter faces them defiantly. This is the first time that Pax has seen Peter show defiance.

Coyotes had caused Peter anxiety because it had saddened his mother when a coyote caused the death of a baby rabbit after Peter and his father trapped it in a cage. Peter had felt that if he was around he could have run the coyote off and saved the rabbit. Here Peter faces a similar situation. His fox, along with another one, is being threatened by coyotes. Peter uses his crutches, the only weapons that he has at his disposal, to frighten the coyotes away. It is as if it is a "do over" for Peter. He was able to face the coyote that had killed the rabbit so long ago. In this second chance, Peter scares away the coyotes and saves Pax and Bristle.

Bristle shows that she understands Peter is not like all humans by bringing Runt to meet Peter. When Pax first met Bristle, she wanted to protect her brother from the scent of Peter. Now she accepts that she was wrong in her blanket comment about humans. She shows that she knows she can trust Peter by bringing her brother, the only family she has left, into contact with him.

Even though Peter had believed that he and Pax were inseparable, he realizes that Pax and his new family are also inseparable. He knows it would not be right for him to take Pax away from them even if it would mean that Pax would be protected from all of the dangers of the forest. Peter shows his new maturity when he sends Pax back into the woods with his new family. Peter tells Pax, just like Vola had told him, that he will leave the porch door open for him.

Discussion Question 1

What does Bristle's act of bringing Runt to meet Peter mean? Why is her action significant?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Peter's encounter with his father. How had they both changed? Does Peter handle his anger with his father well? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss Peter's decision to allow Pax to stay with his family. How have both Peter and Pax changed since the beginning of the novel? How have they stayed the same?

Vocabulary

converging, menacing, cordite, keen, begrudge, levered



Characters

Peter

Peter is the central character. His story begins when he is forced by his father to abandon the fox that he raised from a kit. Peter's father was going away with his military unit. He told Peter that he would have to stay with his grandfather for at least six months. Peter's father told him he would have to release Pax into the wild because he could not take him to his grandfather's house. After Peter settles in at his grandfather's house, Peter realizes he was wrong to let his father make him abandon Pax. Peter runs away from his grandfather's house. He is determined to find Pax.

Shortly after he begins his trek to find Pax, Peter breaks his foot. When Vola finds Peter hiding out in her barn, she first makes arrangements to send Peter back to his grandfather. Peter realizes he is not going in the right direction and persuades Vola to help him heal from his fracture and build up his strength to look for Pax. While he is staying with Vola, she recognizes Vola is not a danger to anyone, as she believes. He convinces her to stop wearing the peg leg she has been using the leg as a punishment to herself. He also arranges for her to use her puppet making talent to help local children.

One of the aspects of his personality that Peter must face during his journey is his anger. On the day his mother died in a car wreck, Peter had used his baseball bat to break a glass gazing globe in the garden because he was angry. His mother had warned him that he needed to get his anger under control. She told him she did not want him to be like his father. Peter has taken this advice to heart. However, instead of realizing that anger could be a good thing, Peter tries to deny his anger. It is only when Vola helps him to understand that everyone has anger, but they must learn to control their anger.

When Peter makes his way to the area where he left Pax, he discovers that his father is part of the active fighting, not just laying wires like he said he would be. When Peter tells his father that Pax is his responsibility and he intends to take care of him, he finally uses his anger in a constructive way. Peter also expresses his anger to his father for lying to him about his role in the war, as well as not telling Peter that they were setting Pax free in an area where troops would be fighting actively.

Pax

Pax is the fox that was raised by Peter from a kit. Peter found Pax just a short while after his mother died in a car wreck. He took care of the kit for nearly five years until his father made him give up the fox because Peter would be going to live with his grandfather while his father was in the war. After Pax is dropped off in the woods, he believes that Peter will come back to get him. He waits for Peter until Gray makes him



understand that Peter will not come for him because the road has been shut down. When he goes south with Gray he learns that soldiers, including Peter's father, are laying land mines in hopes of killing the enemy when they come to try to claim the river.

Pax takes care of Gray after he is injured by another fox, but the older fox dies when he trips a land mine. Pax stays with Gray until he dies. Then, he goes back to the others to tell them about what happened to Gray. He has begun to earn Bristle's respect at this point. She completely trusts him after he cares for her and Runt after Runt is injured by a land mine. When Pax sees Peter again at the conclusion of the novel, he recognizes that his friend has grown up and gained confidence while they were apart. Even though Pax still loves his human friend, he decides to stay with Bristle and Runt.

