Shoeless Joe Study Guide

Shoeless Joe by W. P. Kinsella

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Introduction

Canadian writer W. P. Kinsella's first novel, *Shoeless Joe*, published in Boston in 1982, is an ingenious baseball story that smoothly weaves together fact and fantasy. The narrator, Ray Kinsella, is a baseball fanatic and dreamer who owns a farm in Iowa. One day he hears a mysterious voice saying, "If you build it, he will come." Ray believes this is an instruction to build a baseball field at his farm and that the "he" is his father's hero, Shoeless Joe Jackson, one of the greatest baseball players of all time. Jackson was banned from baseball for life following the Black Sox Scandal of 1919, in which he and seven other players accepted bribes to throw the World Series. From this premise, Kinsella spins his tale full of magic and nostalgia. Shoeless Joe shows up, and Ray continues to pursue his dream, even traveling cross-country to kidnap the reclusive writer J. D. Salinger, who joins Ray in his quest to restore the broken dreams of the past.

Set in idyllic rural Iowa and told in lyrical, poetic, sometimes sentimental prose, *Shoeless Joe* is a story of the power of the imagination and the triumph of love. It is about dreams and hope and trust and the fulfillment of long-buried desires. The dominant note throughout is the characters' consuming love of baseball, which is presented almost as a religion, and is contrasted, favorably, with the spiritual dryness of conventional Christianity.

Shoeless Joe was made into the popular movie *Field of Dreams* in 1989, and for a while the words "If you build it, he will come" became almost as well-known in American popular culture as the famous phrase "Say it ain't so, Joe," allegedly spoken by a young fan to Shoeless Joe during the Black Sox Scandal.

Author Biography

William Patrick Kinsella was born on May 25, 1935, on a farm in Edmonton, in northern Alberta, Canada, the son of John Matthew and Olive Mary (Elliott) Kinsella. Kinsella did not attend school until fifth grade, but he caught up quickly and graduated from high school in 1953. After graduation, he worked at a variety of jobs in Edmonton. He was a government clerk, an insurance investigator, and then owner of a restaurant. He did not attend college until he was in his late thirties, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Victoria, British Columbia, in 1974. He then received a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Iowa in 1978 and taught English for five years at the University of Calgary, Alberta, from 1978 to 1983.

Kinsella always thought of himself as a writer and published his first story when he was seventeen. His first story collection was *Dance Me Outside* (1977), about the Native North Americans of the Ermineskin Reservation in Alberta, Canada. *Born Indian* (1981) and *Mocassin Telegraph* (1983) were similar collections. Kinsella's novel *Shoeless Joe* (1982) was his first popular success, and it was made into the movie *Field of Dreams*, starring Kevin Costner, in 1989.

Since 1983, Kinsella has been a full-time writer and has carved a niche for himself as a writer of baseball fiction. In addition to *Shoeless Joe*, he has written several more novels, including *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* (1986), *Box Socials* (1991), and *The Winter Helen Dropped By* (1995). Story collections focusing on baseball include *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa* (1980), the title story that formed the basis of the novel *Shoeless Joe*, and *The Further Adventures of Slugger McBatt* (1988), which was reissued as *Go the Distance* (1995). Kinsella's most recent publications are *Magic Time* (1998), a novel about a college all-star who revives his baseball career by moving to Iowa, and *Japanese Baseball* (2000), a new collection of baseball stories.

Kinsella was awarded a Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship in 1982; he has also received a fiction award from the Canadian Authors Association (1982), a Vancouver writing award (1987), and the Stephen Leacock medal (1987). He was decorated with the Order of Canada in 1994, and in 1987 he was named Author of the Year by the Canadian Library Association.

Kinsella married Mildred Irene Clay in 1965, and they had three children before divorcing in 1978. In 1978, Kinsella married Ann Ilene Knight. They were divorced in 1997. Kinsella married for the third time, in 1999, to Barbara L. Turner.

Plot Summary

Chapter 1: Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa

Shoeless Joe begins with the narrator, Ray Kinsella, a young farmer in Iowa, describing how one day when sitting on the verandah of his home, he heard the voice of a ballpark announcer saying, "If you build it, he will come." Ray, who is a highly imaginative man and great lover of baseball, takes this as an instruction to build a baseball field in one of the cornfields at his farm. At first, he builds only a left field. Ray believes that the "he" that the voice refers to is Shoeless Joe Jackson, who gained no toriety for his part in a bribery scandal that marred the 1919 World Series.

One night, baseball players appear on the field, including Shoeless Joe in left field, and Ray settles down to watch him play. In Ray's eyes, the scene is as complete as at any major-league park he has visited. But he notices that Shoeless Joe is the only player who appears to have any substance; the others are shadowy, ghost-like. Ray talks to Shoeless Joe, who tells him about his love of baseball, and Ray promises that he will finish the whole field.

Chapter 2: They Tore Down the Polo Grounds in 1964

Ray finishes building the entire field; it takes him three baseball seasons. One by one, the so-called Unlucky Eight, the Black Sox baseball players who were banned for life in 1920, appear. Now only the right fielder and the catcher are still shadowy. Ray's daughter Karin also has the ability to see the games that take place. Next, Ray hears the baseball announcer say, mysteriously, "Ease his pain." Ray intuitively understands this to be a message about the reclusive writer J. D. Salinger. On the basis of a newspaper article he once read, Ray believes that Salinger is a baseball fan but that he has not seen a game live for over twenty-five years. Ray decides to visit Salinger in New Hampshire and take him to a baseball game at Fenway Park in Boston. Another link that connects Ray to Salinger is the fact that in one of his short stories, Salinger created a character named Ray Kinsella. There is also a character named Richard Kinsella in Salinger's book, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and Ray has a twin brother by that name.

On his long drive, Ray stops to attend ball games in Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Yankee Stadium in New York. When he reaches New Hampshire, he waylays Salinger outside his home and, in a mock-kidnapping, persuades the surprised writer to accompany him to Fenway Park. Ray tells his story, and they talk about writing. At the Boston Red Sox game, Ray tries to get Salinger to talk about his pain, but Salinger says he has none. During the game, Ray receives yet another mysterious message, this time from the scoreboard. It concerns a baseball player named Moonlight Graham who played once for the New York Giants in 1905. Ray knows that he has another assignment to fulfill, and he receives a message telling him to "Go the distance."

Salinger also hears this, and he and Ray agree to travel to the small town of Chisholm, Minnesota, to discover what they can about Archie "Moonlight" Graham.

Chapter 3: The Life and Times of Moonlight Graham

As they make the long drive to Minnesota, where Graham died in 1965, Salinger tells Ray that he also received a message saying, "Fulfill the dream." They visit the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, and get information about Graham's one and only major-league game. When they arrive in Chisholm, they discover from a newspaper obituary that Graham had been the town's doctor for many years and was deeply loved in his community.

At night Ray goes walking, and through some magical transformation, he encounters Doc Graham as a seventy-five-year-old man. The year is 1955. They go to Graham's office at the school, where Graham explains how he got the nickname Moonlight. As they talk about his career, he says that if he had one wish, it would be to hold a bat in a major-league game, something that he never did in his career.

Next morning, Salinger and Ray decide to go back to Iowa so that Salinger can see the baseball field. On their way out of Chisholm, they pick up a young man in a baseball uniform who is looking for a place to play. The young man says his name is Archie Graham.

Chapter 4: The Oldest Living Chicago Cub

The three of them head for Iowa, stopping off in Minneapolis to explore a baseball field at night. Going on to Iowa City, Ray stops at the Bishop Cridge Friendship Center, where his friend, ninety-one-year-old Eddie Scissons, the oldest living Chicago Cub, lives. Ray invites Eddie to his farm because he wants to show him the baseball field. Ray has also received another obscure message about sharing and betrayal that he assumes is about Eddie.

When they reach the farm, Ray finds his twin brother Richard there, whom he has not seen for over twenty years. Richard works with a carnival that has stopped in Iowa City. Ray takes his other friends for a tour of the baseball field and knows he will only be able to answer their questions when the magic unfolds once more. In the meantime, his financial situation is increasingly desperate. His brother-in-law, Mark, is trying to buy the farm, and Mark announces that he has the legal right to foreclose on the farm if Ray does not get up to date on the mortgage payments. Mark and his business partner, Bluestein, are buying up farms in the area and using computer farming to modernize them, a concept that Ray dislikes.

When the magic happens again, there is a new player on the field - the catcher for the White Sox. His name is Johnny Kinsella, Ray's father, but Ray cannot bring himself to face him. On the field, Moonlight Graham gets his wish.

An exasperated Mark tells Ray that Eddie has been lying about his past, that he'd never played for the Chicago Cubs. But Ray has known this for a long time anyway. Not long after this, Eddie gets his wish when, as Kid Scissons, he pitches for the Chicago Cubs on Ray's magical field. But Eddie does not perform well. He urges Ray to speak to his father. Shortly after, Eddie dies. He is buried at the baseball field in his Chicago Cubs uniform.

Mark and Bluestein arrive and claim they have legal temporary custody of the farm. Ray orders them off the property at gunpoint, but the confrontation ends when Karin, Ray's young daughter, takes a fall. She is unconscious and has difficulty breathing, until young Moonlight Graham magically metamorphoses into the older Doc Graham and saves her life.

Salinger envisions a way that Ray can pay off his debts and keep the farm: the baseball field will become a magnet for tourists. Just as he says this, the first cars full of visitors begin to arrive. And that night, Ray plucks up courage to speak to his father. Richard, who up to this point has been unable to see what the others see, speaks to him as well.

Chapter 5: the Rapture of J. D. Salinger

When Ray learns that the players have invited Salinger out after the game, he is jealous until he realizes that, as a result of this, Salinger may well get his deepest wish, which is to play baseball at the Polo Grounds, the home ballpark of the New York Giants that was torn down in 1964.

Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa

Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa Summary

Shoeless Joe is W.P. Kinsella's tale of the fulfillment of dreams, love, redemption and belief in people's goodness. The novel combines fact and suspended reality to create possibility for those who hope and fulfillment for those who already believe.

As the novel begins, Iowa farmer Ray Kinsella muses about his father's stories about a baseball player playing under an assumed name in a minor baseball league in North Carolina. As Ray surveys his farmland from the verandah of his home one spring evening, he hears a voice tell him, "If you build it, he will come." The voice is that of a ballpark announcer, and Ray can immediately envision the finished ball field he is being summoned to create. The voice repeats its message, and Ray ultimately carves a baseball field out of an acre of his cornfield.

Ray's wife, Annie, encourages Ray to create his dream if it will make him happy and does not regard him as having taken leave of his senses. Ray first meets Annie when he comes to Iowa to study and stays because of his love for Annie and for the land. Eventually, Annie and Ray marry and buy the Iowa farm they have rented for a while. Ray recognizes that he is not skilled in farming, but he loves the earth of Iowa so much that he can never return to his job of selling life insurance. Annie's family would prefer it if Annie had married a more ambitious and religious man, but Annie is in love with Ray. No one can sway her.

As Ray begins to build the ball field, he reveals that the "he" in "If you build it, he will come" is the famous baseball left fielder Shoeless Joe Jackson. Shoeless Joe played his last major league baseball game in 1920 and was later banned from baseball for participating in the plan to throw the World Series game of 1919 to the Cincinnati Reds. Shoeless Joe and seven other players for the Chicago White Sox are forever associated with what is called the Black Sox Scandal.

Ray inherits his love and fascination for Shoeless Joe from his father, who could never understand how the baseball commissioner could exile a player as tremendous as Shoeless Joe. Instead of building an entire baseball field, Ray at first constructs just the left field, which is the position that Shoeless Joe played during his career. Ray seeks the advice of major league baseball diamond caretakers and tends his field for three years before it is ready for play.

One night, as Annie looks out the farmhouse window, she sees a man wearing an old-fashioned baseball uniform standing in Ray's left field. Ray flips the switch illuminating the field and hears the sound of a crowd as he heads out toward the field. He encounters Shoeless Joe Jackson catching balls in his familiar position. Ray sits in the bleachers and realizes that Shoeless Joe is the only player who seems real. The others have ghostlike shapes. Ray talks to Shoeless Joe when Joe is in the outfield, and Joe shares that his banishment was "like having a part of me amputated, slick and smooth and painless."

As this amazing game comes to an end, Joe asks Ray if he may return. Of course, Ray offers the field at any time, and Joe tells Ray that there are others who would come to play if Ray would complete the field. Ray agrees to finish the ball field and asks Joe if he would consider playing with a catcher that Ray knows never made it to the major league but was very good in his time. Joe agrees to try out Ray's catcher if Ray will complete the ball field.

Before leaving the field, Joe tells Ray, "God what an outfield... What a left field... This must be heaven." "No. It's Iowa," he replies automatically.

Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa Analysis

The story is told from the first person narrative point of view, which means that the reader sees the plot unfolding from the protagonist's perspective including his thoughts and emotions but does not have access to the thoughts or motivations of any of the other characters. Ray Kinsella is the main character and narrator of the story, which is based on Ray's memories of his own father and his love for the game of baseball. To Ray, baseball symbolizes everything that is good and loving about living in America.

The author utilizes liberal doses of descriptive language throughout the novel. Sometimes the usage is trite and unnecessary, but there are examples that are poignant and evocative. For example, when Ray first sees his ball field illuminated for Shoeless Joe, he thinks, "Moonlight butters the whole Iowa night. Clover and corn smells are thick as syrup. I experience a tingling like the tiniest of electric wires touching the back of my neck, sending warm sensations through me. Then, as the lights flare, a scar against the blue-black sky, I see Shoeless Joe Jackson standing out in left field." Ray experiences feelings that overwhelm him as if he were being drenched in warm butter and syrup, followed shortly by the sensation of electricity as the scene comes to life and the reader understands the gamut of the experience for Ray.

