

Room Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Jack turns 5 years old as the story opens. He is a bright boy but has lived his entire life in garden shed that he calls Room. He believes this is the entire world and can't imagine that there is anything real outside the Room. He lives there with his Ma. Their only outside contact is a visitor who comes most nights that Jack knows as Old Nick. Old Nick rapes Ma each night while Jack hides in the Wardrobe.

Old Nick abducted Ma when she was 19 years old. She was a college student and he tricked her by asking for help for his sick dog. He had apparently planned the abduction for a long time because he had a garden shed converted into a self-contained apartment in his back yard. Ma tried to escape by digging out, but discovered that Old Nick had buried wire under the shed. She tried to fight him once but he brutalized her in retaliation and she never tried again. She gave birth to a daughter who died immediately. She gave birth to Jack when she was completely alone and she was his only contact until they escaped.

When he turns 5, Ma realizes that their lives are in increasing danger. She reveals to Jack that the world they see on television is real, and that Outside really exists. Jack is frightened but finally agrees to go along with Ma's plan. She makes Old Nick believe that Jack is ill then she wraps Jack in a rug and tells Old Nick that he died. Old Nick puts the rug in the back of his truck, apparently with plans to bury Jack somewhere, but Jack escapes and finds help. When the police arrive, one of the officers manages to figure out where he'd come from and they rescue Ma as well.

There is a media frenzy following their escape. They are taken to the police station then to a hospital where professionals gather forensic evidence. Then they arrive at a mental health facility where they remain for the coming days. They are there when Ma's mother, Grandma, arrives. There's a tearful reunion and Ma discovers that her parents divorced after she disappeared. Her mother has remarried and her father has moved to Australia. Ma's mother is just relieved to have Ma home and she immediately opens her heart to Jack. Ma's father sees Jack as a symbol of Ma's abduction and rape.

Jack discovers there are many new things to learn. He's smart in some ways because Ma has taught him to read, count, and do math. However, he's socially naïve and doesn't know how to conduct himself in even the most basic situations with other people. He is very attached to Ma and has trouble being away from her for even short periods of time.

One day, Ma drops into a bout of depression. It's happened before and Jack refers to it as "Gone" because Ma doesn't respond to anything. Jack goes for an outing with Ma's brother, Paul, and his family. When he returns, he finds that Ma is seriously ill. He calls for help and nurses discover that Ma has taken an overdose of pills, almost committing suicide. It takes some time for her to recover and Jack stays with Grandma during those weeks. He gradually begins to learn more about the Outside world and begins to feel more at home, though he sometimes longs for the security he felt in Room.

When Jack and Ma are reunited, Ma has secured an apartment for them to share. They make one final visit to Room where Jack says good-bye to the space that made up his entire world for the first 5 years of his life.



Presents

Summary

The first section is titled Presents. As the story opens, Jack announces that he is 5 years old today. He compares it to magic, saying he was 4 when he went to bed the previous evening and now is 5. He is in the bed with his mother and they wake together. They talk briefly about Jack's life, including that Ma was sad until he arrived. Jack believes that "he" didn't come the previous night. Ma says she has a present for Jack and he decides he wants to have it immediately. It's a drawing Ma made of Jack while he was sleeping. He starts to hang it on the cork wall above Bed but Ma says she doesn't want it there. Jack knows it's because she doesn't want "him" to see it. He decides to hang it in the back of Wardrobe. He goes to sleep there most evenings.

Jack begins his day by counting the 100 cereals into his bowl and pouring the milk. He's careful not to splash any and he and Ma thank Baby Jesus for the food. Jack washes the bowls and spoons from breakfast and notices that the sun isn't shining through Skylight very well because of the snow. They brush their teeth. Ma's teeth are very rotted.

Jack finds Spider again. He's amazed that Spider is real and he hasn't told Ma because he's afraid she'll get rid of it. They take their vitamins and "Ma takes her pill from the silver pack that has 28 little spaceships." Ma then takes a painkiller because she has a toothache.

At 8:30, Jack turns on the television and finds Dora. He sits in Ma's lap to watch. Jack is supposed to watch only one show but he asks for a second today and Ma agrees, because it's his birthday. Jack talks about the "planets" he sees on television. His favorite show is Dora the Explorer. He joins in with the songs and with the interactive segments of the show. Jack says he'd like to watch television more but Ma has taught him that too much will "rot our brains." She mutes the commercials and then Jack watches Spongebob Square Pants.

After television time, Ma marks Jack's height on the wall. He can see where's he's grown since he was a toddler. Their day continues. Jack chooses their clothes for the day because it's his birthday. They have "phys ed" time and Ma includes some math, such as multiplying 5 times 5 in their exercise. They continue to play throughout the morning. Jack jumps on the bed while Ma does the commentary as if it's a televised event. They have tuna and crackers for lunch then play "Orchestra" where they bang on things to make different noises. They then read from their limited books, including Dylan the Digger and The Runaway Bunny. Jack talks more about things that are real and things that aren't. Cats, rocks, and mountains are only pretend. According to Jack, Ma is the only real woman, Jack is the only real boy, and Old Nick seems to be only half real. Old Nick does bring supplies, including Sundaytreat, which is something special they



request each week. Jack notes that vegetables are real, but ice cream isn't, though he wishes it was.

Jack and Ma settle down for a nap. Jack has “some” before they go to sleep. He says he had “lots” when he was younger but now is so busy that he doesn't have it often. He's referring to breast feeding though it's not clear until later.

Jack and Ma say prayers, mainly to the Baby Jesus, and Jack has his version of Christianity. Jack chooses spaghetti for dinner and Ma has them eat some broccoli as well. They have a small plant but it's not looking very healthy. Ma says she thinks the plant needs food. They then set out to make a cake to celebrate Jack's birthday. Jack adds the eggs to “Eggsnake,” which is a length of cord threaded through egg shells. They don't have candles but Ma has saved 5 chocolate candies. Jack is furious at the lack of candles. They soon make up and Jack says Ma should make certain there are candles when he turns 6. They brush their teeth and prepare for bed. Ma makes a list of a few food items, and includes fruit at Jack's request.

Jack rushes to get into the wardrobe before 9, when Old Nick might arrive at any time. Ma says she always hid him away from Old Nick, even when he was a baby. After a while, when it's evident he isn't coming tonight, Jack gets into bed with Ma. He breast feeds before going to sleep. He wakes in the middle of the night with Ma turning the light on and off.

The next morning, Jack has cake for breakfast, which has never happened before. They have baths and wash their clothes at the same time. They have pancakes for lunch and Jack sees a mouse while Ma is sleeping. He puts some crumbs on a plate and mouse eventually comes out and begins to eat. Ma throws a book that breaks a plate and scares the mouse away. Jack is angry but Ma says the mouse can carry disease and filth, and that others will follow it into Room. They play checkers then watch television for awhile. They play a game called Parrot in which Ma mutes the television and Jack recounts as much of the previous conversation as he can remember. Ma compliments Jack on his good pronunciation of words such as “poignant.”

Old Nick arrives that evening and seems surprised to learn that it's Jack's birthday. He asks if Jack is 4 but Ma says that Jack is 5. Old Nick says he would have brought a present if he'd known. Jack listens as Old Nick has some of his cake then hears the bed creak 217 times. Old Nick and Ma talk some more but Jack falls asleep.

Jack wakes in Bed Monday and talks to Ma about Old Nick's mention of the present. Ma says she doesn't want Old Nick to buy Jack any presents and Jack becomes furious. He says Old Nick might have brought him a dog. Ma says it would be impossible to keep a dog in Room all the time. Jack continues to be angry, bringing up the fact that Ma scared the mouse away.

That afternoon, they “do Scream” as they do each weekday. They stand near the Skylight and scream at the top of their lungs. They then listen but hear nothing. Jack doesn't know why they do this.



Jack wakes Tuesday morning to discover that Old Nick has brought him a remote controlled Jeep. He spends a lot of time driving it. Ma reminds him that he has to be careful with it and that he will run the batteries down if he drives it all the time. Jack wants to take Jeep and Remote into the Wardrobe but Ma convinces him to leave Jeep on the shelf. That night, Jack turns Remote on and drives Jeep off the shelf. It hits Old Nick and he's furious. Ma says she must have left the Jeep too near the edge so that it fell. Old Nick leaves. Jack tells Ma that he broke Remote's antennae. Ma tells him to go to sleep. Jack waits awhile, then gets into bed with Ma.

Analysis

The first indications about Jack's life are somewhat confusing. For example, he talks about the other planets that he sees on television. On one planet, there are people doing something and people are doing other things on other planets. This is Jack's way of rationalizing what he's seeing. Ma has told him that nothing he sees on television is real and has led him to believe that there is nothing outside Room. Ma tells Jack that too much television will "rot our brains" as a means of limiting the amount of time they watch. She mutes commercials, saying they are especially likely to rot their brains. She much later explains her decision. She says she didn't want to tell him about things that were out of his reach because she didn't want him to long for those things when she had no way to provide them for him.

Ma and Jack take vitamins each day and Ma takes another pill. From Jack's description, it seems obvious that these are birth control pills. It's later revealed that Ma had a baby girl who died during birth prior to Jack's birth. It seems likely that Old Nick provides the birth control pills purely as a means of ensuring that Ma doesn't continue to have babies that he'll have to provide for.

Jack is very interested in things that are "real." When he discovers the spider under the table, he immediately knows that the spider is real. This is an important aspect of Jack's character. He's intelligent and he recognizes that the spider is real as soon as he sees it. However, he later has trouble with the concept of things outside the room being real until he gets to see them.

Ma is very smart about showing Jack how to make do with the things they have. She doesn't want to ask Old Nick for anything unless it's necessary because it makes him angry. She instills in Jack the idea that they have to make the best use of everything. They mix some water with the jelly to get the last bits out of the jar and have very thin pancakes because they are almost out of pancake mix. Jack writes and draws on toilet tissue, then they roll it back up to use as toilet tissue. When Jack wants to know how tall he is, Ma guesses about the length of a foot and they make a ruler. They have a labyrinth made of the cardboard centers of toilet tissue rolls and Jack sees this as a perfectly acceptable toy.