Peter's Father

Peter's father volunteers to go off to fight in the war and decides to leave his son with his father. Peter's father makes Peter leave Pax in the wood near an abandoned rope mill before Peter goes to stay with his grandfather. Peter is later angry with his father both because his father knew the war was coming to the same area where they dropped off Pax. He was also angry because his father told him that he would not be in the combat zone. He would be laying wire. Peter learned differently when he found himself in the war zone when he went to find Pax. When he was living with Peter's father, Pax noticed the man doing several things that seemed deceitful to the fox. Peter's father spoke calmly to Peter before Peter let Pax go, but Pax got the feeling that the man was lying to Peter. Pax had also seen an encounter between Peter's father and Peter's therapist in which he felt that Peter's father was hiding his true feelings and was on edge, even though the woman with whom he was talking seemed concerned about Peter.

Bristle

Bristle is Runt's older sister. She is highly protective of her younger, smaller brother because he is the only member of her family that she has left. Bristle hates humans because it was a human who killed her mother and father when her mother went to a barn in an attempt to get food for her family and got caught in a trap. Bristle's father had been trying to help his wife get free from the trap when the human found them and beat them to death. When Bristle first met Pax, she did not like him because he smelled like humans. Gray told Pax that Bristle would never accept him because he had lived with humans. At first, Bristle discouraged Runt from being friends with Pax. Bristle did come to trust and accept Pax after he proved himself to her by taking care of Gray and staying with him until he died after he was injured by a land mine. Pax also helped Bristle care for Runt after Runt's injury.



Runt

Runt is the younger, smaller brother of Bristle. Even though his sister hates humans and discourages her brother from having anything to do with Pax because he smells like humans, Runt is spunky and ignores his sister's warnings. Runt wants to be friends with Pax and play with him. At first, Pax refuses Runt's friendliness because he does not want to irritate Bristle any further. When Bristle goes to the abandoned rope mill after Pax, Runt follows her. He trips a land mine and loses one of his hind legs in the blast. Despite his injury, Runt learns to walk again. Bristle allows Pax to help her care for Runt after his injury.

Vola

It is on Vola's property that Peter winds up after he breaks his foot while trying to walk to the place where he and his father let Pax go free. Vola is a war veteran who lost part of her leg while scouting a mine field. She has separated herself from society because she believes she is not fit to live around other people. Instead of wearing the prosthetic leg made for her, she chooses to wear a peg leg she has made for herself. She tells Peter that she believes she deserves to have to drag the heavy, clunky leg around after her as if she is doing penance for her crimes.

Peter's Grandfather

After Peter's father volunteers to serve in the war, Peter is sent to live with his grandfather. Peter is not happy with the idea that he was going to stay with his grandfather. His grandfather had a temper and had a habit of blowing up, just like Peter's father. The first night he is with his grandfather Peter gets the feeling that his grandfather does not really want him there. Peter's father told Peter that his father had begun to get angry shortly after his wife died.

Gray

Gray is the older fox who takes Pax under his wing. Gray accepts Pax because Gray had also been raised by humans. Gray tells Pax that humans are coming from the west and are bringing war with them. Gray explains war to Pax. It is Gray who shows Pax to the stream where he can get water. When Pax goes south to his home, Gray goes with him to see if it is safe for the foxes to move that direction.

Robert Johnson

Robert Johnson is Vola's friend who drives the bus. Vola gets Robert to mail the letters that Peter writes to his grandfather from different locations so that his grandfather will not know where Peter is staying. She also gets Robert to take Peter to a city close to

the place where Peter left Pax so that Peter won't have as far to hike to try to find his fox.

Bea Booker

Bea Booker is the librarian at the library in the village close to where Vola lives. It is to Bea Booker and her library that Peter requires that Vola donate her puppets and then make regular visits to teach the children how to use them.



Symbols and Symbolism

Plastic Toy Soldier

The plastic toy soldier is a symbol of the friendship between Pax and Peter and a symbol of Peter's father. The soldier had been a favorite toy of Peter's father when he was a child. Peter's father gives the toy to Peter, but Pax soon takes it over. It is this toy that Peter throws to Pax in order to get him to run away into the woods while he and his father drive away.

Gold Bracelet

The gold bracelet is a symbol of Peter's mother. It was her bracelet before she died. Peter knows that she had let him play with the charm on the bracelet because he has seen pictures. The charm is a phoenix, a bird that Peter's mother told him would rise from its own ashes.