They Tore Down the Polo Grounds in 1964

They Tore Down the Polo Grounds in 1964 Summary

Ray continues with the construction of the complete baseball field, and each time a section is completed, another live ballplayer from the Unlucky Eight, the players banned for life in 1920, appears to play. There is no schedule or routine to the appearance of the players, and Ray watches the dark field every night after a section is completed. One evening Karin, Ray and Annie's five-year-old daughter, sees the players take the field. Ray rushes out to ask Shoeless Joe about the catcher, and Joe vows to keep his promise of trying out the catcher as soon as all the other players are there.

The next time the ball field comes alive is a Sunday afternoon when Annie's ultra-conservative and religious relatives are visiting. Karin announces that the baseball game is on, and Ray rushes out much to the chagrin of his incredulous in-laws. Ray promises Joe that he will have the infield completed in a month, and then all of the Unlucky Eight can return to play. Ray begins to keep statistics for the games in his ball field and compares them against the figures in the *Baseball Encyclopedia*, but none match up, convincing Ray that the games are entirely new and not some strange memory transposed onto his cornfield.

One day as Ray and Annie sit close on the bleachers, Ray hears the announcer's voice again this time, urging him to ease the pain of writer J.D. Salinger. Once again, Annie does not question Ray's mission and encourages him to do whatever he feels he must to keep their life perfect.

Ray has never met Salinger except through Salinger's books and through articles about the reclusive author. Over the winter months, Ray contemplates his new mission of driving from Iowa to Salinger's home in New Hampshire and convincing the author to accompany Ray to a baseball game in order to bring the writer back to life from his self-imposed seclusion. Ray instinctively knows that this is his purpose because of an article he read about Salinger's being a baseball devotee who has not attended a ballgame in over twenty-five years. According to the article, the last game Salinger attended was in 1954 at the Polo Grounds in New York City. According to the article Salinger stated, "I wanted more than anything else in this world to play at the Polo Grounds. But I've seen myself grow too old for that dream - seen the Giants moved across a continent to San Francisco, and finally, they tore down the Polo Grounds in 1964."

Before Ray heads out on his journey to see Salinger, he buys a gun to keep in the trunk of his old Datsun. Ray remembers shooting a sparrow when he was a child in Montana and his feelings of success, which shriveled when his mother chastised him saying that she did not want to see the bird unless he could bring it back to life. From that moment, Ray vowed to revere life, and his purchase of a gun is as unsettling to him as his instinctive need to do so.

As Ray considers his trip to New Hampshire, he thinks about the connection between himself and Salinger, who wrote about a character named Ray Kinsella in his short story entitled "A Young Girl in 1941 with No Waist at All." In another eerie coincidence, Salinger writes about a character named Richard Kinsella in his famous novel, *Catcher in the Rye*. Ray has a twin brother named Richard and feels that somehow Salinger knows both of them without ever having met them.

Finally, spring arrives, and Ray knows that he should stay in Iowa to take care of the farm and possibly get a second job to keep creditors at bay. Still, his need to rescue Salinger is stronger than any other commitment, and he sets out on his journey to New Hampshire. Along the way, Ray feels the pull of the major league ballparks and attends games in Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and New York before heading to Boston to buy two tickets to the next Red Sox game. Ray wants the tickets in hand before approaching Salinger with his quirky idea.

As Ray drives through New England, he is struck by the foreign feel of the sloping landscape, so different from the vast expanse of his beloved Iowa. Ray realizes that the New Hampshire hilltop home of J.D. Salinger is actually in Windsor, Vermont, very close to the New Hampshire and Vermont border. Ray learns that New Englanders are close-mouthed about their resident author and do not give up much information on how to find Salinger's home. Finally, a gas station attendant takes pity on Ray and provides directions to Salinger's house, hidden in the woods down a long lane. Ray sits in the drive and waits until he hears the sound of jeep wheels bearing down the lane. Ray makes the correct assumption that the gray-haired man exiting the jeep is J.D. Salinger, the reclusive author. Salinger, of course, thinks that Ray is some writing devotee or psychotic fanatic, but Ray soon convinces Salinger to accompany him to the Boston Red Sox game. The unlikely duo drives away in Ray's car.

As Ray and Salinger drive to Boston, Ray tries to calm Salinger's fears that Ray is a psychotic kidnapper. He gives Salinger a baseball hit by Shoeless Joe. At a construction detour, Ray is pulled over by a policeman for a missing taillight on the car, and he and Salinger have to show their identification cards. Salinger's shows his name as Jerome David Salinger, but the officer does not recognize him as the famous author. As they pull away, Ray comments that Salinger could have escaped when they were stopped by the officer, but Salinger is intrigued by Ray's zaniness and wants to go along for a while.

During a lull in the conversation, Ray thinks about his farm and his brother-in-law, Mark, who wants to buy it from him, especially since Ray is in serious financial difficulty. Ray will not sell in spite of the increasing value of the offers, which drives a wedge further between Ray and Annie's family, who think she should be provided for by someone more successful.

When Ray and Salinger are seated at the ballpark, Salinger wants to know why Ray thought of him when the voice told Ray to "ease his pain." Ray cannot explain why he knew, and Salinger wonders if Ray is some sort of religious fanatic who experiences hallucinations. Ray thinks that Salinger's solitary life must be unhappy, but Salinger is quite content with the way he lives. He prefers to be out of the public spotlight. Ray cannot understand why Salinger is so reclusive when his writing has obviously touched so many people, including Ray, but Salinger insists that the writing is just a job. He cannot help how people respond to it. Ray wants Salinger to open up so that he may experience more from life, starting with a trip to Iowa to see Ray's ball field.

Toward the end of the game, Ray gets another message, this time from the scoreboard at Fenway, which briefly flashes statistical information about a player called Moonlight Graham who Ray recalls from the *Baseball Encyclopedia.* Ray writes the information on his game program as the park's announcer calls out, "Go the distance." Ray wonders if anyone else has heard the announcement and runs into a steel girder as he distractedly makes his way to the concession stand. Ray is taken to the first aid room, and he and Salinger miss the end of the game.

Salinger drives the Datsun back to Vermont while Ray tells him that he has always admired Salinger as a writer and as a person. It is the memory of a newspaper article about Salinger, though, which convinced Ray to drive to New England. In the article, Salinger is quoted as saying, "When I was a kid, I wanted more than anything else in the world to play baseball at the Polo Grounds." Ray admits that his own passion for baseball has always made him feel a little wistful after reading the article. Salinger claims that the article must have been a fabrication because he never indulges reporters. Salinger apologizes for causing trouble for Ray, and they ride the rest of the way to Vermont in silence.

When the pair reaches Salinger's home, Salinger admits to envy about Ray's passion for baseball and his passion for life in general. Ray implores Salinger once more to accompany him to Iowa to see his ball field and to share the magic, but Salinger hesitates. As Ray waves goodbye, Salinger quotes the statistics about Archie "Moonlight" Graham that flashed on the board at Fenway, and Ray now knows that he is not the only person who saw them. Salinger also heard the announcer say, "Go the distance." Ray is ecstatic to share this with Salinger, who climbs back into the old Datsun. The new friends head toward Chisholm, Minnesota in search of Moonlight Graham.

They Tore Down the Polo Grounds in 1964 Analysis

Kinsella uses the literary technique of flashbacks to help fill in details about Ray's life. These flashbacks are interspersed with current activity, which can be confusing until the reader adapts to the author's style. For example, when Ray is driving in New England, he thinks back about a party given by his brother-in-law, Mark, who talks about Salinger's eccentricities. The thought of Mark makes Ray think about Mark's offer to buy the farm, which brings Ray back to the present and his seemingly irresponsible road trip when he is in such serious financial difficulty at home.

One of the flashbacks has a more poignant sense of foreshadowing for Ray. When Ray, as a young boy, shoots the sparrow and his mother does not want to see the dead bird unless Ray could bring it back to life, Ray is crushed not only by the futility of the request but also by his mother's disapproval. Now Ray wishes that his mother could see his ballpark and realize that Ray is capable of bringing something wonderful to life.

Kinsella continues his liberal use of descriptive language in this chapter when he tries to put Ray's joy into words and realizes that that "would be like trying to stuff a cloud in a suitcase." At another point, Ray describes his happiness about the road trip to get Salinger by saying, "My journey will be like going out to hunt stars with a net on a stick." In another example, the author uses both foreshadowing and descriptive language when Mark, frustrated by Ray's refusal of an offer to buy the farm, tells Ray, "Sure, you're going to discover diamonds in your cornfield." This is a play on words because of the baseball diamond carved out of Ray's cornfield, and it refers to the spiritual and emotional wealth which the baseball diamond will bring to those who can see it.

At the heart of the novel is the theme of imagination, which drives Ray despite the increasing demands on him to sell the failing farm. It is possible that this is an escape mechanism for Ray, but he seems driven to rise above the financial burdens of his life and let his belief in goodness, love and family values take precedence. This passion for life combined with his almost religious zeal for baseball paints Ray as an idealistic character whose naivety just might have more value than adherence to practical rules. Ray's character has a forgiving nature, as the ball players who return to play on his field are the eight who were banned from baseball in 1920. Ray's field gives these men a chance at redemption, and this opportunity will also be extended to Ray at the end of the story.

The Life and Times of Moonlight Graham

The Life and Times of Moonlight Graham Summary

A few miles from Salinger's house, Ray and Salinger stop the car to consult a map and agree that they will drive to Chisholm, Minnesota. Salinger says that at the moment he heard the ballpark announcer say, "Go the Distance," he knew that he was compelled to drive to the place where Moonlight Graham died in 1965. Salinger shares with Ray that he also heard the announcer say, "Fulfill the Dream," and Ray feels a pang of jealousy that he was not privy to that message as well.

Neither Salinger nor Ray knows much about Moonlight Graham other than he was a baseball player for the New York Giants and played as a substitute fielder for only one inning during a game in 1905. In an attempt to find out why Moonlight Graham is so important and has been brought to their attention suddenly, Ray and Salinger drive all night from Massachusetts toward Cooperstown, Ohio, to visit the Baseball Hall of Fame.

As Ray and Salinger drive, Ray questions Salinger about why he does not talk about writing. Salinger believes that no one really understands the life of a writer, and he refrains from discussing it for that reason. According to Salinger, other people choose or stumble into their professions, but writers are born. That is a difficult concept for people who do not share that path.

Reaching the Baseball Hall of Fame the next afternoon, Ray and Salinger find an archivist who is more than anxious to help find information on Moonlight Graham. Unfortunately, all that is available is a single sheet of paper detailing Moonlight's marriage to a woman named Alicia Madden in 1915 and then his attendance at the University of Baltimore and Johns Hopkins University. The form asks whether Moonlight would play baseball if he had his life to live over, and his answer is a definite "yes." According to the form, Moonlight lived in Chisholm, Minnesota for fifty years and signed the paper "Dr. A.W. Graham."

From Cooperstown, Ray and Salinger drive through Ohio, Indiana and Illinois and finally stop at a motel to sleep. They are on the road again only five hours later. Ray finds time to call Annie to tell her that he is with J.D. Salinger and that they will be headed home to Iowa after spending a little time in Minnesota. Annie tells Ray that she is fending off Mark and his demands that she and Ray sell him their farm.

During the brief time that Ray was able to sleep the previous night, he dreamed about Eddie Scissons, the oldest living Chicago Cubs ballplayer. Ray first met Eddie five years ago on the street of Iowa City where Eddie stopped Ray and asked the time of day. The conversation eventually led to Ray's purchase of Eddie's farm, and he has kept in contact with the elderly gentleman ever since.

Arriving in Chisholm, Ray and Salinger stop first at the office of the *Chisholm Free Press* newspaper, where the publisher, Veda Ponikvar, produces an old photograph of Moonlight Graham, known to the people in town as Dr. Archie Graham, since he served as the town's physician for fifty years. Aside from a glowing obituary and fond memories of the townspeople, Ray and Salinger do not find much information about the man they know as a baseball player but who lived most of his life as a doctor.

One night when Ray cannot sleep, he takes a walk through the town and is somehow transported back to 1955. He meets Dr. Graham, who appears as a seventy-five-year-old man. Ray tells Dr. Graham that he wants to ask him some questions about baseball, and Dr. Graham thinks it odd that a man would be out so late at night in the hopes of meeting him. Nevertheless, Dr. Graham invites Ray back to his office and tells Ray about the night much like this one when he earned the name Moonlight Graham. Quite simply, Graham could not sleep one moonlit night during a hotel stay for the baseball team, and a few of his teammates caught sight of him walking toward the ball field in his uniform. The name Moonlight Graham was born.

Dr. Graham tells Ray that he has had a very satisfying life as a physician but regrets that he never got to play major league baseball. Ray admits to seeking out Graham because his time in the game was so short. He is surprised to find that Graham holds no bitterness about his short-lived baseball career. Dr. Graham tells Ray that the real tragedy would have been if he had been a doctor for only five minutes as opposed to his five minutes in a major league game.

Ray pushes Dr. Graham to name his most private wish, and the doctor replies that he would love to hold a bat in a major league baseball game. "Yes, that's what I wish for, Ray Kinsella: the chance to squint my eyes when the sky is so blue it hurts to look at it, and to feel the tingle that runs up your arms when you connect dead-on. The chance to run the bases, stretch a double to a triple, and flop face-first into third base, wrapping my arm around the bag. That's what I wish, Ray Kinsella, whoever you are. Is there enough magic floating around out in the night for you to make it come true?"

The next morning as Ray and Salinger head out of Chisholm on their way to Iowa, they stop to pick up a young man dressed in a baseball uniform. The young man is grateful for the ride as far as the old Datsun will go because he has heard that a young man has better chances of signing on to a baseball team in the Midwest. Ray and Salinger introduce themselves, and the young man says that his name is Archie Graham.