Jack's language skills are probably acceptable for a 5-year-old child, but he shows the effects of having limited contact with the outside world. He doesn't know how to form



sentences correctly, which makes some of his conversations difficult to follow. For example, he wants to know his “tall” rather than his height. Ma corrects him in this instance but she doesn't always correct him.

Ma apparently has some limited experience with religion and she clings to the basic principles during her captivity. This seems acceptable because people often turn to religion during times of danger or stress. She has taught Jack some of the basic ideas but he doesn't really have details down right. It may be that he is putting his own interpretations on some of the story or it may be that Ma doesn't really have a good grasp of religion to tell it correctly. For example, he says that Mary put the Baby Jesus in the manger so the cows could warm him with their breath “because he was magic.” She tries to teach Jack new things, like giving him details about the Saints, but she doesn't seem to know enough to make the stories make sense. At one point, Jack asks why they thank Jesus for food instead of Old Nick. Ma explains that Old Nick is just the person who brings the food, but she can't really explain the difference to Jack's satisfaction.

At nap time, the reader gets the first look at the fact that Ma is still breastfeeding Jack. Some readers may see this as an aberration and as completely abnormal. The reader should remember that Jack and Ma are completely dependent on each other. The breastfeeding likely provides a level of comfort for them but it also gives Jack a nutritional boost that he may need because of their limited diet. After their escape, Ma says that she simply never saw a need to stop. She continues to let Jack breastfeed for a time after their escape, but when they are separated for a short time, Ma tells Jack that her milk has dried up.

From Jack's point of view, Ma seems to be a wonderful, strong woman who is doing the best she can in this situation. It's not until she wakes Jack in the middle of the night by turning the light on and off that the reader gets the first look at Ma's struggles. She may be struggling with obsessive-compulsive disorder, based on the fact that she seems compelled to turn on and off a specific number of times. This ritual may have nothing to do with OCD and have more to do with the fact that she's hoping to attract someone's attention. She is absolutely struggling with depression and details about that will be revealed in coming days. Ma's state of mind is one of the book's themes.

Part of their daily routine is to “do Scream.” They stand near the Skylight and scream as loud as they can for a few minutes, then they listen. Jack believes this is just part of their daily routine and doesn't know why they stop to listen afterward. Actually, Ma is trying to attract the attention of anyone who happens to be near enough to hear them. She knows they are in Old Nick's back yard and holds to the hope that someone might hear them. This hope is an important theme in the book.

Discussion Question 1

If you were Ma, how might you have filled your days? Would it be tempting to let Jack watch hours of television just to fill the time?



Discussion Question 2

Describe Jack's view of the world.

Discussion Question 3

How do you think Ma's life would be different after this many years of captivity if she didn't have Jack?

Vocabulary

nibble, poignant, duvet, magic, switched, weird, adventures, flush, scribble, labyrinth, occasions, commentary, invisible, whew, commentary, collage, desperate, demolition, overflowing, actually

Unlying

Summary

In *Unlying*, Jack wakes the next morning and discovers that Ma has bruises on her neck that match Old Nick's fingerprints. She is obviously angry with Jack for his action with Jeep the previous evening and Jack realizes that he made a horrible mistake by waking Old Nick. Ma is out of sorts throughout the morning and they do *Scream* for a long time. Ma goes to bed for a rest and Jack entertains himself. He plays with the keypad by the door, plays dress up with a crown made of a milk carton and some bits of foil, and measures some more.

Later, Jack sees a bottle of pain killers on television that are the same as the bottle Ma has. He deduces that Old Nick must go in the television when he leaves Room and he questions Ma about it. She says he doesn't go in the television and Jack asks where he gets the pain killers. Ma says she doesn't know but Jack believes she's lying to him. He pushes and she says that the things they see on television are real. Jack is amazed and struggles to believe her. After some additional questions, she points out that it's time for Old Nick to arrive and makes him go to bed.

The next morning, Ma has given in to the depression. She simply lies on the bed with the pillows covering her head. Jack quietly gets his breakfast then watches television, still wondering how it can all be real. He has lunch but skips doing *Scream*. Jack thinks a great deal about the things that Ma says are real. At the end of the day, he wants to get in Bed with Ma. He hasn't breastfed all day but fears that she might push him away. He is also afraid of what might happen if he's there when Old Nick comes. Jack goes to the Wardrobe but doesn't sleep and Old Nick doesn't come.

The next day is pretty much back to normal. Jack watches television for awhile. He asks Ma if each thing is real and she affirms, except for a monster show with werewolves. That night, Ma asks Old Nick if it would be possible to have an exhaust fan. He says the neighbors would notice the smells and says it would be the equivalent of a "neon sign" pointing to his workshop. Ma apologizes. Old Nick says she has a good life that other girls would "thank their lucky stars for a setup like this." He says she's safe from outside dangers, such as "perverts."

The next day, Ma loses a tooth. She says she's glad because that's one that won't hurt anymore but she has others in bad shape as well. Jack keeps the tooth. Jack wakes that night to the sounds of Ma and Old Nick arguing. He is talking about the price of vitamins and Ma says they need them to avoid getting sick. She says they wouldn't need them if they had a better diet and Old Nick accuses Ma of whining. He then reveals that he lost his job months ago. Ma begins to ask questions, including how he's managing to survive. The argument grows heated and Jack makes a sound. Old Nick knocks on the slats of the Wardrobe and asks if Jack stays in there all the time. He says it doesn't seem "natural." He says he has a lollipop for Jack if he'll come out but Ma



distracts him and they get into Bed. Jack hides his head under the blanket and tries not to count the creaks, but he can't help it.

Jack wakes while it's still dark and all he can think about is the lollipop. Jack quietly slips out of the Wardrobe and is standing by the Bed when Old Nick wakes. Ma wakes as well and begins screaming for Old Nick to get away from Jack. Jack rushes back to the Wardrobe and can hear Ma's muffled voice. Then her voice is clearer and she promises to be quiet.

The next morning, Jack is asking questions about the previous night, including Old Nick's statement that Ma should remember where Jack came from. Ma puts him off. Then she discovers that the electricity is turned off. Jack asks about the lollipop but Ma says it's in the trash and that he can't have it. When she's napping, he digs it out and washes it. He's amazed at how sweet it tastes.

The power remains off all day. Ma says Old Nick is doing it as punishment because she was screaming. They are cold all day and do what they can to stay warm. They eat the frozen vegetables that are beginning to thaw. The power is still off the next morning. Jack says he hopes Old Nick never comes again but Ma points out that they are dependent on him for food and other supplies.

That day, Ma tells Jack a new story that she's never told him before. She compares it to the opening scene in Alice in Wonderland. Like Alice, Ma is from someplace else. She says she had a mother, father, and a brother named Paul. She describes the hammock that was in their back yard and other details about their lives. Jack is skeptical and accuses Ma of lying. She says it's the opposite of lying.

Ma says she'd rather be Outside the Room, but that they would be Outside together. Ma points to a leaf on the Skylight as proof that there's a tree Outside, which is one piece of the entire world. The next morning, the electricity is still off and it's very cold. Jack asks if his Grandma, Grandpa, and Uncle Paul are still real, and Ma assures him that they are. Jack and Ma stack furniture so that Jack can look through the Skylight. This time he sees an airplane. At nap time, Jack breastfeeds and suggests that they go Outside the next day. They talk about their situation and what they would do if they could leave. Ma points out the Keypad on the door and says Old Nick is the only one who knows the magic numbers that opens the door. She says Room is a shed behind Old Nick's house.

Ma begins to tell Jack about her abduction. She was 19 years old when she met Old Nick. He claimed he had a sick dog and asked her to help him. He then forced her into his truck and drugged her. Jack says he doesn't want to hear anymore but Ma insists that Jack should know the truth. She says she tried to get out. She threw everything she could at Skylight but it didn't break. She tore through the floor and dug a hole but found that there was wire buried under the Room. One day, she hit him with the lid from the toilet, which was the heaviest item she could find. Ma says she didn't hit him hard enough and Old Nick managed to close the door before she could escape.



Ma says that Old Nick then told her that he would never tell her the code to open the door. He also told her that he would leave her to starve if she ever tried anything like that again. They are in Bed when Ma tells Jack all these things. At the end of the story, the power comes back on.

Analysis

The morning after the incident with the Jeep, Ma is obviously struggling more than usual. She's very upset throughout the morning and Jack notices the difference though he doesn't realize how much Ma is affected. They have only a few books and Jack's favorite is about Dylan the Digger. This morning, Ma says she hates Dylan, which upsets Jack. Ma clarifies, saying that she has read the book too many times. Then they do *Scream* for a very long time, until Ma's voice begins to break. Jack still doesn't realize that Ma is yelling for help. The fact that she screams for so long is evidence of her mounting desperation. After the days without power, Ma is forced to think more about their dependence on Old Nick. He has threatened to let Ma starve to death in the past, and Ma now fears that he might let her and Jack starve. This is all an important look at Ma's state of mind, which is presented only from Jack's perspective.

There is another example of Ma's ingenuity in this section. Jack talks about times he painted with beet juice. Ma is later criticized for the fact that Jack didn't have things most people consider fundamentals of childhood but Ma is doing the best she can with what she has. The fact that she helps him "paint" using beet juice is actually very creative.

During one of the arguments, Old Nick talks about Jack. He makes a comment that makes it clear to the reader that he's Jack's father. Jack doesn't understand the comment and he later questions Ma about it. She tells him that Old Nick was referring to who Jack "belonged to." Jack says it's obvious that he belongs to Ma, and Ma drops the conversation there. It's clear that Ma doesn't want Old Nick to have anything to do with Jack and that she's doing everything she can to protect Jack from the possibility of abuse at Old Nick's hands. Ma's relationship with Jack is one of the fundamental themes of the book.

Jack keeps Ma's Bad Tooth because it's a part of her. Some readers may find this to be horrible. When Jack and Ma are separated later, Jack sucks on the tooth as a means of comforting himself. This is another example of the relationship between Ma and Jack, which is one of the book's themes.

Discussion Question 1

How do you think Jack's relationship with Ma changes when he learns that Old Nick choked her over the situation with Jeep? Is this too much information for a child of Jack's age?



Discussion Question 2

What do you think about the incident involving the lollipop. Why didn't Ma want Jack to have the lollipop?