The Coyote

The coyote is a sign of a time that Peter hurt his mother. It is a coyote that causes the death of the baby rabbit that Peter and his father lure into a cage because it was eating his mother's tulips. Peter's mother is more upset about the death of the baby rabbit than the destruction of her flowers.

Acorns

The acorns that Pax finds in the woods are a symbol of Peter. Pax remembers when Peter would play with him by pouring acorns over his back.

Wires

Wires are a symbol of threat to Pax. Pax can sense the electricity running through the wires. He also realizes it is the wires that have something to do with the exploding boxes. Pax is able to smell the danger in them just as he was able to smell danger in the fan with the short in its housing. Pax had chewed the wire to the fan because he was trying to protect Peter. He also tries to chew the wires connected to the land mines in hopes of protecting Peter.



Peanut Butter

Peanut butter symbolizes happy times to Pax. Peanut butter was one of Pax's favorite treats when he lived with Peter and his father.

“The Seven Voyages of Sinbad”

This novel “The Seven Voyages of Sinbad” is a symbol of the soldier that Vola killed. She believes the novel was a favorite of that soldier and spent time building marionettes to act out a scene from the story.

A Wooden Leg

A wooden leg is a symbol of Vola's feelings of guilt. She wears a wooden leg instead of a modern prosthesis to punish herself. She believes she deserves to have to deal with the clunky, heavy leg because she took a life during the war. After Peter makes her agree that she will wear her prosthetic leg instead of the wooden one, they burn the wooden leg in the fire, just like the phoenix and its belongings.

Bird Feathers

To Vola, the bird feathers that she wears remind her of her parents and her claim that she looked like a bird when she was a baby.

Baseball Bat

Peter's baseball bat is a symbol of his anger and his belief that his actions caused his mother to die. Just before his mother had left to go grocery shopping Peter had been angry and had used his baseball bat to break a gazing globe in the garden. It is during that grocery shopping trip that Peter's mother was killed in a wreck. Before Peter leaves Vola's house, Vola makes him a baseball bat and tells him that he might find it useful on his trip. Even though he was at first afraid of the bat because it symbolizes his anger, Peter does use the bat to repair his crutch after it breaks during his journey.



Settings

The Abandoned Rope Mill

Near an abandoned rope mill, Peter and his father return Pax to the wild. It is at the river near this mill that the soldiers, including Peter's father, buried mines they intended to be tripped by the enemy as they fought over the river. In the same area, Peter and Pax reunite, and Peter realizes that Pax has a new family.

Grandfather's House

Since Peter's father leaves to serve in the war, Peter is supposed to stay with his grandfather for six months. Peter only stays one night before he runs away to try to find Pax.

Vola's House

While the broken bone in Peter's foot is healing, Vola take Peter into her home. By the time he is ready to go ahead with his trip to find Pax, Peter feels more at home at Vola's house than he has anywhere else. The house is a log cabin built by Vola's grandparents. She went there after the war in hopes that she would be able to find herself again.

Food Tent

Pax visits this food tent twice to try to score food for himself and his friends. The first time he gets a piece of ham. The second time he finds a discarded peanut butter jar. When the lid falls off the trash can when Pax pulls out the jar, it alerts Peter's father. He lets Pax go without hurting him.

Library

At Peter's request, Vola donates her marionettes to the library near her home. He also asks Vola to promise that she will visit the library twice weekly to teach the children how to work the puppets.

A Baseball Field

Peter decides to hide out at a baseball field until school dismisses because people will be less suspicious.. While at the baseball field, Peter sees the boy who reminds him of

himself when he is playing the game. Peter realizes by the end of the novel that it is only on the baseball field that he feels peace.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

This novel is a coming of age story for both Pax and Peter as both of them have to grow up in a hurry when Peter's father goes to war. Peter learns that despite his age he has the ability to take charge of things he believes to be his responsibility. Pax, on the other hand, learns how to be a fox in the wild. He also earns the respect and trust of a female fox who had wanted nothing to do with him because humans had raised him.

Since he is almost thirteen, Peter tells Vola he is not a child. Yet, he acts like a child in many ways. He tells her how frustrated he is with his situation because his father had given him no choice about his situation. His father went to war without asking him and he was sent to his grandfather's house without being asked if that was what he wanted. Peter is angry with himself when he realizes he could have stood up to his father and refused to set Pax free. He knows, however, it was the fear of his father's anger and his own anger that kept him from standing up to his father.