The Life and Times of Moonlight Graham Analysis

In keeping with the wholesome tone of the novel and its subject matter, baseball, the author uses descriptive language when writing about Ray and Salinger's odyssey. When Ray questions Salinger about cities and schools which still ban his book, *Catcher in the Rye,* Salinger replies that it used to bother him but no longer does. He says that it is "like browsing in a cool antique store full of Mason jars, big iron stoves, and wooden churns." The author provides some imagery of the serene journey by stating, "...we navigate a series of back roads that meander along lakes shaded by evergreens, and these eventually lead us into Cooperstown in midafternoon." The tone and the choice of words like "meander" help the reader to understand that the drive was a slow, pleasant one with each man enjoying the other's company.

The theme of imagination is still important in this chapter, especially when Ray is transported back to 1955. This allows him to encounter Dr. Graham while he is still alive. In keeping with the tone of the entire novel, the reader is asked to make the leap with Ray to believe that something like this is possible. Ray's conversation with Dr. Graham is so poignant that it is easy to believe what Kinsella writes. When Ray and Salinger pick up the baseball hitchhiker, the belief is so strong that it is no surprise to learn that the young man is Dr. Graham. He has leaped the barriers of time to be a young man again who will one day be nicknamed Moonlight Graham by his teammates.

Ray's encounter with Dr. Graham on the streets during a moonlit night is symbolic because Dr. Graham received the nickname of Moonlight Graham fifty years ago on a night much like the one when he meets Ray. In a quirky way, the encounter is also foreshadowing, because even though the seventy-five-year-old Graham knows his nickname, the young ballplayer who hitches a ride with Ray and Salinger is still named Archie Graham. He has his career and future ahead of him and cannot know yet of the nickname which is to come.

The encounter with Dr. Graham on a street in Chisholm is similar to the one Ray experiences when he meets Eddie Scissons on a street in downtown Iowa City. Eddie, who claims to be the oldest living Chicago Cub, is also drawn to Ray for some unknown reason, and Ray eventually buys Eddie's farm, where the magic ball field is built. The author asks the reader to believe that these circumstances are not merely coincidental but are powered by some benevolent force providing a chance for redemption for all the characters whose lives will intersect in a magical cornfield in Iowa.

The Oldest Living Chicago Cub

The Oldest Living Chicago Cub Summary

Ray and Salinger smile at each other, sharing the secret of Archie's future, which is still unknown to the young man who is just searching for a place to play baseball. Archie tells Ray and Salinger about his family being from North Carolina, and Ray looks at Salinger silently urging him to stop asking questions, the answers to which Archie still does not know. Ray wonders how it is possible that he has conjured Archie out of his imagination. "And I come to believe he has been created by the strength of my dreams, by the depth of my belief in what has been happening. The young Archie Graham is like a doll Jerry and I have conjured up to satisfy our desire that fantasy turn into truth."

Ray tells Archie that they will be stopping in Minneapolis to attend a Minneapolis Twins game before heading on to Iowa. Archie is willing to go wherever his new friends take him because he is in no rush and is enjoying the trip. At the game, Ray and Salinger discuss the lack of nicknames among baseball players today, and Salinger asks Archie his opinion on the topic. Although he does not have a nickname yet, Archie thinks that a player needs to do something unusual or spectacular to earn a moniker. Later that night while the three friends continue the discussion of nicknames in their hotel room, Ray suggests that they head to the ballpark.

"A ballpark at night is more like a church than a church," Ray says, and the men are silent as they stare up into the star-filled night. Ray notes the full moon, and the symbolism of the moment is not lost on Salinger either. Ray is able to break into one of the ballpark doors, and the three men climb up into the stands. Ray suggests the need for a radio to listen to a game to provide more authenticity to their visit. Ray muses for a while about the baseball games he attended with his father.

Ray also thinks about the last question on the form at the Baseball Hall of Fame, asking each player if he would choose to play baseball if given the chance to do it over again. Each man answers with a definite affirmative. Ray knows that there are precious few professions that could make the same claim.

Ray, Salinger and Archie spend several hours throwing baseballs in the moonlight, and Ray encourages the other two to imagine the roar of the crowd and the smell of hot dogs and peanuts swirling around them.

Back on the road, Salinger is driving the Datsun as the trio crosses into Iowa, and Ray's heart quickens to see the lush cornfields once again. Ray wants to pick up Eddie Scissons when they reach Iowa City and take him out to the farm so he, too, can experience some of this baseball magic. Ray remembers a conversation he had once with Eddie, who told Ray that he wants to be buried in a Chicago Cubs uniform and has purchased a new one for the occasion. Eddie's life since his boyhood has been dedicated to the Cubs, even though he did not remain on the team past three seasons.

The reality of raising a family and the need for regular employment are the only reasons Eddie left Chicago to move to Iowa, but he has never lost his fervor for his favorite team.

When the three men reach Iowa City, Ray drives immediately to the Bishop Cridge Friendship Center to pick up Eddie Scissons. Ray thinks about another secret message he received while in Minneapolis, and although the message about sharing and betrayal is obscure, Ray knows in his heart that it concerns Eddie. When Ray approaches Eddie in the center, the old man tries to rise, saying that he expected to see Ray today because he had dreamed about Ray last night.

For some reason, Eddie seems to think that Ray has come to hurt him, and Ray tries to convince him that he only wants to take Eddie to the farm to share some magic. Ray assumes that Eddie's mind is betraying him and finally convinces Eddie to accompany him, Salinger and Archie to the farm.

Arriving at the farm, Ray thinks that his ball field looks a little less than magical, with its high grass and lack of tending. Karin runs to hug Ray and leads him to the house where Annie reveals that Ray's brother, Richard, has appeared after no contact for more than twenty years. Apparently, Richard works for a carnival that has stopped near Iowa City, and he found Ray's name in the local phone book and decided to find his brother. Annie also tells Ray that Mark has been pestering her about selling the farm. Ray, Salinger and Archie begin mowing and cleaning up the ball field before retiring for the night.

Ray's gloomy financial situation will not let him sleep, and he pores over the farm's accounts at the kitchen table. His brother Richard is about to return home for the night when Ray questions Richard about his disappearance for so many years. Richard can only reply that he is driven by wanderlust with no need to reconnect with his past until recently. Richard is wistful as he congratulates Ray on his successful family life. Richard is also intrigued by Annie's stories about the ball field, and Ray encourages Richard to stay for a while to experience the magic. Richard has no family commitments other than a girlfriend who also works with the carnival, so he agrees to stay.

Breakfast the next morning is noisy and active with the house full of new faces. Annie interrupts Ray with a phone call from Mark, who inquires about whether Ray is ready yet to sell him the farm. Ray refuses even after Mark increases his offer by twenty-five thousand dollars. Mark advises Ray that Ray will need to produce some money quickly because Mark has optioned Ray's mortgage, which was held by Eddie Scissons. At the end of sixty days Mark has the right to foreclose, and the farm will be his. Ray hurls a string of profanity at Mark and slams down the phone.

Ray questions Eddie about why he betrayed Ray, and Eddie claims that Mark and his partner forced him into the deal because they know things that could be harmful to Eddie if revealed. Ray cannot imagine what Mark knows which can be used to blackmail Eddie and heads out to his ball field to calm down.

Later that afternoon, Ray and Annie drive into town to check on county land titles and soon learn that Ray's farm is the only hold-out in a grid of land Mark wants to acquire so that he can implement computer farming. Ray is vehemently opposed to the concept of computer farming, which essentially annihilates every vestige of human touch on the land, including the buildings and the people to work the fields. Ray has argued with Mark about this topic many times in the past, and Ray always holds out for the human element in the farming process. Ray remembers telling Mark, "You have to be touched by the land. Once you've been touched by the land, the wind never blows so cold again, because your love files the edges off it. And when the land suffers from flood or drought or endless winter, you feel for *it* more than for yourself, and you do what you can to ease its pain."

Annie calls her mother to verify Mark's plans for Ray's farm and learns that Mark is also experiencing financial problems, he and his partner having overextended themselves. Ray's obstinacy is the only impediment to Mark's leasing all his holdings to a Texas conglomerate, a deal which will resolve all his problems.

Ray's guests are weary and not too optimistic about the prospect of magic happening anytime soon, but Ray urges them to bear with him for ten days. If nothing special has happened by then, Ray will understand it if they choose to leave.

Two days later, Karin once again makes the announcement that the lights are on at the ball field, and the farmhouse empties as Ray and Annie follow their inquisitive guests outside. Ray wonders about which ones of his guests will be able to see the magic in the cornfield and hopes for the best.

Immediately, Archie sees the White Sox team warming up, and soon Ray experiences his own personal magic when he sees the catcher he has wanted to see for so long. Ray asks Shoeless Joe if the catcher is who Ray thinks it is, and Joe urges him to wait for the announcement of the starting line up. Archie is thrilled when Shoeless Joe orders him to warm up with the others, and soon Moonlight Graham is announced as playing right field and batting seventh for the White Sox.

Richard is frustrated because he cannot see what the others see and looks out onto an empty ball field with exasperation. Ray's momentary pity for him is soon replaced by elation as Ray hears the announcer call out that the White Sox catcher's name is Johnny Kinsella. Ray can hardly breathe as he realizes that the young man on the field is his own father at the age of twenty-five.

Richard leaves to return to town because he cannot share the others' experience. Salinger is ecstatic at seeing Ray's dream for the first time and immediately launches into a plan to draw visitors, but Ray is skeptical because not everyone is capable of seeing the magic. After the game, Moonlight Graham disappears with the other players through the gate in center field and becomes part of the brotherhood of baseball players, no longer Archie visiting Ray in a farmhouse in Iowa.

During another sleepless night, Ray pores over the financial papers for the farm. Salinger approaches him and offers to help bring the farm's mortgage payments current. Ray declines Salinger's generous offer and asks Salinger to bear with him for just a few more weeks.

When Richard returns home late at night, he tells Ray that he knows that there really is something special going on in the cornfield, but he is frustrated because he cannot see it. Ray explains that not everyone can see it and that Ray had been directed toward Salinger, Moonlight and Eddie for special reasons that he cannot fully explain. Richard feels that there must be some explanation for his seeking out Ray after all this time and hopes that there is some magical reason, but Ray can only offer his hospitality and hope for the best for Richard's sake. Secretly, Ray knows that Richard may have been drawn here because it is an opportunity for both him and Ray to see the man who will become their father playing baseball in Ray's cornfield.

The next day, Ray visits Richard's girlfriend Gypsy at the carnival to get a glimpse of Richard's life. Gypsy shows him their main attraction, which they promote as strange babies in differing stages of deformity. Ray is surprised to see only black and white photographs, not real fetuses, in the glass containers marked with the clinical details of each picture. Gypsy senses Ray's disappointment and tells him that the mild deceit and the scruffy appearance of the carnival appeal to people's expectations of oddities and the seamy side of life. Ray feels a sense of familiarity about Gypsy and asks her real name, which she reveals is Annie. As Ray drives home, he remembers his own fascination with carnivals as a young boy and recalls a day at a carnival when two carnival workers played a trick on him. He has tried to not be so gullible again.

Later that night while Salinger, Ray, Annie, Karin and Eddie Scissons watch the game, Mark and his partner drive up and ask to speak to Ray. Mark wants to make a deal with Ray, offering that Ray and his family may stay in the farmhouse rent-free while Ray looks for a job. Mark is seizing the rest of the property and has plans to raze the baseball field as his first order of business. An argument ensues between Ray and Mark, who reveals Eddie's fraud in that he never played for the Chicago Cubs in his entire life. Eddie's humiliation is now complete as he reminds Mark that Mark promised never to tell anyone if Eddie sold the mortgage to Mark.

Ray attempts to soothe Eddie's wounded ego and secretly understands that Eddie fabricated the story in an attempt to achieve in his past what he could not live out in his present. Ray has known the truth about Eddie for a long time, but exposing the old man's secret did not seem necessary if it gave Eddie some joy in his waning years.

The ball field comes alive every night now, and the usual group of spectators is present for each game. Richard still does not have a clear view of the action but has begun to see a scratchy image like static on a television screen. Shoeless Joe commends Ray on his choice of catcher, and Ray is pleased, although he still has not been able to approach the man who will become his father.

One night, Salinger tells the ballplayers that Ray is in danger of losing the farm, and they are silent, knowing that if the field is lost so too are their opportunities to play again. The players offer to work the farm in an attempt to help Ray hold on to it, but the idea is not feasible. Ray asks the players what happens to them when they pass through the gate in center field each night, and they respond that they simply sleep, wait and dream until the next chance to play.

Tonight's game is special because the opposing team is the Chicago Cubs team that Eddie remembers as his old teammates. Eddie is enthralled by the game and tells his stories to the others all throughout the game. As the eighth inning begins, the announcement is made that the Cubs will be sending in Eddie Scissons to pitch. Eddie's joy in uncontainable as his fabricated story of being a Chicago Cubs player is validated in front of his friends. The young Eddie Scissons takes the field. The young Eddie does not perform well, and the old Eddie is so dejected that he does not come out of his room until afternoon of the next day. Eddie asks Ray to drive him into town. They go to Eddie's apartment, from which Eddie emerges with some clothes and an overcoat.

Later that night, Eddie dons his new Chicago Cubs uniform and his overcoat and stands on the bleachers waiting for tonight's game to begin. Ray watches Eddie and then sees the players begin to file in as the lights switch on magically and the smells of a ballpark swirl around him. Eddie launches into a sermon about the values of baseball and how the sport is the solution for most of the troubles people experience in today's world. The others watch in silence as Eddie proclaims, "Praise the name of baseball. The word will set captives free. The word will open the eyes of the blind. The word will raise the dead. Have you the word of baseball living inside you? Has the word of baseball become part of you? Do you live it, play it, digest it, forever? Walk into the world and speak of baseball. Let the word flow through you like water, so that it may quicken the thirst of your fellow man."