Discussion Question 3

List everything you learned about Ma's abduction in this section. Why is she now beginning to feel more desperate?

Vocabulary

sedentary, hassling, renovations, natural, belong, lollipop, perverts, setup, hungrier, dazzling, wriggled, mutiny, foil, spooked, blindfolded, concentrate, beanstalk, clatter, soundproofed, slurping

Dying

Summary

Jack discovers that he's now mad that they can't open the door and go Outside. They talk a lot about what's out there, and what's real. Ma spends a lot of time thinking. After lunch, she tells Jack that they have to get out of Room. They begin talking about ideas. Jack suggests poison but Ma says they have to be realistic ideas. They discuss Ma attacking Old Nick just when he gets in the door and Jack running away, but Ma fears that Old Nick will catch him.

Ma says they have to pretend that Jack is sick, and convince Old Nick to take him to the hospital. Jack hates the idea of going Outside without Ma but she continues to insist this is the only option. She says he is to tell the first person he sees that he's been kidnapped. Jack agrees at first, but keeps trying to come up with alternative plans. He is obviously afraid of going through with this but Ma continues to push him. They practice having Jack lie perfectly still as if he's sick. Ma decides she'll make a bag of hot water and keep it on Jack's face until just before Old Nick comes inside so that it will seem that Jack has a fever. Ma says they are going to go through with the plan. Jack wants to put it off but Ma says they have to take action immediately.

Ma wakes Jack that night and shows him the full moon. She says she told Old Nick that Jack was sick so that he'd come closer to believing them when they carry out their plan the next evening. Jack is angry that Ma began the plan but Ma insists they have to do this.

The next day, they don't flush the toilet so that the Room begins to smell like Jack is ill. They practice having Jack lie on the bed as if he's very sick. They talk about Jack's fear. Ma says he feels scared but he's really brave. Jack says that means he's "scave." Jack worries that he won't be able to find the words to talk to someone Outside and Ma writes a note for him to give instead. He puts it in his underwear. He cries some and Ma says that makes him look sicker. She rubs dish soap in his hair to make it look greasy. She suddenly realize that he doesn't smell bad and she forces herself to throw up on the bed, rubbing it on Jack, even on his mouth. Jack remains still when Old Nick arrives. Ma sounds hysterical and Old Nick believes that Jack is sick, but he doesn't take Jack to the hospital.

After Old Nick leaves, Ma admits that she didn't expect him to take Jack to the hospital. He refuses to hear it until the next day. Ma says the next part of the plan will be for Jack to pretend to be dead. He hates the idea but they finally agree that Ma will roll him up in the Rug. The plan is that Old Nick will put the Rug and Jack in the back of the truck to get rid of the body. Jack will wriggle out of the Rug and jump out of the truck when it slows at the first stop sign. Jack is then supposed to find someone, shout that he's been kidnapped, and give them the note. She says that person will then call the police and they'll find Ma. Jack notes that she sounds a little uncertain.



They wait by the Rug until it's about time for Old Nick to show up. When it's nearly time, Ma wraps Jack inside, making certain that he can move around enough to get out when the time comes. To Jack, it feels like they remain that way for a long time. When the door alarm beeps, Jack flinches. Ma puts her hands on him to remind him to stay still. Old Nick comes inside and Ma yells as if she's hysterical. She screams that Jack didn't wake up and that it's Old Nick's fault for not returning. Old Nick says he has to take Jack away now. Ma says that he can't bury Jack in the back yard and that she'll know if he does. He agrees. She yells for Old Nick to keep his "filthy" eyes and hands off Jack, and he agrees to that as well. Then Jack feels himself being lifted and he realizes that Old Nick is carrying him. He doesn't move.

Old Nick pauses in the yard then continues to the truck. He drops Jack onto the bed of the truck and Jack feels the truck begin to move. He feels the truck stop and realizes they are at the first stop sign, and that he hasn't even begun to get out of the Rug. He is still not out at the next stop sign. At the next, he's out but he falls before he can get out of the truck. Old Nick stops the truck. Jack jumps out and begins to run. Jack rushes up to a man and a little girl walking a dog. The dog bites Jack and the man rushes to call the dog away. Jack pulls out the note but Old Nick grabs it away. The man realizes something isn't right and he calls the police. Old Nick grabs Jack and runs toward the truck. The man says he has Old Nick's "plates." Jack doesn't know what that means but Old Nick suddenly drops Jack and rushes to the truck without him.

The man's name is Ajeet and he remains with Jack until the police arrive. One of the first officers on the scene is named Officer Oh. Ajeet and Officer Oh ask Jack questions. He manages to tell Ajeet his name but can't get any words out to explain the situation. Officer Oh begins to talk to Jack and he finds that he can answer her questions if he really tries. Jack fears that Old Nick may be at the Room again by now that motivates him to try harder. Soon, Officer Oh is certain that Jack and his mother were held hostage somewhere nearby.

Officer Oh asks Jack if he can tell her the story of how he got here. He closes his eyes and relates the stops the truck made before he got away. Officer Oh believes she knows the neighborhood Jack came from, based on his details of driving. They get into a car and she hopes that Jack will be able to recognize the house where he was held captive. He says the Room has a Skylight and remembers Ma saying that Room is in Old Nick's backyard. Officer Oh looks at satellite images of the neighborhood. With a combination of Jack's information, the satellite images, and the description of Old Nick's truck, they find Room.

Jack remains in the police car with another officer and soon Ma arrives. Jack is exhausted. He says he wants to go to Bed. Ma says they'll find somewhere to sleep in awhile. Jack says he wants to go back in Room but Ma says they are never going back there.



Analysis

There's a point in this section where Jack realizes that he wants to go Outside even though he's afraid at the thought of going out without Ma. He hasn't wanted to until he learns that Outside is real. This is why Ma lied to him all these years. She says she never wanted him to long for what he couldn't have, and Jack's reaction to the idea that Outside is real indicates that Jack reacted as Ma expected. It's left to the reader to decide if Ma made the correct decision to keep the reality from Jack and to tell him the truth at this point.

Ma's plan to get out of the Room is complicated and she doesn't burden Jack with the entire plan at the beginning. She second guesses herself sometimes and Jack notices that she doesn't seem sure about some of the details. For example, they talk about the fact that Jack should scream or hit, or do whatever he can to get away from Old Nick once he finds some other people. Jack is amazed that Ma is giving him permission to do this. He asks if he can even kill Old Nick and Ma briefly considers giving him a knife. She realizes that it would be dangerous because Jack will be rolled up in a Rug and would likely cut himself trying to get out. It's bound to be difficult for Ma to consider letting Jack go into such a dangerous situation. Jack suggests that she figure out something else or that she should be the one to trick Old Nick into letting her outside, but it seems that it would be more dangerous for Jack if Ma left him inside the Room than if she sends him out by himself.

Ma acts her part with Jack's "death," which is vital to getting Old Nick to do what she wants. She tells him not to bury Jack in the backyard. It's later revealed that Old Nick buried the stillborn daughter in the backyard. Ma yells at Old Nick about wanting Jack to be buried somewhere nice, perhaps with trees. An interesting aspect of this scene is that Old Nick seems to exhibit a level of sympathy for Ma's distress. He doesn't react violently to her yelling and he calls her a "poor girl" for having lost Jack. He pauses in the backyard when he's carrying Jack to the truck, and it seems possible that he's considering burying Jack in the yard despite his promise to Ma. He doesn't and that may be because he promised Ma that he would find someplace nice. It's left to the reader to decide what this says about Old Nick's character.

Jack's first experiences with Outside are painful and frightening. He would likely have been afraid even if he'd had Ma's comforting presence but this situation must have been especially brutal for Jack. He is surprised by the amount of light outside because he's only experienced sunlight that's filtered through the Skylight. The first person he sees is a man walking his dog and the dog bites Jack. Jack falls during the scuffle with Old Nick and scrapes his legs. When Officer Oh talks to Jack, he refers to the dog as a "vampire" and asks if the dog has been taken to jail. These first experiences are not pleasant for Jack but he does come through to save Ma.

Discussion Question 1

Why does it suddenly occur to Jack that he wants to go Outside?



Discussion Question 2

Do you think Ma's plan to get Jack out of the Room was the best one she could have come up with? What are some of the things that could have gone wrong? Is the entire situation believable?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Jack's first interactions with other people and his first experiences Outside.

Vocabulary

obsessing, realistic, actually, cunning, brilliant, pretend, fierce, enormous, gruff, reeks, hysterics, complicated, shroud, explosion, snuggle, melting, freestanding, cult, giddy, pretending, allowed, negative



After

Summary

In *After*, Jack and Ma arrive at the police station. News reporters have already heard about Ma's rescue and are waiting to take photos as Ma and Jack are escorted into the police station. The first man who interviews them tells Ma that she and Jack will be taken to Cumberland Clinic as soon as they finish going over Ma's statement. The clinic is a psychiatric facility but the man says it's a private place where Ma and Jack will get the initial medical care they need. Jack is pleading to breastfeed and Ma gives in. The man and a woman stare but Ma tells them that she's only breastfeeding her son, and they stop.

Jack has to go to the bathroom and is upset that he "pooed a little" in his underwear. He's amazed when Ma throws them away, saying he can get new ones now. To Jack, this seems like a huge waste.

They are then driven to Cumberland where they meet Dr. Clay and Dr. Kendrick. Dr. Clay gives them masks and points out that Jack hasn't been exposed to any number of diseases that are floating around. Ma accepts that and tells Jack the masks will protect them from germs. Dr. Kendrick plans to examine Ma, including doing a rape kit. Ma tries to make Jack remain in the hall but he refuses until he spots a television. Jack is wondering what's going on with Ma and with Old Nick as he watches television. The program changes and he sees footage of Ma carrying Jack into the police station. Jack is excited, then the receptionist turns off the television and Dr. Clay appears, obviously angry.

Jack rejoins Ma and is surprised to see that she's dressed in a paper gown. Dr. Kendrick asks to examine Jack. Ma initially refuses, saying that he's fine. Dr. Kendrick points out that an examination would be routine for a child of Jack's age and Ma agrees. Jack is upset when they draw blood but they give him a sucker and a Dora bandage for his scraped knee. Eventually, they are taken to Room 7 and allowed to go to bed.