During the time he is with Vola, Peter matures a good deal. He learns he can depend on Vola to tell him the truth. She takes care of him without babying him, but she also gives him freedom to make his own decisions. He senses himself getting frustrated with her when she insists that he put on a puppet show for her before he leaves to find Pax. She delays the show by telling him that she needs to build a stage first. Instead of just stewing in his frustration Peter realizes he can take the situation into his own hands and build the stage himself. When Vola sees how determined he is to get to his fox, she makes an extra effort to help him on his way.

Meanwhile, Pax is also forced to grow up. He has lived among humans all of his life. Even though he still has the instincts of a fox, Pax has never learned to hunt, find shelter, or defend himself. He's always depended on his humans for all of those things. Pax must allow himself to be teachable and must work to earn the respect of the foxes with whom he finds himself living. Pax is able to earn the respect and trust even of a female fox of whom it was said would never accept him because he had lived with humans.

Conquering Anger

Conquering or taming one's anger is a major lesson for Peter to learn in his journey toward maturity. He has always been afraid of his father because his father is such an angry person. Once Peter remembered his mother telling Peter he needed to get his anger under control and not be like his father. Vola teaches Peter that instead of pretending like he does not feel anger, he must learn to accept his anger and use it constructively.



On the day that Peter's mother died in a car wreck, Peter had gotten angry and used his baseball bat to break a gazing globe in the garden. She had told him he needed to learn to control his anger. She did not want him to be like his angry father. As a punishment, Peter's mother had made him stay home while she went to get groceries. She would never come back from that trip to the store. Five years later Peter still struggles with his belief that it was his anger that contributed to his mother's death. He believed if he had not been angry and he had been allowed to go shopping with her, she might not have died.

Peter also associates anger with his father's anger and his grandfather's outbursts. Peter recognizes the hurt that anger can cause and knows there are no apologies that undo the hurt caused by anger. For this reason, Peter has tried to pretend that he does not get angry. He ended his therapy sessions when his therapist asked if he was angry about his mother's death. He denies that he is angry each time Vola suggests that Peter is feeling angry. It is Vola who helps him to realize that anger is an emotion that every human being experiences. There is no way to stop feeling anger. She advises him, however, that he can tame his anger and learn to use it constructively.

Peter seems to be taking her advice when he faces his father at the abandoned rope mill when he goes to find Pax. He tells his father how angry he is with him and why he is angry. Instead of letting his father tell more lies by way of explaining, Peter takes action to take care of Pax, the animal who is his responsibility.

Characteristics of Foxes

The unique characteristics of red foxes are described and illustrated. Foxes have well tuned senses. They can sense changes in movement that humans cannot detect. For example, Bristle teaches Pax how to hunt by showing him how to feel for the vibrations mice make in the ground as they travel through their tunnels. Foxes also have well defined olfactory abilities. They can sniff out food sources and smell the pheromones given off by humans and other animals. These pheromones help the foxes to know if the other animals are hurting, if they are hunting, or if they are anxious. The author also shares information about the life cycles of red foxes. The foxes begin learning to hunt when they are about eight weeks old. When they mate, foxes mate for life. The author also includes some information about the way foxes communicate with one another through body language, as well as barks and yips.

Effects of War

One of the things that angers Vola the most is the fact that when humans engage in war they fail to report the truth about the effect the war will have on people and the land. As Peter sees for himself what the war has done to the area around the abandoned rope mill, a place he used to play, he agrees with her. He sees how the trees have been uprooted and burned. The river that had once been so clear he could see to the bottom is muddy and clogged. He believes that no one would want to play there any time soon.



When Peter looks at the damage done to animals he also believes these animals suffer the effects of war just as much as people do. While he is looking for Pax, he sees the animals that have been killed and injured by the land mines. As he walked through the evacuated towns, he saw the pets that had been abandoned. When he thinks about the costs of war, Peter also thinks about the children who lose parents in the war. Even if a parent comes back from war alive the child still loses his parent for the time he is in battle. Some people, like Vola, come back from war completely changed and unable to reintegrate into life. Vola spends many years trying to pull herself together after her war experience.