Later that night, Eddie approaches Ray, who is once more worrying over the farm finances, and tells Ray that he must approach the catcher. Eddie feels that Ray should simply tell the catcher that he appreciates how he plays the game. He believes that their common love of baseball will be all that is necessary to forge a bond between father and son. Eddie feels that Ray is capable of speaking with his father and not revealing his secret, and he thinks that Ray has been the key to unlocking the magic for several people.

Eddie goes to bed, and Ray recalls a conversation he had with Salinger about approaching the catcher. Salinger had advised him not to reveal the fact that he would become Ray's father one day. Salinger feels that it would destroy any man to know his own future, and for now, Ray is content to simply watch his father in his prime and be content with how special and rare a gift that is.

The next afternoon, Salinger finds Eddie dead in his room in the farmhouse, dressed in his Chicago Cubs uniform complete with cap, glove and spikes lying next to him on the bed. Eddie's three daughters are notified of his death and begin their trips to Iowa City to make funeral arrangements.

After the three women arrive, Ray and Annie visit them at Eddie's apartment, and Ray wants to make sure that they are aware of Eddie's wish to be buried in his Chicago Cubs uniform. One of the daughters confirms that Eddie expressed that wish many times over the years, and they will abide by the wish as strange as it is. The next day one of Eddie's daughters calls to tell Ray that Eddie just last week added a clause to his will requesting that he be buried in Ray's cornfield. Ray gives his consent, and before long a hearse bearing Eddie's body is delivered to Ray's cornfield. Ray and Salinger agree to lower the coffin into the grave, and the attendants leave in a bewildered state.

When Ray and Salinger headed to the cornfield to dig the grave the previous day, they were surprised to see some of the ball players in practice, and the players expressed a wish to pay their last respects to Eddie. Knowing that the players cannot go beyond the edge of the ball field, Ray agrees to dig the grave in left field. Now Ray and Salinger open the coffin to reveal Eddie lying in his Chicago Cubs uniform, and the baseball players pass by in respect. After the coffin is lowered and the mounded dirt creates a small protrusion, Shoeless Joe admits to playing in worse conditions, validating Eddie and the spirit of all baseball players.

Later that afternoon, Richard surprises Ray by arriving with his carnival trailer. The carnival has moved on to another city, but Richard and Gypsy have stayed behind to spend some more time with Ray and his family. That night, Ray is pleased when Gypsy is able to see the players on the ball field, and Richard asks Ray to teach him how to see it as well.

A few days later, Mark and his partner return with an order granting them temporary control of the farm. If the mortgage payments are not brought current within seventy-two hours, the farm will fall into Mark's ownership. Mark begins to order everyone out of the bleachers, and Ray runs to his car and returns with his gun, which he fires into the air. Ray warns Mark and his partner to leave the farm or risk being shot. In the midst of the confusion, Karin slips and falls in the bleachers, knocking herself unconscious.

Annie runs to call an ambulance while Ray wonders if it would be more expeditious to drive Karin to the hospital in the car offered by Mark. Suddenly, Ray sees Moonlight Graham approaching from the direction of the ball field. As Moonlight walks nearer, the young man evolves into the Dr. Graham who Ray met in Chisholm. Dr. Graham is able to clear Karin's airway of a hotdog bun, and she begins to breathe normally again. When Karin is out of danger, Dr. Graham walks around the side of the bleachers and disappears into the cornfield.

Soon after, Ray is able to explain the significance of the catcher playing out in the ball field. Although Richard still cannot see the activity on the ball field, he encourages Ray to approach their father and become his friend. Richards says, "Ray, people toss around the phrase 'Heaven on earth,' but it seems to me you've gotten a lock on it. Play it for all it's worth."

That night, Salinger shares a dream with Ray and tells him that people will begin to find this magical ball field by instinct or as if they are being pulled by some invisible force.

The people will drive into Ray's lane, still unsure of what they will find, and they will hand over twenty dollars for a chance to experience the peace that washes over them. As the people take their seats on the bleachers, they will relive their childhood days from simpler times and rise renewed as if they had taken dips in magic waters.

Salinger continues, "I don't have to tell you that the one constant through all the years has been baseball. America has been erased like a blackboard, only to be rebuilt and then erased again. But baseball has marked time while American has rolled by like a procession of steamrollers. It is the same game that Moonlight Graham played in 1905. It is a living part of history, like calico dresses, stone crockery, and threshing crews eating at outdoor tables. It continually reminds us of what once was, like an Indian-head penny in a handful of new coins."

As Salinger continues to speak, Ray notices cars with out-of-state license plates pulling into his lane. Ray instantly envisions that Richard and Gypsy can sell tickets to the ball field and that he will be able to pay the mortgage with no problem now. Gypsy appears and tells Ray that she will go see what all the cars want, and Richard wants to know what cars she is talking about.

After the game that night, Ray and Richard approach the catcher, their father, and tell him that they admire the way he plays. Ray explains Richard's squinting to see his father clearly as some recent trouble with his eyes, and the three men walk across the outfield talking about family, friendship and love.

The Oldest Living Chicago Cub Analysis

The author continues his lyrical prose in this chapter. One vibrant example is the scene where Ray, Salinger and Archie Graham break into the ball diamond in Minneapolis to play in the moonlight. Ray explains, "Behind us, Archie Graham picks up and lays down his cleats, softly, in order to make as little noise as possible. When the moonlight illuminates his face, I can see that it is covered with question marks." Obviously, Archie does not have question marks on his face, but the author writes in a metaphoric style describing Archie's incredulous expression in a more interesting manner.

The author uses a simile to explain the frantic movements of the nighttime bugs in the ballpark when he writes, "...an empty field eerily illuminated by a single battery of floodlights, where moths crash into the bright bulbs like determined kamikaze pilots." This method of describing the bugs' activities helps the reader to visualize the intensity of the movements as the bugs crash into the lights, as opposed to their flying lazily around the bulbs.

The author maintains the theme of imagination during this chapter when he asks the reader to believe that Dr. Graham transports through time once again to transform from a young man just starting out on a baseball career to an elderly doctor. More important is the imagination of those who can see the games in Ray's ball field. It is as if there are requirements of love, forgiveness and compassion necessary for anyone who hopes to view the games. Mark and his greedy partner cannot see anything but a ball diamond hastily constructed by some person who does not understand his real world plight. Richard cannot see the games, probably due to either his cynicism or inability to love completely, but as he learns to be part of a family again, his vision of the games comes more into focus.

Another important theme is that of the father and son relationship. From the beginning of the story, Ray asked Shoeless Joe about a special catcher, knowing all the while that the catcher is his father as a young man. Ray wants to complete the unbreakable bond forged between a father and son and made even more durable with memories of baseball games. When the catcher finally appears, Ray's dream is complete, and he captures forever the spirit of his father as a young man. He shares that gift with Richard in an attempt to show Richard that their father was not always old and tired but once had spirit and energy. This gift is invaluable in mending the relationship between Richard and Ray as well.

Ray also gives the gift of redemption to Eddie Scissons, whose fib about playing for the Chicago Cubs is proved momentarily wrong when the young Eddie takes the field in a game one night. All the onlookers know about Eddie's deception, but Ray gives an old man a few moments of happiness and return of his dignity through his wish for Eddie. Ray's goodness is rewarded when Dr. Graham comes to Karin's aid on the bleachers, proving that the opportunities that Ray has provided with the ball field extend beyond the obvious for those who get another chance to play.

The Rapture of J.D. Salinger

The Rapture of J.D. Salinger Summary

Ray explains building the door in the right-centerfield fence through which the ball players pass at the end of each game. When the last player passes through each night, the lights to the field switch off, leaving the playing field dark once more. Ray speculates on the whereabouts of the players once they pass through the door and hopes that one day they will reveal the secret to him.

One night, Ray is instantly jealous when he hears Shoeless Joe ask Salinger if he would like to go out with the players after the game. Salinger instantly accepts, and Ray cannot help but be cool toward him in the bleachers. Finally, Ray cannot control his envy and demands to know why Salinger has been selected and not himself, especially since he is the one who has risked everything to build the ball field. Salinger reminds Ray that the idea was not his originally but came from some greater source.

In order to calm Ray's outrage, Salinger finally admits that he had indeed given the interview about baseball and his wish to play at the Polo Grounds. Salinger admits that he almost turned down Shoeless Joe's invitation, but he reasons that there must be something behind their selection of him and not Ray. Salinger counsels Ray to consider the perfect life Ray has. He hopes that Ray will not begrudge Salinger the chance to "touch the perfect dream." Salinger promises Ray that he will write about it, and Ray softens toward his friend.

At the end of the game, Salinger joins Shoeless Joe, and they walk through the door in the fence, signaling the lights to dim and the essence of the ball field to fade into the night. Ray, Annie and Karin walk to the farmhouse, and Ray turns to see the ball field bathed in moonlight before he walks through the door.

The Rapture of J.D. Salinger Analysis

The author uses symbolism in the image of doors in this chapter. Ray has built a door in the fence through which the players pass each night to some place that Ray can only guess about. He assumes it is some sort of heaven. Salinger will soon realize his own heaven by getting the opportunity to play at the Polo Grounds, which he has always wanted to do. Ray's jealousy is understandable given his personal investment in the fruition of dreams for so many people, but at the end of the story, Ray passes through the door of his farmhouse with his loving wife and daughter. He is passing into a life that many envy and would consider heaven on earth.

Characters

Abner Bluestein

Abner Bluestein is the hard-nosed business partner of Mark, Ray Kinsella's brother-in-law, who wants to evict Ray from his farm.

Archie Graham

Archie Graham, also known as Moonlight Graham, is based on a real person who played once for the New York Giants in 1905. He appears in the novel in two forms. First, he is an old man, Doc Graham, a doctor in the small Minnesota town of Chisholm. Ray meets him in a magical episode of time travel that takes him back to the year 1955 when Graham is seventy-five years old. Doc Graham has some eccentric habits, such as chewing paper and spitting it out, but he is a good-hearted man who is loved and respected in his community, where he takes care of all who seek his assistance. He tells Ray that he got his nickname one night when, after a minor league game, he went outside the motel for a walk, dressed in his baseball uniform. A teammate spotted him, and he was Moonlight Graham ever after. Graham also appears in the novel as a young man dressed in a baseball uniform who travels from Minnesota to Iowa with Salinger and Ray in search of a game to play. He ends up playing on Ray's fantasy field and thus gets the chance to bat in the major leagues.

Gypsy

Gypsy is the girlfriend of Richard Kinsella. She works in the change booth at the carnival. She is tough but also kind and wise, and she has an open heart that enables her to perceive all the baseball games taking place in Ray's magic field.

Shoeless Joe Jackson

Shoeless Joe Jackson was one of the greatest baseball players of all time. His career with the Chicago White Sox ended in 1920 when he admitted to being involved in a plot to throw the 1919 World Series. He was banned from the game for life. In the novel, Ray (the narrator) believes that although Shoeless Joe may have accepted money from gamblers, he did not deliberately throw the series. In the novel, Ray (the narrator)believes that although Shoeless Joe may have accepted money from gamblers, he did not deliberately throw the series but was the victim of greedy baseball owners. Shoeless Joe is one of Ray's heroes, and he is the first baseball player to appear on Ray's baseball field. Shoeless Joe is presented not only as a legendary baseball player but also as a man who loved the game and who would have played just for food money. He tells Ray that being banned for life was the equivalent of having part of himself amputated.

Annie Kinsella

Annie Kinsella is Ray Kinsella's red-haired, twenty-four-year-old wife. She is pretty, full of life and good humor, and very loving. She always supports her husband and encourages him to fulfill his dreams, never once reproaching him for being impractical, even as their debts mount.

Johnny Kinsella

Johnny Kinsella is Ray's father. He served in World War I and was gassed at Passchendaele, after which he settled in Chicago and became a White Sox fan. He also played semipro baseball in Florida and California before marrying and settling in Montana. At the time of the story, he has been dead for twenty years. He and his son Ray appear to have been close, and he instilled his love of baseball into Ray. Shoeless Joe was his hero. Johnny Kinsella appears in the novel as a young man, playing catcher in games at Ray's baseball park. At first, Ray does not know how to approach him, but later he does so, and he realizes that he can talk with his father about many things.

Karin Kinsella

Karin Kinsella is Ray's five-year-old daughter. Like her father, she is gifted with imagination and has no trouble seeing the baseball games that take place in the cornfield at the farm.

Ray Kinsella

Ray Kinsella is the narrator of the story. He was raised in Montana, and his father passed on to him a love of baseball. Ray later moved to Iowa to study, and he fell in love with the state and decided to stay. He married Annie, the daughter of his landlady. Unable to find congenial work, Ray took a job as a life insurance salesman, which he hated. Then, Annie suggested that they rent and later buy a farm. Although he has little expertise in farming and machinery of any kind baffles him, Ray takes great pride in the farm. However, times are such that it is very hard for a small farmer to flourish, and he falls badly into debt. Impractical in matters of money, he makes almost no effort to right his finances. His wife's family dislikes him, and he has equally negative feelings about them. Ray also dislikes organized religion, big business, and people in authority who do not use their authority well.

Whatever his shortcomings in practical life, Ray is gifted with imagination, an open heart, and the ability to conceive a great dream and work at it until it comes true. When he hears the mysterious voice saying, "If you build it, he will come," he immediately understands what it means and sets about building the baseball field. He is also motivated by a desire to rekindle the enthusiasm for baseball of his favorite writer, J. D.

Salinger, and to heal Salinger's pain. Ray drives a thousand miles cross-country to make this happen. In the end, Ray is vindicated. His dreams come true because of the depths of his own belief in them. He also becomes the agent whereby the dreams of others can be fulfilled, but in this he realizes that he is only playing his part in some larger plan, the origins of which he does not speculate about. Ultimately, what is most important to Ray is not baseball but love of family and friends.