The next morning, Jack is upset to discover that he's wet the bed. Ma says it doesn't matter and assures him that someone else will change and clean the sheets. He's then upset that Ma wants to have a shower before breakfast. She says that now they can do things whenever they want. Jack is upset because the shower is new to him. They finally compromise with Jack standing near the back of the shower stall, getting splashed only a little. They put on robes and head down for breakfast. Jack remains confused about a lot of things, such as how big *Outside* really is. He has trouble with the stairs and finally has to sit down and scoot down them.

A nurse introduces herself as Noreen and reminds them about the need to wear masks. In the dining room, Jack is overwhelmed and Dr. Clay suggests they should return to their rooms. He says eating with everyone else might be a "little ambitious" for their first



day. They return to their room and Jack listens to the conversation between Dr. Clay and Ma. Dr. Clay is explaining that he will continue to work with Jack and Ma, with input from others in specialized fields.

Despite Dr. Clay's objection, Ma shows Jack a picture of Old Nick and says that the police have arrested him. She promises that they don't need to ever be afraid of him again. Dr. Clay asks Ma if seeing Old Nick's photo has caused her any undue stress. She says she isn't likely to "crumble" because of a photo after spending all those years with the real man. Dr. Clay then questions Jack about his interaction with Old Nick. Ma insists that she protected Jack from Old Nick but Dr. Clay points out that Ma was asleep sometimes. He says that asking Jack these things is part of his job and Ma gives in. Jack says the only times Old Nick hurt him were when he tossed Jack into the truck and when he dropped him on the street.

Dr. Clay mentions DNA testing. Ma is angry and asks if they think she might have had "other visitors." Dr. Clay says the court system requires specific steps, and that this is one more of those steps. Noreen arrives with clothes for Jack and Ma. Soon after that, Ma's mother arrives. Jack is to call her Grandma. Jack is interested but won't let her get too close.

A man enters the room. Grandma introduces him as Leo. She says Ma's father is now living in Australia. They talk about Ma's disappearance. Grandma says some officials said young girls sometimes took off on their own, suggesting that's what Ma did. She says the family put up fliers and that she searched for Ma everywhere.

That night, Jack and Ma keep bumping into each other on the small bed. There are two beds in the room, but they share one. Jack asks how long they're going to stay at Cumberland. Ma says it'll be for awhile. Jack wants to know if they are locked in but Ma assures him she isn't.

The next day, Jack continues to notice new things. He says it's more difficult to poo because he isn't accustomed to so much food. Ma suggests they go outside the clinic today but Jack refuses. Jack and Ma spend some time with Dr. Clay. He talks to Ma then plays with Jack. They play with Play-Doh and Jack is enthralled. Dr. Clay asks if Jack never got Play-Doh for a Sundaytreat. Ma interrupts, saying that Play-Doh would dry out, even if they were very careful with it. She says they sometimes played with flour dough but that it was white. She is angry by the time she finishes explaining some of her choices, such as asking for crayons instead of markers, because they last longer. Dr. Clay assures her that no one is judging her choices. When they return to their room, Jack breastfeeds for a long time.

After the nap, Jack is very tired and his nose is running. Ma tells him he's got a cold and has to teach him to blow his nose. Jack is afraid that he'll die but Ma assures him that they'll be fine. They go outside but Jack panics and they come back in quickly. When Grandma returns, she has several books that belonged to Ma and Paul when they were young. While Jack looks at the books, Grandma says that she wants to hear every detail about Ma's captivity. Ma refuses. She says she doesn't want Grandma to "think



about that stuff every time you look at me.” Grandma says she's so relieved to have Ma home that she only thinks “hallelujah.”

They meet later with a lawyer named Morris. He is going to handle business affairs and other details for Ma. He says there are tons of donations pouring in. Cumberland has waived their fees but Morris says there will be many other expenses in the near future. He shows Ma a sack full of toys. Jack is overwhelmed. Ma tells him to choose 5 but he settles on 6 instead. He worries that she'll be angry and hides the extra toy. Ma and Morris make plans to deal with some of the things, such as giving toys to children in local hospitals.

Ma and Morris continue talking. Ma asks if Old Nick could be charged with murder for “the first baby.” Morris says it wouldn't be murder if the baby wasn't born alive. Jack asks Ma about it later and she explains that it was the first baby she gave birth to, the little girl. Jack wants to know if he's to blame and Ma says he wasn't born until a year later. Jack says he doesn't want to hear the rest of the story, but Ma continues. She says that Old Nick watched her give birth but had no idea what to do, and the baby was born dead.

Ma and Dr. Clay talk the following day while Jack plays. He hears Dr. Clay say that Ma did good by getting Jack out at a young age, and that he will probably forget. Next, Ma insists they go outside. She says otherwise, it's as if they never escaped at all. They remain outside for awhile and Jack is amazed to see ants. When a helicopter hovers overhead and Ma rushes Jack inside as reporters are trying to snap photos.

After their nap, Paul arrives with his wife, Deana. They talk about their daughter, Bronwyn. Grandma visits again and this time Leo joins them. They agree that since he's Jack's step-grandfather, Jack will call him Steppa. Grandma is obviously upset when she learns that Ma is still breastfeeding Jack. Ma says Grandma knows nothing about it and Grandma says she's in the dark because Ma won't talk to her about it.

Jack finds a newspaper article about himself but Ma takes it away. Later, they have time on the computer. Ma teaches Jack to play a game and she writes some e-mails. On Thursday, Ma and Jack ride in the van to a dental office where Jack gets a brief checkup before the dentist does major work on Ma's teeth. They are eating dinner when Ma's father arrives. She rushes out to see him but Jack finishes eating first. When Jack joins them, Grandpa becomes upset, which makes Ma furious. He starts to leave but she insists he remain. He says he can't stop imagining what “that beast” did to her. She says she's alive and that she has Jack, which is two miracles.

Ma is about to give a television interview. The plan is that Jack is to remain in their room and nap and Ma will be in another room giving the interview, but when the time comes, he refuses to let her go. Jack sits in a corner of the room and the lawyer says that no one is to take a photo of him.

Jack listens while Ma talks about her captivity. The woman doing the interview asks about the stillbirth. The lawyer interrupts, saying that isn't to be discussed according to



their contract. Ma says she had an abortion when she was 18 and that she “never regretted that decision. She says Jack saved her because she suddenly had a reason to live, which made her act politely to her captor. The woman tries to make Ma say that Jack reminds her of being raped and brutalized, but Ma refuses. The woman asks Ma if she feels the need to protect Jack from the world. Ma says that’s a mother’s role. The woman asks if Ma ever thinks that it would be better to be back in Room. Ma asks the lawyer if the woman is “allowed to ask me such stupid questions.” The woman asks if Ma ever considered asking her captor to drop Jack off at a hospital. Ma says she would never willingly be apart from Jack. Jack interrupts the taping by rushing to Ma when she begins to cry. The lawyer yells out that Jack is not to be photographed.

Jack wakes the next day to find that Ma is “Gone.” Jack and Ma were supposed to go with Paul and his family to see a dinosaur exhibit today. Dr. Clay suggests Jack can go without Ma and Jack agrees. Paul and Deana pick him up but they need to stop by the mall to get a gift for a birthday party Bronwyn is attending later. Paul decides it will be easier if everyone goes inside. Jack spots a Dora backpack and refuses to be parted from it. Paul pays for it and they continue on until Jack finds a Dylan the Digger book. He takes it without paying for it. Paul has to return to the store and pay. The entire scene at the mall is such a disaster that they return to Cumberland without going to the dinosaur exhibit at all,

Jack arrives at their room at Cumberland to find that Ma has thrown up on the pillow. He realizes this is something more than her usual “Gone” and he calls for Noreen. Noreen immediately picks up the phone and shouts that there is a “code blue.” Jack sees Ma’s pill bottles are “mostly empty.” He doesn’t understand because she’s never to take more than two at a time. He shouts that this is a “bad idea” as more people rush into the room.

Analysis

Jack has led a very sheltered life in many ways. He has never had exposure to direct sunlight and he hasn’t been exposed to any of the normal childhood diseases. He’s never had a cold until after his escape.

Ma clung to routines while they were held hostage and it seems likely that this was a means of coping for her. They bathed, ate, and did many specific activities at the same time each day. One they have escaped, she immediately embraces the idea of doing things whenever she wants without regard to a schedule, but Jack is now facing so many new things that he wants to return to some of the familiar things, such as their routines. In some ways, Ma dealt with their imprisonment in the same way that Jack is dealing with their new found freedom. An interesting aspect of this is that Ma doesn’t have much sympathy for Jack’s feelings with this regard. She pushes him to accept their new situation.

Ma’s first shower the morning after their escape is a traumatic thing for them both. Jack has never had a shower and wants to have a bath instead. There isn’t a tub and Ma



insists that the shower door be closed. Jack becomes hysterical when she's inside the shower with the door closed, and he bangs it until it comes open. It's only when Ma sees how upset he is that she realizes the things she's taking for granted in the Outside world are all new and frightening to Jack.

The relationship between Ma and Jack is not typical of mother-son relationships because of their unique situation. They are sometimes absolutely mother and son, with Ma taking control of the situation. At other times, they seem almost more like peers with Ma treating Jack as if they were contemporaries. This could be the case when Ma shows Jack the police photo of Old Nick with the explanation that they will never have to see him or be afraid of him again. She doesn't consider that Jack might not fully understand the concept of arrest or that seeing the photo might have a negative effect on Jack. This relationship is one of the main themes of the story.

There have been lots of changes during the years when Ma was held captive. She discovers that her brother has married and that her parents have divorced. Neither is really surprising. Many couples who experience the loss of a child – whether through death or disappearance – are unable to hold their marriage together. Both Grandma and Grandpa had difficulty dealing with Ma's disappearance, but it seems that Grandma found ways to go on while Grandpa simply stepped out of his life. He held a funeral for Ma, apparently as a way of finding closure, and moved to another country.

Dr. Clay and Ma talk about Jack's development. He is intelligent and Ma has done what she could to ensure he developed normally, but the fact that he lived in such an enclosed environment has caused some issues. Jack doesn't know how to go up and down stairs. He doesn't gauge distance well and often bumps into things. Ma may not have realized these issues and it seems to upset her when she does make the discovery.