Two But Not Two

The idea of two but not two is introduced as inseparability, the bond that Peter believes exists between himself and Pax. Peter began thinking about the idea of inseparability because his grandfather had talked to him about a picture of Peter's father and his childhood pet, a dog. His grandfather said the two were inseparable. Because Peter was able to abandon Pax he wonders if his actions meant that he and Pax were separable. When Peter talks to Vola about the feelings he gets about Pax, she identifies with his feelings. He tells her that he sometimes believes that he knows that Pax is well, that he has eaten, or that he is seeing the same moon that Peter is seeing. Vola tells Peter that the concept is a Buddhist belief. The idea is that everything is connected in some way, even things that do not seem to have any connection. She explains to Peter that the Buddhists believed that a piece of wood was not just wood but also the rain that had watered the tree and the sun that had helped it grow. Even while Peter recognized this connection between himself and Pax, he also recognized it existed between Pax and the foxes who were now Pax's family.



Styles

Point of View

The story is told from the point of view of a limited third person narrator. This third person narrator alternates between the viewpoints of Pax and Peter, with one chapter being told from the viewpoint of Pax and the next chapter being told from the viewpoint of Peter. This point of view is important because it allows the reader to read the stories of both characters even though they are separated and do not know what is happening with the other. Telling only Peter's story or only Pax's story would only be telling half the story. The narrator is limited in that he knows the thoughts and emotions of Pax and Peter but none of the other characters. The thoughts and emotions of these other characters are known only through their actions and by what they say.

Since it is a coming of age novel with both Peter and Pax learning things about themselves and their world that they did not know previously, the story would not be well developed if the author attempted to tell it from the first person point of view of Pax and Peter. The story depends on the additional input from other, older characters to teach and mentor these characters as they grow and learn about the world around them.

Language and Meaning

Significant about the language of this novel is the author's attempt to capture the "language" of the red foxes. Although these foxes don't speak in the way humans do, they communicate with each other through barks, yips, and body language. The author describes the ideas that she believes the animals might be trying to portray through conversations like ones humans might have. More true to life, the author describes what the animals are trying to say to one another through their body language.

Another significant factor about the language in this novel is the author's use of military phrases and words. For instance, when Vola first talks to Peter she asks him about the things he has chosen to carry with him on his journey. She tells him that she can tell a good deal about a soldier by the things that he chooses to carry with him into battle. Peter didn't see that his journey to find Pax was a war but Vola may be thinking of the man she killed in battle and the story she tried to create for him based on the things he carried with him. Another military phrase used in the novel is the phrase "boots on the ground." In Chapter 20 it is indicated that even with his broken foot Peter believed he was moving as quickly as if he'd had both boots on the ground. That phrase is a military one referring to active military ground troops. Notice that Peter also refers to the training that Vola puts him through as being Boot Camp Vola. Boot camp is the term used to describe military training camp as well.

Structure

This 293-page novel is divided into 34 chapters. The novel is told in the past tense beginning with the day that Peter and his father leave Pax in the woods near the abandoned rope mill and ending with the day that Peter and Pax are reunited. The chapters alternate between a chapter told from the perspective of Pax and a chapter told from the perspective of Peter. The chapters that are told from the perspective of Pax are notated with a picture of a fox's head with the chapter number embedded in it at the beginning of those chapters. The chapters that are told from the perspective of Peter are notated with a picture of a boy's head with the chapter number embedded in it.

Quotes

The father reached over the seat again, and after saying something to his son in a soft voice that didn't match his hard lie-scent, he grasped the fox by the scruff of the neck."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 10)

Importance: When Peter's father attempts to comfort Peter as he is letting Pax go free, Pax recognizes that Peter's father is lying.

Six months — maybe more — of living here with his grandfather, who always seemed on the verge of blowing up."

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 23)

Importance: Peter seems most unhappy about living with his grandfather because of his grandfather's temper and ability to be easily angered.

Pax had been born with that same instinct as well, but distrust is no match for kindness administered consistently and unmeasured, especially in creatures new to the world. Pax had been only sixteen days old when Peter had rescued him — a fatherless, motherless curl of charcoal fur, his eyes barely opened — and it wasn't long before he'd come to trust the quiet, gangly boy who'd brought him home."

-- Narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph 6)

Importance: Because Pax has been given constant reinforcement that humans are not cruel, he is able to overcome his instinctive distrust of humans. This is unlike Bristle who has never known humans to be kind.

Peter knew he himself wasn't the kind of kid you'd expect to find on a ball field, either, and he was even less at home in the dugout with all the shoulder punching and trash talking. But a baseball field was the only place where he felt he was exactly where he was born to be."