Richard Kinsella

Richard Kinsella is Ray's twin brother. He and Ray have not seen each other since the morning of their sixteenth birthday. On that day, Richard quarreled with their father and walked out of the house. No one in the family has seen or heard of him since, until one day he shows up at Ray's farm. It transpires that he works with a traveling carnival that has stopped in Iowa City. Richard is at first unable to see what happens in the baseball cornfield, but he asks Ray to teach him how to do it. Eventually, Richard is able to perceive and speak to their father.

Mark

Mark is a professor at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, and Ray's brother-in-law. His area of expertise is the corn weevil. He is also a businessman and, with his partner, Bluestein, owns apartment blocks and several thousand acres of farmland. Practical and with an interest in the latest technology, Mark is the opposite of Ray, the dreamer. Mark wants to buy Ray's farm so he can modernize it, and he pursues his goal ruthlessly, only to be foiled at the end by Salinger's creative ideas for how Ray can pay off his debts.

Moonlight

See Archie Graham

J. D. Salinger

J. D. Salinger is the real-life reclusive author of *The Catcher in the Rye*. In the novel, Salinger is presented as a kind man with a sense of humor, although since he no longer writes and publishes, he is also denying himself his greatest talent. When he is way-laid by Ray at his home, he agrees to accompany him to the Red Sox game in Boston. Then he joins Ray in his research into Moonlight Graham's life in Minnesota and also goes to Iowa to see for himself the baseball field where Shoeless Joe and the other famous players perform. As a writer with a developed imagination, Salinger is well able to perceive everything that takes place on Ray's baseball park. When he receives an invitation to accompany the players beyond the baseball park into a world beyond ordinary reality, Salinger promises Ray that he will resume his writing career.

Eddie Scissons

Eddie Scissons is a very old man whom Ray befriends several years before the story begins. Ray rents and later buys Eddie's farm. Eddie lives at the Bishop Cridge Friendship Center in Iowa City and claims to be the oldest living Chicago Cub. He has many stories to tell about baseball and claims to have followed the Cubs for eighty years. They have been his whole life, and he wants to be buried in his Chicago Cubs uniform. It transpires, however, that Eddie has been lying. He never played for the Cubs. The best he could manage was to play part-time, for one year, for a Class D team in Montana. Eddie eventually gets his wish when, as Kid Scissons, he pitches for the Chicago Cubs on Ray's baseball park. But he performs poorly and is devastated by the experience. Although he gets what he wants, it does not make him happy. However, when Eddie dies, his wish to be buried in his Cubs uniform is honored.

Themes

Religion

Shoeless Joe has countless references and allusions to religious beliefs and practices. Kinsella presents a strong contrast between traditional Christianity and what he regards as a truer, more life-promoting form of religion, mediated by the game of baseball. Traditional religion is presented in an entirely negative light. It is epitomized in Ray's perceptions of his wife's family. Annie's mother is self-righteous and judgmental, and she makes a point of bringing her religion into any conversation. Mark, Ray's ruthless brother-in-law, is also a fundamentalist Christian, who dislikes atheists and Catholics. Mark has three brothers, named Matthew, Luke, and John. Together with Mark, these are the names of the evangelists who wrote the four gospels, which underlines Ray's quarrel with Christianity. Other examples of people who adhere to traditional Christianity are Eddie Scissons's three daughters, who are presented as dour, unimaginative, and joyless.

In contrast, baseball is presented as a kind of quasireligion. "We're not just ordinary people, we're a congregation," says Ray of the baseball fans. A ballpark at night "is more like a church than a church." Ray imagines fans waiting for a game to start, sitting "in silence, in awe, in wonder, in anticipation, in joy"—rather like worshipers in a cathedral. The element of joy is what is conspicuously lacking in Ray's perceptions of the way Christianity is normally lived.

Baseball provides the experience of calmness and stability for which people often look to religion. Baseball is soothing because "it is stable and permanent." As he looks around Boston's Fenway Park, Ray remarks that "the year might be 1900 or 1920 or 1979, for all the field itself has changed. Here the sense of urgency that governs most lives is pushed to one side." Baseball also offers the possibility, like religion, of miraculous events that can transcend or reverse time. In a baseball game, Ray says, anything can happen: "Tides can reverse; oceans can open." And of course, this is exactly what happens in Ray's magical baseball park. Through Ray's dedicated love of baseball, the dead can live again—another promise that traditional Christianity makes to its followers.

Imagination, Dreams, and Reality

Shoeless Joe is a wish-fulfillment, fantasy novel in which the dead come back to life, dreams come true, and old wounds are healed. It asserts the primacy of imagination over the demands of practical life. For example, Ray makes no attempt to get out of his mounting pile of debt. To all outside observers (except for his loyal wife, Annie), he is heading for disaster and his only practical option is to sell the farm. But Ray is one of the least practical characters imaginable. He insists on following his dreams and making them into reality. To accomplish this, he must be alert to the prompting of his intuition and his heart. He must do apparently crazy things, like driving cross-country to take a reclusive writer to a baseball game. He must never lose sight of his goal, he must ignore advice by well-meaning people, and he must trust in his vision. He must also work hard at the physical task of turning his cornfield into a baseball park. He seeds, waters, sands, and rakes the field. This is clearly a metaphor for watering his own imagination, allowing the hidden desires and hopes to push up to the surface. In digging deep into his own consciousness, Ray accesses the things that need healing, both in himself and in others. He taps into the universal level of life, where everything is connected. From there he can become the instrument by which the "cosmic jigsaw puzzle," in which everything has its proper time and place, can move to completion. As long as Ray sticks to his task, providence will take care of the rest. It is significant that, in the end, there proves to be no dichotomy between the imaginative and the practical life. By following his imagination, Ray also creates the means to pay off his debts—through the throng of tourists that come to see the magical ballpark—and to continue to live at the farm.

Father and Son

The relationship between father and son is at the heart of the novel. Ray's father passed on his love of baseball to his son, and his hero was Shoeless Joe, whom he believed to have been innocent of the charges that led to his lifetime ban from baseball. This is why Shoeless Joe is the first player to appear on Ray's baseball field. It is not only a chance for him to right the wrong that was done to him, but it also makes it possible for Ray to appease the spirit of his father, who has been dead for twenty years. When Ray first sees and talks to Shoeless Joe, his thoughts quickly turn to his father, and he wants him to play catcher with the resurrected White Sox. When this dream comes true and he sees his father as a twenty-five-year-old man, he does not know how to approach him, but, after making the first move and speaking to his father as a friend, he thinks of all the things he will want to talk about: "I'll guide the conversation . . . and we'll hardly realize that we're talking of love, and family, and life, and beauty, and friendship, and sharing." What Kinsella suggests here is simple: those to whom we are closest can remain so, even after death, if our hearts and minds remain open; the barriers between the living and the dead are not as insurmountable as they might seem. Ray's twin brother, Richard, is the immediate beneficiary of Ray's discovery. Unlike Ray, Richard quarreled with their father. Richard had not reconciled with his father by the time of his father's death—but Ray teaches the initially uncomprehending Richard to see his father on the ballpark, so Richard can also be a part of the restored wholeness of the family.

Style

Similes and Metaphors

Kinsella's use of simile and metaphor, in which something is compared to something else generally unlike it in a way that brings out the resemblance between the two, is the most noticeable aspect of his style. The similes and metaphors come thick and fast. The first seven pages alone include the following examples: the wind "is as soft as a day-old chick"; speakers at baseball stadiums are "like ancient sailors' hats"; small items accumulate at one end of the sloping verandah "like a herd of cattle clustered with their backs to a storm"; Annie falls into Ray's arms "like a cat that you suddenly find sound asleep in your lap"; black clouds lumber off "like ghosts of buffalo." Later examples include extended metaphors, such as this one describing the rumors that circulate about J. D. Salinger. They are "like mosquitoes from a swamp and buzz angrily and irritatingly in the air." Kinsella cannot resist immediately following this with yet another simile, in which Ray, whose favorite author is Salinger, says he collected those rumors "as a child might collect matchbooks and stash them in an unruly clamor in a dresser drawer already full of pens, tape, marbles, paper clips, and old playing cards."

Style

Kinsella writes in a lyrical, poetic style. This is particularly noticeable when he evokes the landscape of Iowa when the magic of the baseball field is in the air. Just before Shoeless Joe appears for the first time, for example, Ray senses that the magic is approaching, "hovering somewhere out in the night like a zeppelin, silky and silent, floating like the moon until the time is right." After Ray's first talk with Shoeless Joe, "A breath of clover travels on the summer wind. Behind me, just yards away, brook water plashes softly in the darkness, a frog shrills, fireflies dazzle the night like red pepper. A petal falls."

These and other descriptions of the Iowa landscape add to the feeling of enchantment that Kinsella wishes to create. He appeals directly to the senses, exactly as Ray instructs Salinger to do: "Open up your senses, smell the life all around you, touch it, taste it, hear it." This is the key to seeing the way Ray sees, and Kinsella gives his reader all the help he can. Consider for example the appeal to sight and smell in the following description: "Moonlight butters the whole Iowa night. Clover and corn smells are as thick as syrup." The image of moonlight buttering the night is particularly striking and effective.

The evocative lyricism extends to the descriptions of the baseball players and their games. This, for example, is the young Archie Graham in action:

He cranks up his arm, rears back, and throws, and
the ball . . . travel in a white arc, seeming to leave

behind a line like a streak of forgotten rainbow as it
drops over the fence, silent as a star falling into a distant
ocean.

When Eddie tells Ray that his uncle had a gift for "describing the beauty and mystery of baseball," his words could equally be applied to Kinsella the author.

The descriptions of Ray's wife Annie and his relationship with her have a similar kind of sensual radiance. It is as if everything within the scope of Ray's deep imaginative response to life appears in the light of this soft, romantic glow.

Symbolism

When Ray visits the carnival in Iowa City to meet Gypsy, she shows him part of the show. In a trailer, there are about a dozen glass containers. Each contains a faded black and white photograph of a deformed fetus. Kinsella attaches some importance to this, since just before the incident, Ray's daughter Karin repeats several times the sales patter she has heard from Richard: "the world's strangest babies are here." The reader is meant to take notice.

The grim image of twelve dead fetuses symbolizes the stifled, aborted dreams that Ray has brought back to life in his enchanted baseball park. The twelve are the eight banned White Sox players, including Shoeless Joe Jackson, as well as Moonlight Graham, Eddie Scissons, Johnny Kinsella (Ray's father) and J. D. Salinger.

The image recalls an incident in Ray's childhood when he shot a sparrow. To discourage him from such activities, his mother told him to bring the bird to life again. Obviously, he was unable to do that, but Ray has since learned that there are some things that can be brought back to life—forgotten hopes and frustrated desires. The sparrow incident is linked to the image of the dead fetuses when Ray calls his mother, reminds her of the dead sparrow, and tells her she must come and see "what I've brought to life." He means the baseball field, but the following day he visits the carnival and sees the glass cases. Kinsella leaves the reader to make the symbolic connection.

Historical Context

Shoeless Joe Jackson was born in rural poverty in Greenville, South Carolina, in 1888. When he was only six, he worked seventy-hour weeks at the local cotton mill with his father. There was no opportunity for formal educational, and Jackson grew up illiterate. He joined the mill's baseball team at the age of fifteen and within five years was playing in the local minor league team, where he earned his nickname by playing in stocking feet.

In 1908, Jackson joined the major league Philadelphia Athletics, and, in 1910, he was traded to the Cleveland Indians. Five years later, he was traded to the Chicago White Sox.

The White Sox were owned by the miserly Charles Comiskey, who refused even to pay for the team's laundry, which earned them the nickname, Black Sox. The players were inadequately paid. The highest annual salary Jackson ever earned with the Black Sox was $6,000. Comiskey also favored contracts that placed all power in the hands of the owner rather than the player. In the novel, Ray laments the Ten Day Clause, "which voided contracts, could end any player's career without compensation, pension, or even a ticket home."

Although all the details are still not known, the conspiracy was initiated by first baseman Chick Gandil, who recruited the other players. Gamblers offered each of the eight players $20,000 to lose the 1919 World Series. At the time, the White Sox were a formidable team and were expected to beat the Cincinnati Reds—but they lost the series. Jackson received $5,000 but later tried to give it back. It is by no means certain that he helped to throw the series. He did, however, bat .375 to lead all players; he collected twelve hits and made no errors in the field. These statistics have led many fans to argue (including Ray's father in the novel) that he did not participate in the conspiracy.

A year later, after an investigation initiated by sportswriters, Jackson and two of the other players confessed to a grand jury. A famous story is told of a young boy pleading with his idol as he left a Chicago courthouse, "Say it ain't so, Joe." Jackson reportedly replied, "I'm afraid it is, kid."

Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis banned all eight players from baseball for life. In 1921, a jury acquitted all eight players, but this was because evidence, including the players' signed confessions, had been stolen and was unavailable.

Jackson returned to Greenville, where he and his wife ran a successful dry-cleaning business. Jackson played semipro baseball in the South Georgia League until the age of forty-five. There are legends, disputed by some baseball historians, that he sometimes played elsewhere under a false name. The novel begins with Ray recalling how his father had claimed to have seen Shoeless Joe, "playing in a tenth-rate commercial league in a textile town in Carolina, wearing shoes and an assumed name."

Jackson remains to this day one of the great baseball players of all time. His lifetime batting average (.356) is the third best in major league history. Ty Cobb called him the "best natural hitter he ever saw."

Jackson died of a heart attack in 1951 at the age of sixty-three.

Critical Overview

Shoeless Joe was well received by reviewers. Barry Schweld, in *Library Journal*, called it a "triumph of imagination . . . the tone is gentle and sweet." Schweld compared the novel to the work of Bernard Malamud, Robert Coover and others, concluding that like those writers, Kinsella had spun a "wonderful myth out of the ritual of baseball." *Publisher's Weekly* declared it to be "the most imaginative and original baseball novel since 'The Natural,'" and concluded, "fanciful, if somewhat lightweight, the novel attests to the timeless game and the power of love." Maggie Lewis in *Christian Science Monitor* joined the chorus of praise, commenting that "Kinsella does wonders in this book: The visual fantasies are so rich that whether you believe them or not, you can't help imagining them."