Grandpa and Ma meet before Grandpa meets Jack. When Jack enters, Grandpa becomes even more upset. Jack doesn't understand why but it's obvious that Grandpa sees Jack as a symbol of the brutality and rape Ma endured during her years of captivity. Grandpa can't see past that to recognize that Jack is a blessing to Ma. Ma is furious at Grandpa's reaction. She points out that Jack is a little boy but Grandpa simply can't accept the situation.

The television journalist who interviews Ma is seeking to sensationalize some aspects of the situation. She asks Ma if she ever wishes for the relative safety of captivity. It's a ridiculous question and Ma makes it obvious that she thinks it's stupid. The woman also brings up the stillbirth, which was excluded from discussion by the contract negotiated by their lawyer. The woman then tells Ma that she's trying to “help” Ma tell her story. This is yet another example of the media attention and how it affects Ma and Jack as they try to move into a normal life.

It's no secret by this point that Ma was adopted. She was open about that fact with Jack, though he didn't really understand what it meant. The television reporter brings it up as well. This is one aspect of one of the book's major themes, the importance of family.



Ma drops something of a bombshell when she says that she had an abortion before she was captured. There's no other information, other than the fact that she says she doesn't regret that decision. It's left to the reader to decide the significance.

Paul's decision to take Jack into the mall is a fiasco that he should have been able to predict if he'd fully understood Jack's life experiences up to this point. Jack had never been in a mall and has no concept of buying things. He's never learned about money or discussed how a store works. He's in sensory overload and Paul doesn't know how to handle it.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Ma and Jack, including how it changes once they are Outside.

Discussion Question 2

Compare the reactions of Grandma and Grandpa to Ma's return. Which do you identify with more closely? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Paul's first interaction with Jack. What is it about Jack's past that Paul doesn't understand?

Vocabulary

despot, incarceration, protocol, ambitious, sensory, modulation, remarkably, ideally, input, adolescent, talisman, reverential, empathy, pathological, corridor, sturdy, crunchiest, gigantic, bawling, concussion, desperate



Living

Summary

In *Living*, Jack is staying in the house with the hammock. It's where Grandma and Steppa live. Jack says that Dr. Clay wanted Jack to remain at Cumberland but Grandma argued that he has family, and Jack moved to Grandma's house. Jack questions Grandma relentlessly, asking about Ma's condition and why she took too many of the pills. Jack has Ma's Bad Tooth in his cheek and he sucks on it for comfort as he struggles to believe Ma is alive. Grandma offers to let Jack sleep in the spare room downstairs but Jack refuses and Grandma agrees to let him sleep on an inflatable mattress beside Grandma's bed. Jack doesn't want to go to bed alone and Grandma finally lets him get in bed with her. Jack desperately wants to breastfeed so he sucks on Ma's tooth instead.

Grandpa stops by to say good-bye as he's returning to Australia. Jack reluctantly has breakfast with him in Grandma's kitchen. The next day, Grandma refuses to let Jack spend another day in front of the television. She takes him to the park though he doesn't want to go without Ma. He doesn't know how to interact with the other children once they arrive, which Grandma hadn't anticipated. Back at home, she realizes that Jack has a sunburn though they were outside for only a very short time.

Ma continues to improve. Grandma and Steppa begin to help Jack learn to play with things such as Legos. One day, Grandma takes Jack into the back yard, careful to cover him with sunscreen first. Jack asks about the hammock and Grandma goes to get it from the basement. Jack finds a bee and gets stung while she's gone. He decides that bees are better when seen from a distance. When Grandma gets the hammock up, Jack enjoys swinging in it.

Ma calls on the telephone and assures Jack that she's alright and that she's going to be with him again soon. Dr. Clay stops by to visit and Jack overhears Grandma telling him that a sunburn and a bee sting are not a big deal. She says she "raised two children."

One morning, Grandma takes Jack to the playground before any other kids arrive so that he can play all by himself. He's a little reluctant but Grandma helps him explore. When Grandma's book club meets, Jack listens to them talking about him and Ma. Grandma is furious when she learns that pictures were taken of Jack during Ma's television interview, and that they are now "all over the Internet." Jack hears them talking about their reactions to Ma's disappearance.

One evening, Grandma insists that Jack have a bath. He's been washing with a cloth but fears getting in the tub alone. Grandma puts on her bathing suit and gets in with him. When they get out, Jack discovers that some of his skin is peeling. Steppa pulls a large strip from Jack's back, which delights Jack. The next morning, Jack finds some scissors and cuts off his ponytail. Grandma cuts some more to make his hair



presentable, and she weaves some into a bracelet since it's Jack's first haircut. Grandma takes Jack to town after that, saying that no one will recognize him now that he's had a hair cut. They buy new shoes that Jack loves because they are so light. They visit the library as well.

Jack has made a list of things he wants from the Room and some of them arrive, including Rug. Grandma and Steppa take Jack to visit the ocean. Jack gets another call from Ma and she says the doctors are still working to get her medications right. Jack hears a television show in which two men and a woman are talking about the fact that they are all like Jack on some level. Grandma turns it off.

Grandma takes Jack to a department store where she plans to buy him a soccer ball. Jack is enthralled with the down escalator but when he gets on it he discovers that he can't get back off. Some young women recognize him and begin talking to him. When Grandma finds him, she's angry. She tells Jack that there are bad people in the world and that he's never to go off on his own. She berates the young women for not helping Jack find his way back to his family. Jack doesn't really understand. He thought Old Nick was the only wicked person in the world. She doesn't pay for the soccer ball and sets the alarm off at the door. She throws the ball down and makes Jack leave the store.

Back at home, Jack throws a fit. He screams at Grandma and shouts that he's going back to Cumberland. Grandma is obviously frustrated with the situation. Steppa picks Jack up and carries him to the blow up mattress where he sleeps. He waits for Jack to calm down then suggests they have some pie and watch television. Jack agrees.

Jack is surprised when Ma arrives. She admires his haircut and he gives her the bracelet Grandma made from his hair. Grandma asks if Ma would like to sleep on the couch but Ma says they'll be leaving after supper. They eat the meal then Grandma drives Ma and Jack to Independent Living Residential Facility. Grandma helps them take all their things up to the 6th floor where their new apartment is located. Grandma has also bought some groceries.

After Grandma leaves, Jack asks to breastfeed. Ma says they have dried up. Jack lifts Ma's shirt and kisses each good-bye.

The next morning, they begin unpacking. Ma suggests that they have separate rooms so that she can have some space of her own. Jack doesn't understand. Jack begins trying to make one of the bedrooms look more like Room. He asks if they can put up cork, like what was on the walls at Room. Ma refuses. Jack wants to put down Rug but Ma refuses. They argue, with Ma saying that Jack needs to think about her feelings sometimes. Ma wants to burn Rug but gives in, saying that Jack can keep it only if he keeps it rolled up in his wardrobe, out of sight. Dr. Clay and Noreen visit. They ask if Ma has given any thought to new identities to avoid so much media attention. Ma says they won't be doing that.

The days pass. Jack and Ma go outside and Jack buys Ma a hair clip with some coins Steppa gave him. Grandma buys him watercolor paints. They sometimes visit Grandma.



Paul buys Jack a soccer ball. Jack and Ma attend some concerts and a couple of churches.

One day, Jack asks if they can go back to visit Room for “one minute.” Ma says she doesn't think she can stand it. Jack assures her she can. Officer Oh picks them up one day for a last look at Room. Jack sees crime scene tape blocking off most of the property. He sees the hold where they dug up the baby girl who died. They talk briefly about how Room seems different now. Ma says she can't stay any longer and Jack says “good-bye” to the elements of the Room, including the Wardrobe and Bed. He remembers the picture Ma drew for him and gets it from the back of Wardrobe. Then he urges Ma to say “good-bye.” He knows she does, but she does so “on mute.” Then they walk away.

Analysis

The scene in the department store must have been traumatic for Grandma. The reader should remember that Jack has become something of a celebrity. People know him on sight and Grandma's first concern would naturally have been that someone took Jack. Imagine Grandma's fear that she might have put Jack in a situation to be kidnapped after all he and Ma had been through.

Steppa's role in Jack's life is an interesting aspect of the story. He has no children of his own but he does know how to relate to children. He teaches Jack about Legos and some other specific things. He also shows Jack how his skin is peeling. Grandma is a bit grossed out by that scene but Jack is enthralled, and Steppa seems to believe he would be. When Jack throws a fit with Grandma, both Jack and Grandma are out of patience with each other, but Steppa steps in. He arranges for Jack to cool off away from Grandma. Grandma seems to feel that she's at the end of her rope with Jack, but Steppa doesn't allow the situation to escalate. At one earlier point in the story, Jack notes that Grandpa is his real Grandpa but that a real Grandpa should act more like Steppa.

The relationship between Ma and Jack continues to change as they begin to settle into their new life but there remains some fundamental things that are the same. Ma sometimes acts like Jack is her contemporary rather than her son. She accuses him of thinking of no one but himself. Jack's reaction is furious. He says that he thought of nothing but Ma during their time apart. They aren't exactly talking about the same thing but they are each dealing from their own perspectives.

Jack loses Ma's Bad Tooth sometime before he and Ma arrive at the apartment. He fears that he might have swallowed it by accident. He asks Ma what would happen if a person swallowed something they shouldn't and she assures him it will pass through his system. He doesn't think that's happened and wonders if it might remain in some corner of his body, hidden away forever. This Tooth has become a symbol of Jack's need to be near Ma, even when she's away.



The final scene of the story is an important piece of closure for Jack. He has begun adjusting to his new life and is beginning to accept that he will never return to the Room, but he needs to make this final trip in order to fully move past that phase. Ma, on the other hand, sees Room as only a reminder of the years of captivity and she can't imagine that she's going to find any closure in seeing it a final time. She initially accuses Jack of thinking of no one but himself, but she gives in to his insistence that they make the trip together. Once there, she seems to feel a little frantic from being there, but she also seems to find a sense of peace that she hadn't expected. She tells Jack that she can't remain in the Room any longer but he says she should tell the Room good-bye, as he has. Jack believes that she does, but that she does so "on mute." This is a case in which the limited perspective is truly limited. It may be that Jack is projecting his own emotions onto Ma. It's left to the reader to decide if Jack's perspective, in this instance, reflects what really happens or only what he wishes would happen.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think it's important to Jack to say "good-bye" to Room? What is Ma's reaction to the situation?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the new step in life for Jack and Ma. Predict the challenges and advantages they'll face by living on their own.