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 4)

Importance: At the beginning of the novel, Peter is not sure of the word that describes the comfort that he feels when he is on the baseball field. It is after he has spent time with Vola that Peter realizes that he feels at peace there.

His right foot caught on a root and he fell. He heard the bone break — a soft, muffled snap — at the same time he felt the sharp stab."

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 47)

Importance: It is when Peter breaks his foot that his journey to find Pax changes drastically.

If he could have, he would have made her know every kindness of every day with his boy. But the hatred she had for humans was deep and fair. Instead, he offered his cheek



in sympathy.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 18)

Importance: Although Pax doesn't agree with Bristle that humans are completely evil, Pax does express his sympathy to Bristle for the cruelty done to her family by humans.

And you can tell a lot about a soldier by what he carries into battle.”

-- Vola (Chapter 12 paragraph 12)

Importance: A good deal of battle-related language is used in this novel. When Vola and Peter first meet, Vola tells him one of the requirements of staying with her is that he will tell her why he carries the woman's bracelet with him. Since he brought it with him during this difficult journey (battle), she assumes it is significant to him.

It's heavy and it's clumsy, but I did some terrible things in the war. I figure I deserve to drag something around.”

-- Vola (Chapter 12 paragraph 65)

Importance: Vola tells Peter that she believes that she deserves to have to deal with the clunky wooden leg that she uses because she did some things that she regretted during the war.

Now he's all alone because of a war. I let him go because of a war. War, not peace. What's that called? Irony? Whatever, now it's a terrible name. He'll probably die because of a war.”

-- Peter (Chapter 14 paragraph 46)

Importance: When Vola comments that Pax is a word that means peace, Peter says the name is ironic because the fox will probably die because of a war.

What I am is for telling the truth about it. About what it costs. People should tell the truth about what war costs.”

-- Vola (Chapter 14 paragraph 95)

Importance: Vola, who has been in a war before, is angry about the coming war because when wars were started, no one ever talked about the costs of war and what war did to the people and the land.

I probably killed a lot of people, or at least contributed to their deaths. But this one . . . this one I saw. After. I had to search his body.”

-- Vola (Chapter 16 paragraph 31)

Importance: Vola admits she was most upset by the death of the soldier on whom she found the copy of the novel “The Seven Voyages of Sinbad.” Since she had to touch this man, she recognized him as an individual instead of just a general member of the enemy.



If he owned his own bat again, every time he picked it up, he would see that shattered blue glass over those white roses.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 18 paragraph 66)

Importance: Peter remembers that on the day that his mother had died he had used his bat in anger to break a gazing globe in her garden. He is afraid if he owns another bat it will forever remind him of the way that he hurt his mother. It was because Peter broke the gazing globe that his mother would not let him go to the grocery store with her on the day she was killed.

The plain truth can be the hardest thing to see when it's about yourself. If you don't want to know the truth, you'll do anything to disguise it.”

-- Vola (Chapter 20 paragraph 28)

Importance: Vola tries to explain to Peter why it is taking her so long to find the truth about herself. She indicates that there is a part of herself that she still does not fully understand.

Bristle seemed lessened to Pax, as if a vital piece of her had disappeared. He knew that somehow the humans had taken it.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 21 paragraph 10)

Importance: After the blast injures Runt, Pax realizes just how badly the humans have injured Bristle emotionally.

The marionette's black eyes looked back at him blankly. Peter checked the joints, still amazed that Vola had taken the puppet apart just so he could learn its secrets. And suddenly Vola's secret philosophy card flashed in his mind: 'I would have been a good teacher.'”

-- Narrator (Chapter 22 paragraph 3)

Importance: As Peter thinks about Vola's act of taking apart her marionette so he could learn how it worked, he agreed with her comment on her philosophy card that she would have been a good teacher.

We all own a beast called anger. It can serve us: many good things come of anger at bad things; many unjust things are made just. But first we all have to figure out how to civilize it.”

-- Vola (Chapter 24 paragraph 39)

Importance: Vola helps Peter deal with his anger and his fear of being angry.

This new world was his. He could travel through it, and he could feed himself on its bounty whenever he wanted. He was part of it all, free. But not alone.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 25 paragraph 35)



Importance: It is after Pax makes his first catch and jumps off a branch in celebration that he feels he is really part of the new world that he had been forced to enter.

And Peter understood. His fox belonged to them. And they belonged to Pax.
Inseparable.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 34 paragraph 33)

Importance: When Peter meets Bristle and Runt, he knows that Pax has his own family apart from Peter.