William Plummer in *Newsweek* was a little more tough-minded. He called *Shoeless Joe* a "wonderfully hokey first novel," adding that the subplots "are a hasty pudding" and the Salinger of the novel was not "smart or quirky enough" to have created the character Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*. However, Plummer concluded that "such complaints seem mean-spirited, tineared, in the face of the novel's lovely minor music."

Shoeless Joe has gained lasting popularity with the reading public, owing in part to the success of the movie *Field of Dreams* (1989). Literary critics have given it less attention, although several scholarly articles have explored such topics as Kinsella's baseball metaphors, his presentation of different attitudes to religion, and his social conservatism. There is a general consensus that the book is Kinsella's finest achievement in the realm of baseball fiction, a subgenre to which he has devoted much of his writing career.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Aubrey holds a Ph.D. in English and has published many articles on twentieth-century literature. In this essay, Aubrey discusses the parallels between Ray Kinsella's vision in Kinsella's novel and some elements of traditional Christianity. He also points out the social and political implications of Ray's nostalgic dream.

"Is this heaven?" asks Shoeless Joe early on in the novel. "No, it's Iowa," replies Ray. In reality, however, Ray's magical baseball field has many of the characteristics of the Christian heaven, and Ray himself resembles an apostle of Christ, proclaiming the "good news" of salvation to all who believe. Seen in this light, *Shoeless Joe* appears to resemble an extended religious parable that creates, out of the rituals and artifacts of baseball, the trappings of a new religion, with much of its creed borrowed from the traditional elements of Christianity. While it is tempting to see the novel in this way, Kinsella is careful to repudiate the idea that baseball can be worshiped as a religion. He does this by contrasting Eddie Scissons and Moonlight Graham, highlighting the different role that baseball plays in each of their lives. Also, close analysis of Ray's heavenly Iowan field suggests that its saving values of love and hope rest on political and social underpinnings that may bring their universality into question.

The parallels between Ray's enterprise and that of an evangelist inspired by Old and New Testaments are unmistakable. Ray is a Moses bringing his people to the promised land, flowing with milk and honey. The promised land happens to be Iowa, lyrical descriptions of which occur on and off throughout the story. And in Ray's magical, blessed baseball field, he offers healing sanctuary first for Shoeless Joe, an outcast and a sinner, just as Jesus made a point of eating with tax collectors (the outcasts of his day) and sinners. Ray also brings to enlightenment his long-lost brother, Richard, who resembles the prodigal son in the story told in Luke's gospel (Luke 15: 11-32). And like any good evangelist, Ray goes out in search of the lost sheep, as in the story told in Matthew, chapter 15, about the man who leaves his ninety-nine sheep to search for the one sheep that is lost, and rejoices greatly when he finds it. The lost sheep in *Shoeless Joe* takes the form of J. D. Salinger. When Ray finds him, Salinger epitomizes the error made by the third servant in the parable of the talents related in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 25. This is the servant who was given one talent (a unit of currency) by his master and buried it in the ground rather than doing as the other servants did—using what they had been given and so multiplying it. Kinsella's Salinger is a brilliant writer, blessed with the ability to touch people deeply with his words, but he has chosen not to share his gift with others. In the language of the New Testament, he is hiding his light under a bushel instead of letting it shine out. Ray, the baseball evangelist, must try to awaken him from his spiritual torpor.

Ray succeeds even better than he must have expected, for not only does Salinger, at the end of the novel, promise to let his light shine (that is, to write again), he is also the one who is permitted to experience the rapture. This is a reference to the Christian belief, based on a passage in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians (4:17), that when Christ returns, believers will be caught up in the air to meet him. The equivalent in the novel is the invitation the baseball players extend to Salinger to join them after the game. They permit him to enter whatever spiritual world they inhabit when they are not hitting and fielding baseballs. This is a world the nature of which Ray can only guess at, but there are strong hints that Salinger will there have all his buried hopes and desires met.

In short, then, Ray's baseball field is the medium through which the ideal, transfigured, paradise state emerges and is made known. It is a condition, a state of consciousness, in which instead of being recalcitrant to human desire, life takes on the very shape of the fulfilled wish. It is similar to the description given in the Book of Revelations about the new Jerusalem that is made manifest after the return of Christ: "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (21:4). As Annie says in the novel, "It's so perfect here."

Should we, then, worship baseball, the most perfect of games, embodiment of beauty and granter of our desires, a stable point of reference in a changing world? The perhaps surprising answer Kinsella gives is no. He is careful to point out that this quasi-religious world, just like its Christian counterpart, has its devil. And that this devil is ready to tempt the baseball lover, promising everything but leading him astray. The devil comes in the unlikely form of Eddie Scissons. When the reader first meets Eddie, he carries a white cane, on the top of which is a brass serpent's head. This is obviously meant to be a symbol. The serpent is, of course, the Biblical symbol of the devil. It was the devil in the form of the serpent that first tempted Eve, and in the New Testament, the devil is described as a liar and the father of all lies. In the novel, it transpires that Eddie has been lying for over forty years about his life, claiming to have played for the Chicago Cubs when he did not. The lie has become so pervasive it has taken over his entire life. He lives in a fantasy, a make-believe world that has no relation to real life. He has made a false god out of baseball, and this becomes abundantly clear when he stands on the bleachers and gives his long, high-flown sermon on baseball as the word of salvation. His speech is accompanied by Ray's impressions that are clearly meant to be negative: Eddie's voice "is filled with evangelical fervor"; a moment later he "shakes his head like a fundamentalist who can quote chapter and verse for every occasion." Eddie is a man who has taken his enthusiasm too far, and his life becomes a lie.

It might appear, of course, that Ray himself is sometimes in danger of doing the same. But although he is a baseball fanatic, he is aware of the dangers of not keeping his feet on the ground. When Salinger muses about whether there is a baseball devil, because Ray seems so possessed by the game, Ray replies with impeccable common sense, "Anything taken too seriously becomes a devil."

The more apt contrast with Eddie, however, is not Ray but Moonlight Graham, the man who made one brief appearance with the New York Giants in 1905 and then spent most of the rest of his life as a doctor in the small town of Chisholm, Montana. Although he loved baseball, he always kept a sense of what was really important in life. He tells Ray:

> If I'd got to be a doctor for five minutes, now *that* would have been a tragedy. You have to keep things in perspective. I mean, I love the game, but it's only that, a game.

Far more important for Doc Graham was finding a place in a community where he belonged, where he could express love and show his caring nature. For over forty years, Doc Graham was the good doctor who always had time for his patients. The baseball wish he expresses to Ray—to hold a bat in a major league game—is very much a secondary consideration for him. This is shown, as Charles Beach points out in his article, "Joyful vs. Joyless Religion in W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*," in the incident where Karin almost chokes to death. Moonlight Graham leaves the baseball field where he is playing and magically metamorphoses into Doc Graham, in which guise he can save the little girl's life. Ray believes that Doc can never go back to being Moonlight Graham again. But it does not matter because the doctor has his priorities right.

But does Ray have *his* priorities right in all respects? What are the social and political implications of the kind of "heaven" he envisions in the Iowa heartland? Bryan K. Garman, in his essay, "Myth Building and Cultural Politics in W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*," argues that the social environment out of which Ray's paradisiacal world springs is a very conservative one. It reflects an America not transfigured but frozen at a particular point in time.

The conservatism of Ray's worldview is clear from the nostalgia that pervades the novel. *Shoeless Joe* can be seen as one long hymn to the past. Ray is always looking back to a golden time. He hates the changes that he observes in Iowa City, for example, where the proliferation of fast-food franchises, motel chains, and muffler shops destroy bit by bit the city's traditional ambience. Ray also dislikes technology and the changes it brings to farming, including his own farm:

> Now a new breed of land baron is buying out the farmers one by one, and I suppose corn farms like mine soon will be operated by computer. Instead of a farmhouse and family, there will be a small metallic box studded with red, green, and blue lights, which will tell a foreman which quadrant needs water and in which area the cutworms are hatching.

Perhaps most important, as Garman points out, Ray's persistent nostalgia showers adulation on the game of baseball during a period when African Americans were not allowed to play in the major leagues. (They were not admitted until 1947.) This is also a period in history when a woman's place was firmly in the home. In the novel, this preference for a conservative attitude regarding gender roles shows up in the treatment of Annie. She occupies a subordinate place in Ray's world, offering him constant support, allowing him to do whatever he wants while her main task is taking care of domestic chores. She has no thought of a career of her own. Similarly, when Salinger climbs aboard the same backward-looking train, he also envisions the future of Ray's baseball field in nostalgic terms that idealize a particular period of history. Salinger's vision includes not only the quaint "squarish cars parked around a frame schoolhouse" but also domestic arrangements in which women labor hard and long at food-preparing chores: "women shelling peas in linoleum-floored kitchens, cradling the unshelled pods in brindled aprons, tearing open corn husks and waiting for the thrill of the cool sweet scent."

Many people today, feminists and others, might feel that such times were less than ideal, hardly deserving of the sentimental, rosy glow with which Kinsella imbues them. Although reading the novel for its political and social implications may upset the finely developed and charming fantasy—after all, who cannot love a story in which wishes come true and life is one long baseball game?—it also brings to light some underlying assumptions that must play a part in any critical evaluation. What is heaven for some may not be so heavenly for others.

Source: Bryan Aubrey, Critical Essay on *Shoeless Joe*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Garman looks at the mythic structure of Kinsella's Shoeless Joe*.*

The mythic vision of America and its national pastime which W. P. Kinsella constructed in *Shoeless Joe* ([1982] 1991) has extended into millions of American imaginations, both in the form of the novel and its film adaptation, *Field of Dreams* (1989). Kinsella built the myth, and people came to live it. Perhaps literary critic Neil Randall best articulates the popular response to *Shoeless Joe* when he calls it a "moral book" which "makes us come away in the end feeling 'pretty damn good about being alive for the rest of the day.'" But when we read beyond what Randall calls "fantasy and the humor of fellow-feeling," and explore the context of the novel's morality, an unsettling portrait of America emerges. In this essay, I will argue that Kinsella engenders a culturally conservative world, which reflects the historical circumstances of the 1980s and reproduces the ideology of Ronald Reagan's presidency. By discussing the text within the framework of Reagan's America and the social history of baseball, this paper shows that Kinsella's nostalgic world is characterized by a mythic history of consensus, a fraternal and patriarchal order, and discrimination based on race and gender.

The most insightful and important scholarly articles written about Kinsella's vision of America have addressed the film, *Field of Dreams*, rather than the novel. Like *Shoeless Joe*, the film absolves the legendary Chicago White Sox leftfielder Shoeless Joe Jackson of his involvement in the so-called Black Sox scandal of 1919. Reviewer Harlan Jacobson astutely observes that the film "wishes aloud that America could return to the innocent days of white baseball. When there were no stains on the American honour, no scandals, no dirty tricks, no surprises. When everything was pure and clean and simple, and, well, white. When the Sox stayed white." The critic is so appalled by this longing for the past that he claims the film "takes on shades of the Weimer Republic . . . *Field of Dreams* weeps for what is not now and never was. It remembers America before it lost control." As a corollary to Jacobson's argument, Pauline Kael suggests that the film reconciles the counterculture of the 1960s with the conformists of the 1980s, and argues that the movie is "close to saying: Don't challenge your parents' values, because if you do you'll be sorry. It's saying: 'Play Ball' with the American political system.["] Finally, Frank Ardolino, who discusses the theme of innocence in *Field of Dreams* and in two other baseball movies (*Bull Durham* and *Eight Men Out*) which were released in the late 1980s, concludes, "The wide-shouldered 1950s figure of Ronald Reagan dominates these films for better or worse."

Reagan's shoulders carried the complacency and stability of the Eisenhower era to the White House, where conservative pundits used it to shore up the mythic consensus of history which undergirded his presidency. Warren Susman argues that history "comes into existence" when "the social order itself must be rationalized." The act of writing history, he tells us, "brings order out of the disarray" of circumstances and is "often used as the basis for a political philosophy that while explaining the past offers also a way to change the future. History thus operates ideologically." Perhaps no one understood this concept as well as those who choreographed the Reagan presidency. The master of the image and communication, Reagan narrated a history that projected American tradition and myth into the present and future. His mythic vision sought to redeem a powerful American patriarchy, which had been emasculated by recent events: the embarrassment of Vietnam, the challenge of the counterculture and the civil rights movement, the shame of Watergate, the frustration of the Iranian hostage crisis, and the failed attempt to end it. While Jimmy Carter asked Americans to sacrifice and settle for second best, Reagan vowed to put America first. To overcome what he perceived as aberrations in the country's history, Reagan rearmed and remasculinized America, reintroduced a fervent patriotism, and, perhaps most importantly, recaptured a mythic American past. Biographer Garry Wills assesses the Reagan mystique:

> We want to 'retain' what we never had—a mythical frontier life, an America where merit and hard work were the only paths to success, where the government did not interfere with the workings of the market's invisible hand: the past, that is, as Reagan thinks he lived it, where performing and earning merged, and the part to be performed was always that of the meritocrat .... For others, Reagan offers not only a path of entry into such an America, a relic of its reality, but a guarantee of its continued existence into our time. In several senses, he gives us the past as present ....

With the world as he knew it threatened by feminism, the Soviet Union, and the rapid development of technology, Reagan invoked and evoked America's Golden Age and became a stalwart for the status quo.