Discussion Question 3

What role does Ma's family play in the new life Ma and Jack are living? Why are they important?

Vocabulary

continuity, therapeutic, isolation, definitely, archetype, relevant, cemented, secondary, identities, surname, sniffs, independent, concealed, thumping, scratchy, nearly, actually, inventing, hail, shush, participation



Characters

Jack

Jack is the narrator of the story. He celebrates his 5th birthday as the story opens. He has a very limited view of the world, having spend all his life inside the tiny Room he shares with his mother. Routines are important to Jack because they provide stimulus and structure in his life. He depends on having meals at the same time of day each day, going to bed on time, and doing the same kinds of activities daily. They also do chores on a schedule, which is another important part of Jack's life up to the day of their escape.

Jack is a smart child but naive because of his lack of exposure with worldly things. He counts, reads, and spells well and has a fairly extensive vocabulary. However, his speech patterns are not well developed because of his limited exposure to people and his lack of practice interacting with other people. When he escapes from Old Nick, he has trouble talking to the people who ultimately serve as his rescuers. Later, when he slips away from Grandma at a store, Jack talks to some other people and his Grandma is furious, knowing that something bad could have happened to Jack again. He is surprised to learn that there are other bad people in the world.

Ultimately, Jack is hopeful about his future though he is fearful of all the new things he is forced to learn. He wishes he could return to the Room because it's where he felt safe, but he becomes willing to give that up when the time comes.

Ma

Jack's Mother is never named. For the purpose of clarity, she is referred to as Ma or Jack's Mother throughout this guide. She was abducted when she was 19 years old. She was a college student at the time, and was apparently a typical young woman looking forward to making something of her life. She was raped repeatedly after her abduction, and she gave birth to a little girl who died at birth. She was alone when she gave birth to Jack and carefully guarded him against Old Nick.

Ma created a life for Jack with her limited space and resources. It would have been tempting to let him watch television all day, just to fill in the time, but she resists. She limits his television time and sets routines that help Jack learn while passing the time as productively as possible. She does many things aimed at providing comfort and security for them, and generally puts Jack's needs ahead of her own. She continues to breast feed him until a short time after they escape. She says she didn't see any reason to stop but there is also a level of comfort for both Jack and Ma.

There are some times when her own feelings come first. For example, she talks to Jack about things that would have been adult conversations in normal circumstances. She tells him about the baby girl who died though she glosses over the details. The reader



may be tempted to judge her for this but should remember that she's very young to be solely responsible for a baby, especially under these circumstances. She is also struggling with depression and seems to barely hold herself together some days. It's evident she was focused on Jack during her captivity because she gives in to the depression once she's outside, and tries to commit suicide by overdosing.

Ma is a strong character and is devoted to Jack. She is careful to ask for things that will last a long time and that make sense for them, such as crayons instead of markers. She lives in fear of Old Nick and submits to her captivity until she realizes that staying in the Room is more dangerous than trying to escape.

Old Nick

Old Nick is the man who abducts Ma when she is 19. He has apparently been planning the abduction for some time because he has a self-contained garden shed to keep her in. He has taken many precautions, such as burying fencing in the ground under the shed so that she can't dig out. He lives in a residential area but manages to keep Ma and Jack's presence a secret for 7 years. He gripes at Ma when she asks for things, and says that some girls would appreciate the opportunity to live as she does. He is caught after Jack's escape, and is sent to jail. Jack calls him Old Nick because of a cartoon he once saw about a man who visited people at night. Ma's abductor only comes to Room at night, prompting Jack's nickname for him. His real name is never revealed.

Grandma

Grandma is Ma's mother and Jack's grandmother. She is relieved to know that Ma has survived and is excited about being a grandmother to Jack. She is a likeable and believable character. She is somewhat overwhelmed by taking care of Jack but insists that he remain with her rather than in the health care facility where Jack and Ma stayed in the first days after their rescue. She obviously worried about them but is supportive when Ma and Jack move into an apartment of their own.

Steppa

Steppa is Grandma's husband. Ma is not excited about meeting him in the first days after her escape but it's clear that he's a kind man who is willing to do whatever he can to help those around him. He is very good to Jack and helps Jack to understand some specific things, such as how to play with Lego blocks.

Grandpa

Ma's Father has moved to Australia in the years since Ma's captivity. Jack knows him as Grandpa. He held a funeral for Ma as a way of finding personal closure and had



accepted that she was dead. He hates Jack because Jack represents the rapes that Ma endured during her captivity. He is obviously struggling with his own feelings regarding the situation without giving much thought to the feelings of others. He remains only a short time before returning to Australia.

Officer Oh

Officer Oh is one of the two police officers who arrive after Jack's escape. She is a kind woman who quickly begins to understand Jack's speech patterns which helps her decipher Jack's directions back to Ma. She is also the officer who returns to Room with Jack and Ma to give Jack the chance to say good-bye.

Paul

Paul is Ma's younger brother. He is grown, married, and has a child of his own by the time Ma escapes. He is a kind man but doesn't understand how traumatic the situation now is for Jack, which is why he decides it's a good idea to take Jack into the mall. He is a believable and likeable character but does not play a major role in the story.

Dr. Clay

Dr. Clay is the admitting physician when Ma and Jack arrive at Cumberland, so he remains in charge of their care during their time there and during their follow-ups. He notes that he confers with others regarding specific aspects of the situation, such as Jack's special needs as a small child. He seems to be compassionate and wants what's best for Ma and Jack. It also seems that he is pleased to be in charge of their care and Ma berates him for saying he was "lucky" to be the one who caught their case.

Noreen

Noreen is the nurse who takes care of most of the needs of Jack and Ma. She brings them their new clothes and generally helps them take care of daily needs as they begin their adjustment. She is with them when they go outside for the first time and she shows Jack how to breath into a paper bag to stop his panic attack. She seems to be a compassionate person who cares about Jack and Ma.



Symbols and Symbolism

Rug

This is a rug on the floor of Room. Jack and Ma move it to do their walks around the track. Ma wraps Jack in Rug when he pretends to be dead and makes his escape from Old Nick. After Jack and Ma move into their own apartment, Jack wants to have Rug back. To Jack, this and the other possessions from Room provide a sense of security. To Ma, they represent her captivity. Ma eventually allows Jack to keep Rug but insists he leave it out of sight in his closet.

Television

Jack and Ma have television in the Room but Ma limits Jack's time watching, partly because she doesn't want him to know much about the Outside world. Jack enjoys some specific shows, such as Dora the Explorer, but he also watches nature shows, cooking shows, and medical shows. He hasn't closely questioned the reality of these other shows before his 5th birthday and calls them "planets."

Breastfeeding

Ma breast feeds Jack when he's born, partly out of necessity because she doesn't dare ask Old Nick for a steady supply of formula. She continues to feed him until a short time after their escape. She says she never saw a reason to stop but she was also providing a level of comfort for both herself and Jack.

Sundaytreat

This is a special thing that Jack and Ma request for Sundays. Old Nick seems to give in at least a little on this point. Some Sundaytreats are actually necessities, such as Ma's pain medicine. For Jack, Sundaytreat is a symbol of hope that he'll get some gift that's very special. It represents that same symbol for Ma, except her hope is that they'll get something that will make their captivity a little less horrible.

Scream

Jack and Ma "do Scream" each Monday through Friday when, presumably, Old Nick will be at work. Jack believes it's simply another part of their routine but Ma is hoping that someone will hear them and come to investigate. This is an important part of one of the book's main themes – hope.



The Hammock

Ma tells Jack about the hammock that was in the back yard at Grandma's house and Jack latches onto the idea of that hammock as being one of the good things about Outside. When he gets to go to Grandma's house, he asks about the hammock and she puts it up, though it's been unused for a long time.

Dora the Explorer

Jack watches Dora on television while he's in the Room and it's one of his favorite shows. When he goes to the mall with Uncle Paul, he creates a huge scene over a Dora backpack and insists on having it.

Ma's Tooth

Ma has some bad teeth and one of them falls out a short time before Ma and Jack escape. Jack takes the tooth with him when they escape and he holds onto it for days afterward. He sometimes even sucks on it as a way of comforting himself when he and Ma are separated. For Jack, the tooth is a small piece of Ma that he can hang onto and he has no idea that it's really not an acceptable memento.

The Park

Grandma takes Jack to the park near her house after Ma's suicide attempt. On that first visit, she doesn't understand that he doesn't have any idea how to interact with other children. She realizes it later and takes Jack back in the early morning hours when he can play by himself. Grandma sees the park as something that Jack should greatly enjoy but Jack sees it as a challenge and one more strange thing that he has to learn about in the Outside world.

Legos and Play-Doh

Jack doesn't have toys like these in Room and doesn't really understand how to play with them once Jack and Ma escape. Ma feels that Dr. Clay is judging her when he learns that Jack has never had Play-Doh. Ma has created toys to entertain Jack out of ordinary things, such as the cardboard rolls from toilet tissue and boxes from their cereal. Jack is interested in these toys but hesitant in some cases.



Settings

Room

Room is the most important setting in the story. It's a shed in the back yard of the man who took Jack's mom captive. The Room is about 11 feet square and Jack's entire world until he and his mom manage to escape. Room is a symbol of captivity and brutality to Ma but it's a symbol of security for Jack. Room includes a bed, small bathroom, and small eating area. There is a television in the Room and this provides Jack's minor glimpses at the outside world. While traditional speech patterns would indicate that this is "the room," Jack refers to it as "Room," making it like a proper place such as a city or, in Jack's case, a world.

Wardrobe

Wardrobe is literally a wardrobe inside the Room where Jack and his mother are held captive. This is where Jack sleeps when Old Nick comes to the Room. Jack treats the Wardrobe as something like his own bedroom. He feels safe here though it doesn't keep him from knowing most of what's going on in Room.

Outside

To Jack, Outside is everything that isn't inside Room. He doesn't believe Outside actually exists until he turns 5, when Ma begins to explain it all to him in order to plan their escape. Outside is a frightening place to Jack and he often wants to return to the relative security of Room. He also doesn't really understand for a long time just how big Outside is.