The television advertising campaign which the Reagan-Bush ticket unleashed during the 1984 presidential election brilliantly illustrates the Reagan administration's reliance on a mythic past. In the advertisement entitled "America is Back," an orchestra's euphony and images of domestic tranquility appeal to our sentiments, while we hear the narrator's serene and confident voice-over:

> In a town not too far from where you live, a young family has just moved into a new home. Three years ago even the smallest house seemed completely out of reach.
> Right down the street one of the neighbor's just bought himself a new truck—with all the options.
> The factory down by the river is working again—not long ago people were saying it would probably be closed forever.
> Just about every place you look, things are looking up.
> Life is better. America is back. And people have a

sense of pride they never thought they'd feel again.
So it's not surprising just about everyone in town is
thinking the same thing.
Now that our country is turning around, why would
we ever turn back?

While this narration evokes the nostalgic neighbourhood of 1950s Main Street America, the video provides the appropriate images: an elderly man with a straw hat sits on his porch and peers over his newspaper to watch the new family move in next door; a little girl excitedly runs to her father's new truck; the night watchman greets his coworkers as they return to the factory; a barber sweeps the sidewalk in front of his shop; an elderly couple walks down the street eating ice cream; and, finally, there is a parade which features the high school band, a teen queen waving to the crowd, a shining red fire engine, and well-groomed children brandishing American flags.

Through these nostalgic images, the Reagan camp attempted to establish a tranquil consensus which was devoid of internal conflict. In this made-for-television community, black and white Americans live and work together and women work in the home. Reagan was able to convince America that we were part of an idealistic, conflict-free past which, although it never existed, was being relived in the present. Wills writes of Reagan, "He renews our past by resuming it. His approach is not discursive, setting up sequences of time or thought, but associative; not a tracking shot, but montage. We make the connections. It is our movie." The montage presented in "America is Back" was so intoxicating that many of us who suspected that Reagan's performance was merely the extension of his acting career still felt compelled to embrace his popular ideology. In short, we saw Reagan rehearse the myth so often that we began to believe it. Similarly, *Shoeless Joe*'s Eddie Scissons convinced himself that he played for the Chicago Cubs. After Ray's brother-in-law, Mark, reveals that the "oldest living Chicago Cub" never played in the big leagues, the aging Eddie admits, "If I can't have what I want most in life, then I'll pretend I had it in the past, and talk about it and live it and relive it until it is real and solid and I can hold it to my heart like a precious child. Once I've experienced it so completely, no one can ever take it away from me." Throughout his presidency, Reagan and many of his constituents seemed to operate under the same principle.

Kinsella explains that *Shoeless Joe* is "about a perfect world. It's about a man who has a perfect wife, a perfect daughter and wants to keep it that way" (Knight 1989 . . .). We might see pictures of Carter and Mondale hanging in the office of the *Free Press* when Ray and J. D. Salinger visit Doc Graham's hometown of Chisholm, Minnesota, but Kinsella's definition of perfect is more in line with Carter's successor's. To create his perfect world, Ray must, like Reagan, travel into the American past and revive its myths. As he returns to Iowa City with the "kidnapped" Salinger and the young Archie "Doc" Graham (whose dream to bat in the major leagues will be fulfilled on Ray's field), Ray laments the commodification of the Iowa landscape and the loss of the nostalgic small town. The "shady streets, very old white frame houses, porch swings, lilacs, one-pump gas stations, and good neighbors" have been replaced by "fast-food franchises that spring up everywhere like evil mushrooms, by concrete-and-glass buildings, muffler shops, and Howard Johnson motels. Each of these destroys a little more history. Iowa City is a town of grandfathers fighting a losing battle against time."

Longing for the retention of a world which is lifted "right out of a Norman Rockwell painting," Ray joins the good fight and tries to preserve it. He and Annie are cultural throwbacks, "meat and potato people" who both come from humble backgrounds and try to make their living from the land. In effect, they are archaeologists who actually live the type of life which they are trying to resurrect. In recovering antique glassware and crockery which is buried in their backyard, they rediscover and preserve the artifacts of the halcyon days when milk was delivered to houses in glass bottles. While their farmhouse becomes the museum for these antiques of material culture, Ray's baseball field preserves the mythic values of the period in which his house was built.

In much the same way that Reagan's masculinity and appeal to nostalgia absolved the sins of America's recent past, Ray's field wipes away the transgressions of baseball's history and returns the game to its fabled innocence. This purification ceremony occurs when Ray resurrects Shoeless Joe Jackson, the leftfielder of the 1919 Chicago White Sox, who was one of eight White Sox players implicated in the Black Sox scandal. Labouring under stingy owner Charles Comiskey, the eight Black Sox accepted bribes to throw the 1919 World Series, and were subsequently banned from baseball for life by the game's first commissioner, Kennesaw Mountain Landis. That Jackson, the most capable player in the group, took the money is certain; that he threw the series is not. As Ray explains, his impressive statistics suggest that there was no compromise in his play. Still, the Black Sox placed an indelible blemish on baseball's character and represented a nadir in American sports culture. "Say it ain't so, Joe," the apocryphal words uttered by a young fan who waited for his heroes outside of the court proceedings, recorded the disappointment and disillusion of an entire generation. America's national pastime, often thought to be the purest of its sports, had lost its innocence.

The ball park announcer's voice in *Shoeless Joe* implicitly charges Ray, as Jacobson suggests, to make the Black Sox white again, a task he accomplishes, in part, through his sympathetic representation of Jackson. Speaking as if he were trying to convince himself of the truth of his words, Ray calls the ballplayer a "symbol of tyranny of the powerful over the powerless" who fell victim to "the circumstances": "The players were paid peasant salaries while the owners became rich." An illiterate South Carolina farm boy, Jackson, who was duped by more experienced men, epitomizes the innocence of the past. Baseball, not money, was his concern. "I loved the game," he tells Ray. "I'd have played for food money. I'd have played free and worked for food. It was the game, the parks, the smells, the sounds. . . . It makes me tingle all over like a kid on his way to his first doubleheader." If, as Eddie Scissons preaches in his baseball revival meeting, the word "baseball" has the ability "to raise the dead," it also has the capacity to forgive the sins of the past. Upon his second coming into Kinsella's nostalgic world, Jackson "dip[s] [himself] in magic waters" and is forgiven by the "great god baseball." When the fallen hero implicitly confesses his sin, the magic waters baptize him in the name of baseball, wash away the wrongdoings of the Black Sox, and return them to the innocence of childhood. Ray's idyllic field suspends the Black Sox's life sentence and exonerates them from their crime.

While the "magic waters" of baseball allow Shoeless Joe to begin his career anew, the sport's regenerative properties also have a soothing effect on Salinger and Richard, Ray's twin brother. When Salinger disappears with the players into the mysterious corn field, there is hope that he will regain the creativity and passion that he had as a younger writer. Apparently, Ray has eased the author's personal pain, but because he identifies Salinger so closely with Holden Caulfield, he feels compelled to heal the general adolescent rage that the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye* embodies. Calling Salinger's book "the definitive novel of a young man's growing pains," Ray says, "Growing up is a ritual. . . . Everything is experienced for the first time. But baseball can soothe even those pains, for it is stable and permanent, steady as a grandfather dozing in a wicker chair on a verandah." Like the grandfather figure Reagan, who at age sixty-nine was the oldest man elected to his first term of the presidency, Ray wants a stable world that will erase the anger and rebellion of the 1960s counterculture, and stall America in the perpetual innocence and consensus of the Eisenhower era. Ray accomplishes this feat by reuniting his family. Twenty years after Richard left home in a fit of adolescent rage, he unexpectedly appears at Ray's farm. His return enables him to resume his relationship with his father, whom Ray has resurrected as a catcher on the field of dreams. In the process, we see the family, a standard icon in Reagan's mythology, reconstituted, and patriarchy restored. Richard's regrettable adolescent tantrum has ended, and he returns to the innocence and simplicity of childhood where patriarchal authority will remain unquestioned.

It is appropriate that Kinsella organizes his ceremony of forgiveness around baseball, for the sport has long been associated with the themes of regeneration and innocence. In mid-nineteenth century America, when baseball became popular, it furnished a pastoral retreat for urban middle-class men. Afternoons in the park removed these respectable merchants, proprietors, and clerks from the filth and unpleasantries of the city, and delivered them to the landscape of the American farm. The combination of vigorous exercise and the calmer environs of the park provided these men a powerful form of recreation, a pastime which was readily transferred to the modern professional game. Even today the most aesthetically pleasing of the major league ball parks, particularly those that have maintained natural grass playing fields, serve as respites from the homogeneous urban concrete and the city's morally complex and hectic pace. But the cyclical structure of the professional baseball season also offers both players and fans the annual opportunity for recreation. While for many the end of winter is signalled by the arrival of the first spring flowers, baseball fans mark the changing seasons with the annual convocation of Florida's Grapefruit League. Wizened veterans rehabilitate from nagging injuries and stage comebacks, while hopeful young rookies nervously struggle to fill a void that a recently retired super-star has left behind him. Each team approaches the upcoming season with optimism, hoping to atone for the sins and failures of the previous campaign. The fans are all too willing to forgive, and they too internalize the promise of the new year. They watch their favourite teams and players stagger through the young season of April and May, see the pennant races take shape by the mid-summer All-Star break, and watch them race to their conclusion just after the dog days of August. October brings a cool conclusion to the season's nine-month gestation and crowns a new World Series champion. Three long months later, fans are again willing to forgive the failures of their heroes, and the cycle begins anew when they enthusiastically embrace the hope of yet another baseball season. Because these cyclical traditions are reinforced by their ties to the natural growing season, they constitute a powerful regenerative ritual which is not present in any other major sport.

While Kinsella is aware that baseball subjects its faithful to a cyclical rebirth pattern, he also understands that each trip to the ball park revives even the cynic "who gave up the sports page for the Dow Jones Average when he was twenty-one." In his monologue near the end of the novel, Salinger indicates that baseball has a purifying and rejuvenating effect on all who watch it. He explains that Ray's magical baseball field is so powerful that pilgrims will come to it as "innocent as children" and "find they have reserved seats somewhere in the grandstand or along one of the baselines—wherever they sat when they were children and cheered their heroes." Kinsella carefully reconstructs the childhood of the white middle-aged man who, as a young boy, chose his heroes from American war generals, Saturday afternoon Westerns, and baseball players whose daily progress he followed on the radio or in the morning newspaper's box scores. Most young baseball fans share their earliest experience of the sport with their fathers, and attendance at any game during adulthood invariably summons associations which cause the fan to remember the simplicity and dependence of his or her childhood. The older fans who come to Ray's field of dreams will immerse themselves in nostalgia and remember afternoon games, radio broadcasts, Ted Williams, and perhaps even such attitudes as anticommunism and an unquestioned American patriotism. For nine innings, the fans are reborn as innocent as children and the memories they recall of their childhood enable them to rehearse a mythic consensus.

The structure of the game itself ensures that this rebirth occurs within a specific conservative cultural framework. In the more than 125-year-old history of professional baseball, the rules of the game have changed very little: the pitcher's mound has been moved a bit further away from home plate; owners insist that games be played at night; the American League employs the designated hitter rule; and salaries, of course, have increased exponentially. These alterations have had little effect on how the game is played, however. The hit-and-run play, for example, looks and works the same whether the manager who called it was the venerable Philadelphia Athletics' Connie Mack or the new Colorado Rockies' Don Baylor. Major League Baseball executives have developed the concepts of stability and permanency by marketing their products with nostalgic references to the game's past. Most professional teams hold annual old-timer's games and many have abandoned modern-style uniforms for more nostalgic ones. Moreover, professional baseball employs vital statistical categories which ensure that the old timers will not be forgotten. Certain numbers and names are held out as virtually unattainable standards against which all men who play the game are judged. When a player establishes himself as the all-time leader in a particular statistical category, many years typically pass before he is displaced. Babe Ruth (who played from 1914 to 1935) held the mark for career home runs at 715 until Hank Aaron (1954-76) eclipsed the total nearly forty years after Ruth retired. Ty Cobb's (1905-28) 4,191 hits eventually gave way to Pete Rose's 4,204 (1963-85), and Walter "Big Train" Johnson's (1907-27) 416 career pitching victories will probably never be challenged. Such statistics provide the game with a stronger sense of stability than other professional sports.

Throughout the history of professional baseball, playoff formats have been altered, teams have moved from city to city, stadiums have become more standardized, and the management in the front offices has changed dramatically. But, while the business of baseball is different than it was when it first began, and the America which exists outside of the ball park has undergone tremendous transformations in the past 125 years, the game that is played between the foul lines has remained relatively stable. Drawing on baseball's regeneration myth and stable, self-contained history, Kinsella uses the voice of J. D. Salinger to associate many of the same values with baseball that Reagan associated with America:

> I don't have to tell you that the one constant through all the years has been baseball. America has been erased like a blackboard, only to be rebuilt and then erased again. But baseball has marked the time while America has rolled by like a procession of steam-rollers. It is the same game that Moonlight Graham played in 1905. It is a living part of our history, like calico dresses, stone crockery, and threshing crews eating at outdoor tables. It continually reminds us of what once was, like an Indian-head penny in a handful of new coins.

Kinsella erases the sins of the past by imbuing the game with the innocence of childhood and evoking memories of a younger and simpler America. In short, baseball stabilizes Kinsella's world in the same way Reagan stabilized America. Depressions, wars, and civil unrest have altered the American landscape, but in Kinsella's narrative baseball provides a version of Reagan's orthodox past. In a dynamic world of Star Wars, Middle East terrorists, and American feminists, it satisfies the "certain compulsion . . . for orderliness" which Ray and so many Americans have. Watching the Red Sox in Fenway Park, Ray concludes that baseball "is the most perfect of games, solid, true, pure and precious as diamonds. If only life were so simple. I have often thought, "*If only there was a framework to life, rules to live by*." *Shoeless Joe* touches our emotions because it celebrates the traditional values of an irrecoverable age that Ronald Reagan seemed to make tangible. As James Earl Jones says, as Terrence Mann, in *Field of Dreams*, baseball offers the promise that "what once was good can be again." There is more to Kinsella's myopic vision, however, than goodness.