Cumberland Clinic

This is the facility where Jack and Ma stay in their first days after their escape. It's a traditional mental health facility. Jack and Ma are in room 7. They sometimes go to the dining room for a meal and have limited interaction with other patients. They spend time with the psychiatrist Dr. Clay, including sessions in a room where there are things for Jack to play with.

Independent Living Residential Facility

This is where Ma and Jack have an apartment after Ma's recovery from her suicide attempt. It's a small apartment on the 6th floor. Jack is struggling to figure out how to learn to be on his own away from Ma. The apartment suits their needs with a kitchen, living room, bathroom, and two bedrooms.



Themes and Motifs

The Relationship Between Jack and Ma

This relationship is an important part of the book though the dynamics and the power of the relationship shifts dramatically once Ma and Jack are outside the Room. Ma gave birth to a little girl before Jack was born, and that child died during childbirth. Ma may have become even more protective of Jack because of her daughter's death. It's vital to note that Jack is the product of Ma's continuous rape but she doesn't view him in that way. She is very much a mother to Jack and it doesn't occur to her that she should try to send him away.

Ma is a captive who is brutalized and raped on a regular basis. She is afraid of her captor and seems to be prone to depression, perhaps mainly because of her situation. Her life is devoid of joy with the exception of her interaction with Jack. She depends greatly on him as a means of giving purpose to her life. She establishes a routine designed mainly to take care of Jack's needs. They have physical education so that Jack can learn to run and jump. As much as possible, she is creating a good environment for Jack with an eye toward his normal development.

Another aspect of their relationship is that Ma sometimes depends on Jack as something like a peer. She tells him the story of her abduction as a means of getting Jack to understand that they need to escape. She has no one else to confide in, so she often confides in Jack as a means of combating the loneliness.

The relationship changes dramatically once Ma and Jack are outside the Room. Ma is now in complete control because Jack doesn't know how to deal with this new situation. He is more dependent on Ma for guidance and comfort, but she forgets that sometimes. She tries to rush Jack into accepting the Outside world and has to remind herself that he isn't returning to something he's lost, as she is. She occasionally has to be reminded that she and Jack are not experiencing the same things in this regard. For example, when she steps into the shower, she is returning to a habit that feels like something of a luxury. To Jack, the shower is new and frightening. He hates how the water splashes on him and he becomes frantic when Ma closes the door between them.

Once they are Outside, Ma accepts that there should be some distance between them. She wants Jack to sleep in his own bed and doesn't see anything wrong with being inside the shower while Jack is outside. Jack, however, is depending on Ma more than ever to help him feel secure.

Another example of this theme is seen in the fact that Ma is still breastfeeding Jack until they are forced to live apart for awhile. She tells Grandma that she just never saw a reason to stop breastfeeding him, though it's not acceptable in the outside world. When Jack is overly stressed once he's Outside, he depends on that contact both as a source of nourishment and as a means of comfort.



Ma's State of Mind

Ma's state of mind is seen only through Jack's perspective, which means the reader sometimes has to interpret Jack's view to fully understand Ma. She doesn't talk to Jack about being worried or depressed until they are about to escape. Jack does, however, see the signs of depression and worry though he doesn't fully understand them and he doesn't have a name for them.

One of the most evident signs of depression is seen in the days that Ma is "gone." That's Jack's word for it, though it gives the reader an accurate picture of what's happening. This seems to be Ma's version of a coping mechanism that she uses as a means of giving herself a chance to get back on an even keel. When those days happen in the Rom, Ma spends the day in bed. She doesn't interact with Jack and she doesn't do anything for herself during those hours. She just lies on the bed and sleeps a lot. On those days, Jack is responsible for taking care of himself. He gets his own food and entertains himself quietly throughout the day. He doesn't do anything that's overly loud and he doesn't try to make Ma wake up. The reader doesn't know how they came to establish these routines, or how often these days occur for Ma. They must happen fairly regularly because Jack is not particularly surprised when it happens shortly after his 5th birthday. He does worry about what would happen to him if he woke the next day to find that Ma was gone again. He says it never happens for more than a day.

This theme is seen again as Ma begins making plans for their escape. The catalyst comes on the night that Jack drives the Jeep off the shelf, waking Old Nick. Ma says Jack scared Old Nick and Jack thinks it's funny that Old Nick could be frightened so easily. Ma says that it isn't funny in the least and Jack realizes that his prank caused Old Nick to hurt Ma. Ma seems quiet but determined as she begins to plan for their escape. She faces difficult decisions but feels that their situation has become so dangerous that they can no longer put off an escape attempt. Ma seems to battle between hope, fear, and depression during this stage and after their escape.

The most important aspect of this theme is seen when Ma attempts to commit suicide after they are Outside. She has a day alone when Jack is gone with Paul's family, and she takes a lot of pills in an apparent effort to kill herself. She has opportunities to commit suicide prior to this point because she has access to her pills in her room, but she doesn't take them until Jack is gone. It seems possible that she wanted to kill herself when Jack wouldn't be around to witness it. She may also have simply come to the end of her rope on that specific day, and she might have taken the same steps even if Jack was there. She never talks to Jack about anything along these lines.

The Effects of Captivity

Jack spends the first 5 years of his life confined to a single Room. He believes that there is nothing Outside that Room, and that everything they see on television is make-believe. Jack isn't old enough at age 5 to fully begin questioning the situation, but it seems that it would only be a matter of time before he came to that point. Ma keeps him



in the dark on most aspects of the real world. She doesn't prompt him to think about where Old Nick goes when he isn't in the Room or where their food and supplies come from. She later explains that she doesn't want Jack to wish for things that he can't have. In some ways, this makes it more difficult for Jack to believe that there is an Outside and that he and Ma would be better off living out there.

Once they do manage to escape, a doctor urges Ma and Jack to wear masks. He points out that Jack has never been exposed to diseases and germs that are prevalent in public places, and that Ma hasn't been exposed to them in many years. They do wear the masks for a few days but Jack quickly develops his first cold. He's never been sick like this and he has to learn how to blow his nose. He gets immunizations and hates the pain, perhaps more than children who had been receiving shots as a normal thing for their entire lives. Jack also sunburns easily because he's never been exposed to direct sunlight until his escape.

The lack of social interaction is another of the effects of captivity. Jack doesn't know how to act with other people and he's completely out of his element at the mall and the park. Many of the people who have contact with Jack don't understand this. Paul doesn't understand the sensory overload that Jack experiences inside the mall. Grandma doesn't initially realize that Jack would be overwhelmed at the idea of playing with other children his age. He has trouble talking with other people and Ma has to remind him to speak up and talk clearly so that others can understand him.

Jack also has some development problems because of the limitations of his first 5 years. He doesn't know how to go up and down stairs. He bumps into things when he walks because he's never had to learn depth perception. His digestive system is taxed by the new diet. He struggles with what most children would simply understand as a matter of course.

The media interest in the case is another aspect of this theme. Ma and Jack are photographed coming into the police station. Jack is amazed when he sees himself on television. Reporters in a helicopter try to photograph them from the air when they are outside the Cumberland Clinic. Jack sees a newspaper article that compares Jack to a bonsai tree. He later sees a television show with men discussing the fact that everyone is a little bit like Jack in their view of the world.

The captivity has an effect on Ma as well. She is years behind in her life. She hasn't developed relationships or a career. She has a child that is a product of rape. She struggles with depression and she struggles to step back into her relationship with her family.

The Importance of Family

When Ma disappeared, her parents put up fliers and searched desperately for her. Ma doesn't know about their efforts to find her until after her escape. Her disappearance



creates problems for the family and Grandma and Grandpa divorce because of their different approaches to dealing with the loss.

Arguably the most important example of this theme is seen in Jack's parentage. He is very close to Ma, mainly because they are totally dependent on each other for comfort and support. Ma says that Jack gave her a reason to live during her years of captivity. She says that she became more polite to her captor because she wanted to protect Jack. Jack, by contrast, feels the need to be near Ma but he also feels the need to protect her. When she becomes visibly upset during the television interview, Jack rushes to hug her.

An important aspect of the family theme between Ma and Jack is seen in Ma's attitude about Jack's father. She admits that her captor is Jack's biological father but doesn't want Jack to even know that fact. She says that there is no "relationship" between Jack and their captor, and that Jack has only one parent as far as she's concerned.

Once Ma and Jack escape, she's relieved to reunite with Grandma. Grandma is simply relieved to have Ma back. She tries to get Ma to talk about her time in captivity. Ma says she doesn't want Grandma to have to think about those things but Grandma says she can't think past being glad that Ma has returned. This seems like the attitude most family members would have but Grandma struggles. He can't get past the idea that Ma was repeatedly raped and brutalized during her years of captivity. He sees Jack as a symbol of those years of rape, which means he doesn't begin developing a familial relationship with Jack. Ma predicts that he'll eventually come around, and that he'll begin to act like a grandfather should.

By contrast, Steppa and Grandma step up to take care of Jack when Ma tries to commit suicide. Grandma insists that Jack come home with her rather than remaining at Cumberland. Steppa teaches Jack things, such as how to peel the skin after he sunburned and how to play with Legos. He also takes control to help Jack deal with his anger issues.

Ma was adopted and she is open about that with Jack, though he doesn't have a real concept of what that means at first. She never kept in contact with her birth mother and considered Grandma and Grandpa her parents in every sense of the word. While in captivity, Ma doesn't talk to Jack about her parents and brother until she is preparing Jack for their escape attempt. She doesn't forget about them at all, but this is one more example of Ma trying to keep Jack from longing for things he can't have. However, once she begins preparing him to escape, she tells him all about his grandparents and the relationship she had with them and with her brother.

Fear

Fear is an important theme of the story because it drives a great deal of Ma's actions throughout the first two sections of the story. Ma was abducted when she was 19 years old. She was a college student and was old enough to know that her life was in danger



from the moment of her abduction. She always felt an intense need to escape and she talks to Jack about her early attempts. She threw things at the Skylight but found that it was reinforced and she couldn't break it. She tried to dig her way out but found there was fencing buried beneath the foundation of the Room. She also hit Old Nick with the toilet lid once, but she didn't manage to escape then either. Old Nick told her that he would never tell her the code, which made her realize this tactic wouldn't work.

After Jack's birth, Ma became more compliant. During her television interview, Ma says that she became "polite" to her captor in an attempt to keep Jack safe. Ma doesn't make problems for the sake of keeping Jack safe, but she continues to think about an escape. She turns the light on and off at night in the hope that someone might see the flashing light through Skylight. She and Jack "do scream" every weekday afternoon when, theoretically, Old Nick isn't home. Jack sees it merely as one of their routine activities, but Ma is still hoping that someone might hear them. She is bound to know that Old Nick would punish her if he caught them, but her fear drives her to take the risk.

When Old Nick punishes Ma for screaming at him by turning off the power for several days, Ma's fear escalates. She tells Jack the truth about the Outside world and explains that they have to face their fear because it's becoming more dangerous to remain in Room. She tells Jack that Old Nick had once threatened to let her starve to death. She fears that it might happen at any time.

Jack is another example of this theme. He is never really afraid of anything other than Old Nick when he and Ma are in the Room together during his first 5 years. In some ways, he is protected from all the fears and dangers that children with traditional upbringing might face. He doesn't share Ma's fear that Old Nick might kill them, so his life is fairly protected. That changes dramatically once Jack and Ma escape. Jack is very afraid of facing the new things Outside, including the people they encounter. Jack's adaptability, which is one of the minor themes of the book, comes into play fairly quickly and he begins to discover the joys of being Outside.

Grandma exhibits this theme as well. She talks about their search for Ma after she was abducted. She doesn't voice the fear but it's implied. She is, however, frantic when she briefly loses Jack in the department store. It's easy to imagine that she fears someone recognized Jack and abducted him. Jack doesn't understand her fear because he thought Old Nick was the only evil person in the world and he knows Old Nick is in jail.

Ironically, Old Nick is also an example of this theme but for entirely different reasons. He is scared when Jack drives the Jeep off the shelf, hitting Old Nick in the middle of the night. He reacts by choking Ma. He is also afraid when he confronts the man walking his dog during Jack's escape. Old Nick grabs Jack but then drops him so that he can run away.



Styles

Point of View

The story is written in first person from the limited perspective of Jack. He is 5 years old as the story opens, making his perspective much more limited than it might have been if he was an adult. The limited perspective means that the reader knows only what Jack knows. For example, he calls his mother Ma. He knows that she has another name but that name is never revealed to the reader. He overhears conversations that he doesn't understand, and he relates individual words or phrases that convey some meaning to the reader. This is seen when Jack and Ma are in the health care facility. Jack listens to the conversation between Ma and Dr. Clay. Jack hears a few words about Ma's state of mind and Jack's development, but he doesn't know what these words mean. This gives the reader a look at what the conversation is about though the reader doesn't get the full conversation.

The perspective does give the reader some information that would have been omitted if the story had been written from his mother's perspective or that of some other adult. For example, Jack is sometimes angry and upset at situations that the adults don't fully understand. The reader gets more information in some cases from Jack's thoughts than from his words or the conversations.

Jack's perspective is reliable, as far as his understanding goes. He doesn't fully comprehend everything that goes on and he doesn't always explain himself well. Within these limits, his perspective is accurate and reliable.

Language and Meaning

The story is written in the language and understanding of a 5-year-old who has literally been cut off from contact with anyone other than his mother for his entire life. His speech patterns are different than that of a typical child who has been exposed to constant contact with a variety of adults. These patterns make some of Jack's thoughts and conversations difficult to follow. It seems reasonable that Ma and Jack would develop some of their own language idiosyncrasies because they depend on each other for communication.

The story is presented in chronological order from the day of Jack's 5th birthday. The reader gets some pieces of information about events prior to that date through conversations and Jack's memories. Jack overhears some of these conversations but Ma talks to him about others. In some cases, he doesn't fully understand what he's being told. For example, he has the idea that he was first born as a girl but then returned to heaven and came back into Ma's tummy as a boy. This is because of the death of Ma's first child, a daughter. Through Ma's conversations with him, Jack has developed this story.



The most obvious literary device seen in the book is personification. Jack refers to all the major possessions in his world as proper nouns, as a normal child might refer to their school or their town. Jack gives these things human emotions, such as wondering if they are lonely after he leaves.

Structure

The story is divided into 5 sections. The first is titled Presents and it runs from the opening page through page The opening lines of this section indicate that Jack has just turned 5 and it gives some clues about the life he lives with Ma. The second section is titled Unlying. It begins on page 61 when Jack discovers that waking Old Nick with the Jeep caused Old Nick to hurt Ma. The third section is titled Dying. It begins on page 121 the morning after the power is turned back on. Jack has learned about Ma's abduction and that there is a real world Outside.

The fourth section is titled After. This section begins on page 195. The section includes the moments immediately after Jack and Ma are rescued and go on through their reintroduction into society. Ma and Jack both struggle to become acclimated to living Outside but Ma seems to actually struggle more. The fifth and final section is titled Living. It begins on page 313 right after Ma's suicide attempt. This section goes on through the remainder of the story, outlining Jack's efforts to learn to live Outside and Ma's coming to terms with her new life.

During his time in Room, Jack refers to most of the things in his world as proper nouns. The author gets this point across by using capital letters when Jack refers to Room, Wardrobe, Jeep, Remote, Door, and other items. In an effort to maintain that point, many of these words are capitalized in this guide as well.

The overall tone is one of hope though it's obvious that Ma is feeling levels of despair and desperation until near the end of the story. Most readers will expect a happy outcome, at least for Jack, and they won't be disappointed in this regard. The story ends just as Jack and Ma are turning a corner into their new lives. It's left to the reader to imagine what might have happened to them after that.



Quotes

I don't think he came last night after nine, the air's always different if he came. I don't ask because she doesn't like saying about him.”

-- Jack (Presents paragraph 21)

Importance: This is the first time Jack mentions “him.” He's referring to the man holding Jack and Ma captive. He notices that the air outside Room is different than the air inside, so he notices that difference if the man has opened the door the previous night. Ma protects Jack from him so that Jack never comes in direct contact, and Jack knows that Ma doesn't like to say anything about “him.”

Spider's real. I've seen her two times.”

-- Jack (Presents paragraph 80)

Importance: This is very early in the story and it's showing that Jack doesn't have a clear concept of what's real and what isn't. At this point, he still believes everything he sees on television is not real and that what's inside the Room is all that's real in his world.

Women aren't real like Ma is and girls and boys not either. Men aren't real except Old Nick, and I'm not actually sure if he's real for real. Maybe half?

-- Jack (Presents paragraph 175)

Importance: This is an indication that Jack is repeating the things his mother has taught him about what's real but that he's beginning to have questions. He hasn't yet thought about where Old Nick goes when he isn't in Room, but he will think about that soon.

I see her neck again, the marks that he put on her, I'm all done giggling.”

-- Jack (Unlying paragraph 22)

Importance: Jack has just figured out that Old Nick tried to choke Ma when Jack woke him in the middle of the night. Ma has instilled a natural fear of Old Nick but Jack has never thought about the fact that Old Nick is actually dangerous until this moment.

What we see on TV is ... it's pictures of real things.”

-- Ma (Unlying paragraph 100)

Importance: Jack saw an ad on television for pain killers that are like the ones Ma takes, and he has questioned how Old Nick got them. Ma doesn't really want to have this conversation, but she is coming to the conclusion that she and Jack are going to have to figure out how to escape. She explains to him that she's now telling him the truth and that it's the opposite of lying.

Before I didn't even know to be mad that we can't open Door, my head was too small to have Outside in it. When I was a little kid I thought like a little kid, but now I'm five and I



know everything.”

-- Jack (Dying paragraph 20)

Importance: There are a couple of important pieces of information in this statement. First, Jack is maturing as he realizes that there are things he knows now that he didn't know when he was younger. It's also a realization on his part that he now longs for Outside, which is something he didn't even know existed until a short time earlier. Ma explains that she'd never told him about Outside so that he wouldn't long for things he couldn't have.

It's a story all about us and Room and Please send help a.s.a.p., that means super fast.”

-- Jack (Dying paragraph 330)

Importance: This is the note Ma gives Jack that he's going to take with him when Old Nick takes him Outside. Jack is afraid that he won't be brave enough to talk to anyone once he's out of the Room and Ma has given him the note as a means of helping him communicate.

She's walking with me up on her hip, I cling onto her shoulders. It's dark but then there's lights quick quick like fireworks.”

-- Jack (After paragraph 2)

Importance: Reporters have heard about Jack and Ma, and are waiting when the police arrive with them at the police station. Media attention is high over the coming days as the story spreads.

Words sliding underneath LOCAL NEWS AS IT HAPPENS. A she person is talking but I can't see “... bachelor loner converted the garden shed into an impregnable twenty-first century dungeon.”

-- Jack (After paragraph 84)

Importance: Jack is seeing news coverage of the story about their escape. The story is sensationalized with information such as that “catatonic state” of Jack and Ma. Jack doesn't understand what he's seeing or hearing at this point but Dr. Clay is furious that he was allowed to see it.

Ma said we'd be free but this doesn't feel like free.”

-- Jack (Living paragraph 77)

Importance: Ma has attempted suicide and Jack is now staying that Grandma and Steppa. He is feeling lonely and confused, and he's afraid of all the new things he's enduring. He remembers that Ma told him they'd be better off Outside, but Jack doesn't see that this is better.

He said I shouldn't be and then Ma wouldn't have to be Ma.”

-- Jack (Living paragraph 98)



Importance: Jack is talking about his Grandpa, Ma's father. Jack heard his reaction to Jack and figured out enough to know that Grandpa thought Jack shouldn't have been born, and that he sees Jack as a symbol of the brutality Ma endured. This is an example of one of the book's themes, the importance of family.

To be honest, we haven't put it up for years.”

-- Grandma (Living paragraph 261)

Importance: Grandma is talking about the hammock. Ma talked fondly about the hammock and it has become a symbol of everything that's wonderful about being Outside. Jack expected to find it as soon as he arrived at Grandma's house. He asks for it and she puts it up for him. Her comment that it hasn't been up for many years is evidence of the passage of time and changes in her life, partly because of Ma's disappearance.