While baseball re-creates itself in the image of its old heroes to function as a living part of American history, Reagan's nostalgia refashioned America in the same manner. Although his renowned advertising strategists claimed that it was morning again in America, we were not awakening to a new morning. Rather, Reagan's day dawned in a mythic society which, like Kinsella's, espoused a conservative morality. As Garry Wills writes, Reagan "not only represents the past, but resurrects it as a promise of the future." The president appealed to "traditional" small-town values and religious mores and presented them as a way to rejuvenate America, a political philosophy that won considerable praise from Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and other fundamentalist groups. In Kinsella's novel, Ray tells us that he detests Christian fundamentalism in all forms, but his actions suggest that he too follows fundamentalist doctrines. "The kind of people I absolutely cannot tolerate," he tells us, "are those, like Annie's mother, who never let you forget they are religious. It seems to me that a truly religious person would let his life be example enough . . ." But if Ray condemns dogmatic Christianity, his fanatical adherence to the mythic history of baseball ensures that he will hold an ideological position which resembles the fundamentalist's. In *Shoeless Joe*, baseball functions as old-time religion, and Ray is the preacher who seeks to convert the infidels. The great god baseball welcomes the troubled (Salinger), the sinner (Shoeless Joe), the outcast (Eddie Scissons), the forsaken (Moonlight Graham) and the prodigal son (Richard) back into the fold, and restores or re-confirms the conservative values which they held before they strayed from the flock. These values—which place emphasis on order, the male-dominated family, and moral and racial purity—have their origins in the Victorian culture in which baseball was founded.

When Salinger articulates the vision that will save Ray's farm, he tells Ray that when the people come to his field, "It will be almost a fraternity, like one of those tiny, exclusive French restaurants that have no sign." Baseball's mythic history has traditionally claimed that the sport is the most innocent and democratic of games, but Salinger's statement is informed by the historical context in which the game was born. Historian Warren Gold-stein notes that as early as 1860, the democratic myth was expressed in the *Beadle's Dime BaseBall Player*:

> Employers willingly and cheerfully gave their employees
> time to play base ball.... All classes of society,
> the mechanic, the merchant, the professional
> classes, the school children, the collegiates, the aged
> and the young . . . the affluent member of society, all
> joined in the sport . . . . Everything seemed to indicate
> that an American national out door pastime,
> fraught with influences the most beneficial and desirable,
> had been established, and so indeed it had.

This myth, which is perpetuated by Kinsella, holds, in part, that baseball was an egalitarian sport until owners such as Comiskey corrupted it. Goldstein points out, however, that capitalists have had financial interests in the game since at least 1867, when the Cincinnati Red Legs were incorporated. Moreover, because baseball clubs were originally founded as social fraternities, their function was always more than purely athletic. These organizations, which usually maintained a clubhouse, held annual galas, and oftentimes conducted elaborate picnics and dinners after games, provided a homosocial space for aspiring men of the "respectable" classes. Goldstein estimates that between the years 1855 and 1870, baseball fraternities had the following demographic composition: twenty percent were "high white collar" workers, a third were skilled craftsmen, with the remaining forty-four to forty-eight percent described as "low white collar or proprietors." Sufficient funds were always required to maintain these organizations, and certainly many business and professional contacts were made within the circles of the baseball fraternity. It would seem, then, that the "good old days"—the days in which baseball was not a business—did not exist for long.

Kinsella's misrepresentations, however, do not stop here. Indeed, as Goldstein explains, baseball germinated in a specific social-historical milieu, and consequently contained class, race, and gender biases which Kinsella fails to acknowledge. Specifically, when baseball fraternities became popular in the 1850s, the Know-Nothing party manifested itself as a sign of anti-immigration sentiment which was permeating the country. Carl Degler explains that the party's primary goal "was the elimination of the foreigner as a political force." To that end, the Know-Nothings sought to prohibit immigrants from holding public office and to increase "the waiting period for naturalization from five to twenty-one years." Although the Know-Nothings failed to implement their platform, they had considerable representation in American political offices from 1855 to 1861. Degler points out that even Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, the headstrong reformer, associated himself with the party.

The existence of the Know-Nothings expressed the profound desire of many middle-class, native-born Americans to create a purely self-contained and homogeneous nation that was free of the cacophony and pluralism of immigrant cultures. In many respects, the brotherhood of baseball was an extension of this nativist impulse, for it took steps that would distinguish itself from the vast new immigrant populations which entered America between 1830 and 1860. Goldstein suggests that after mid-century the game was "straddling a cultural boundary" between the middle and working classes, but avers that those who did identify with the game sought to differentiate themselves from the rough culture of the "poor and unskilled and 'unrespectable'" population which was increasingly comprised of immigrants. Baseball fraternities consequently presented their sport as the "manly" game and contrasted it to such "boyish" working-class pursuits as boxing. Baseball players were expected to act like gentlemen on the field rather than unrefined pugilists. Within the framework of the language that the baseball fraternities used to establish their manhood, there existed the connotations of class distinctions. Goldstein writes:

The fact that the same rancor was directed at the
lower classes suggests that the question of 'maturity'
or 'manly' behavior had a class content as well. It
further suggests that the language of age and class
could be used (at least from the top down) interchangeably,
perhaps especially when the scorn originated
with a combination of middle-class professionals
and 'respectable' skilled craftsmen, and was
aimed downward at the unskilled workers, laborers,
and street arabs who did not belong to their clubs and

did not aspire to the self-controlled respectability of
their betters.

While such classism differs significantly from nineteenth-century racism, these class prejudices inform the history of racial discrimination which has plagued organized baseball. If white immigrants had little of the "self-controlled respectability of their betters," the African-American slave was thought to have even less. Nativists and the baseball fraternity strived to attain white middle-class purity, and if the slave economy alone did not prohibit blacks from participating in the baseball fraternity, theories of racial purity and miscegenation did.

Don Murray argues that readers "are drawn toward Kinsella's world because of its goodness and gentleness" and suggests that "despite the racial context of his work, only a minority of his readers (perhaps *they* are the perceptive ones?) see him as a racist." In reading *Shoeless Joe*, we are compelled to ask what Kinsella's treatment of race suggests about race relations in American culture and organized baseball. What does it mean for the author to assert that *Shoeless Joe* is about a "perfect world" and then situate this utopia in a region which has a very small minority population? Moreover, why does Kinsella locate his perfect world in a time when African Americans were not permitted to play major-league baseball?

The history of African Americans and other minorities in baseball does not penetrate Kinsella's narrative. In fact, his text does much to perpetuate the fraternity of racial purity by not only making the Black Sox white again, but by deracinating baseball and America. To be sure, Kinsella's representations of race are unflattering at best, and Ray has little respect for people of colour. One of the first items he notices on Joe Jackson's uniform is "an American flag with forty-eight stars," a signifier of a self-contained America which had not yet admitted the Asian populations of Alaska and Hawaii to its citizenship. Like Ronald Reagan and the nativists, Ray wants to put America first and keep it pure. As he tells Mark, "You owe the land something. . . . It's not just a product. Not plastic and foam and bright paint imported from Taiwan or Korea, meant to be used once and discarded." While Ray describes the products of Asian labour as disposable, he sees the occupation of the American farmer and the cultural product of baseball as permanent symbols of a far superior national culture. Asian cultures may have appropriated baseball, but Ray would never concede American ownership of it. In his narrowly defined view, baseball is America, and because the World Series is played solely by North American teams, America is the world. Indeed, few players of Asian descent have broken the professional ranks, and until the recent purchase of the Seattle Mariners by a group of Japanese investors in June of 1992, the organizations resisted the presence of foreign owners altogether.

Perhaps Kinsella commits his most insidious (mis)reading of the past by failing to mention baseball's most reprehensible sin: until 1947, African Americans were not permitted to play in the major leagues. While Ray's fantasy recalls many of the great players of baseball history, the only black players he mentions are Willie Mays, Reggie Jackson, and a few Minnesota Twins players from the late 1970s. The introduction of

Reggie Jackson into text occurs under notable circumstances, for, in Annie's view, Joe Jackson supplants the New York Yankees' outfielder from his position. When Ray informs his wife that Shoeless Joe has arrived on the Kinsella farm, she asks, "Is he the Jackson on TV? The one you yell, 'Drop it, Jackson' at?" Reggie Jackson typically played rightfield for the Yankees, but in Annie's mind the unassuming, hardworking, and white Joe Jackson replaces the always flamboyant Reggie, and thereby restores white integrity, manhood, and self-control to the game. In Kinsella's world, it is this latter characteristic that is particularly lacking in the African-American community. As Ray walks through a Chicago ghetto near Old Comiskey Park, he feels so threatened by the African Americans he sees in this deprived environment that he "picture[s] young black men in felt fedoras going on a lavish spending spree with [his] very white Iowa credit cards." This passage is indicative of two points. First, the representation of African Americans as thieves who have little self-restraint and wear felt fedoras confirms the most virulent racial stereotypes, and thereby objectifies the black population. Ray is so blinded by the mythic history of baseball, however, that he fails to recognize his thoughts as being racist. Second, the passage illustrates the systematic discrimination in which baseball clubs have engaged against poor African Americans. Professional teams frequently erect their stadiums in black, poverty-stricken neighbourhoods, and, in the process, deprive local inhabitants of housing and inconvenience them with the large crowds that attend the games. Many major-league clubs have placed their stadiums in such areas, actions which indicate that they look upon these neighbourhoods as expendable.

Although economic statistics from the 1980s would prove otherwise, Reagan's selective reading of America and its history of race relations promotes a myth of consensus where blacks and whites live together in equality. Kinsella's representations of blacks and his desire to return baseball to an era which existed before Jackie Robinson broke the colour barrier, however, suggest that he prefers to isolate his "perfect world" from African Americans altogether. As an individual, W. P. Kinsella may or may not be a racist; we simply cannot draw any conclusions from reading one of his works of fiction. We can, however, clearly conclude that the world he envisions, the culture in which it is embedded, and the baseball fraternity all have racist underpinnings.

While Kinsella's representations of race subjugate blacks to whites, his representations of women place them under the control of men. Salinger explains that when crowds of people come to Ray's farm to see Shoeless Joe play again, the experience will conjure memories of "women shelling peas in linoleum floored kitchens, cradling the unshelled pods in brindled aprons, tearing open corn husks and waiting for the thrill of the cool sweet scent." These unmistakably domestic images recall the drudgery of preparing all food by hand (there are no frozen vegetables, instant cake mixes, or microwaves in this kitchen), and relegate the woman to monotonous and often unrewarding household chores. Moreover, the images associate the woman with the role of reproduction: she carries the pea pods to term in her apron and gives birth to the vegetables by removing their shells. In Kinsella's world, the ideal woman keeps bare feet on the linoleum floor, happily bears the labour of motherhood, and performs the domestic obligations that will sustain the man in his pursuits. Goldstein suggests that women played a similar supportive domestic role in the establishment of the baseball fraternity. He writes, "Baseball clubs and promoters wanted women at games as evidence of the game's popularity. Many spectators would be drawn by the legitimacy that only women could confer to the game. Most important, however, women were supposed to help men control themselves on the ball field . . . women personified the standards of behavior that could, theoretically, keep men's behavior within certain boundaries." In short, these Victorian women "were to domesticate" the ball field, and without their supporting and submissive role, the fraternity of baseball, and middle-class patriarchal life as a whole, would not have developed as we know it.

Like her Victorian counterpart, Annie assumes a submissive role in the novel and embodies the middle-class domestic ideal. While Ray travels across the country to fulfil his outlandish dreams, Annie, a woman who is much younger than her husband, never questions him, remains at home to care for their daughter, and contends with their financial difficulties. She is the team player who executes countless sacrifices for the well-being of her family. While her other friends "were going to be nurses, teachers, pilots, or movie stars," Annie chose Ray "for her occupation," a task which requires her to support, comfort, and believe in him at all costs. Regardless of what Ray does, "she will be waiting for [him]" when he returns; as she says, "Whatever happens, I'm with you, Champ."

Annie's faith does not go unappreciated, however. After making love with his wife, Ray thinks, "I wish I had some kind of fame to dedicate to her

. . . I see myself making my acceptance speech, thanking party faithful, then calling Annie forward to share the applause, the adoration." He implies that behind every man there is a good woman who can not earn her own applause, but who must bask in the glory and honour of her husband's fame. In Kinsella's perfect world, good women remain confined to the home where both their domestic and child-bearing labour can be concealed, devalued, and controlled. Such an arrangement prevents and discourages them from participating in the fraternity of baseball. If, when watching the game, Annie is "bored or too hot or too cold she can go back to the house" and resume her domestic duties. Fortunately for Ray, her "sense of baseball history is not highly developed"; she "is a spectator, not a fan. Like a reader who reads a whole book without caring who wrote it, she watches, enjoys, forgets, and doesn't read the box scores and standings in the morning paper." If Annie belonged to the fraternity, Ray's world would not be possible. In the home, she stays away from his fraternal business and allows men to labour in the world outside to produce a masculine definition of perfection. Because she dutifully encourages her husband to follow his dream, she is appropriately rewarded when thousands of fans visit the field and help alleviate the family's financial worries. The "separate spheres" ideology which characterized Victorian America, and was reclaimed as one of the chief components of Reagan's America, is alive and well in Kinsella's narrative.

When Ray and Salinger "go the distance" to investigate Doc Graham's idyllic life in Chisholm, they excavate the doctor's obituary, which states that the era of the paternalistic country doctor "was historic. There will never be another quite like it." But when Doc Graham finally gets a chance to bat in the major leagues, Ray's ball field brings the era of this 1950s small town back to life. This resurrection simultaneously fills the reader with hope for the future and nostalgia for the past. Salinger might write again. Shoeless Joe might play left field again. With hard work the family farmer, always the true meritocrat, can stand up to the "new breed of land baron" who proposes to operate farms by computer. Dreams can come true. And people will come.

In the emotionally touching scene where Ray walks across the outfield lawn with his brother and father, he tells us, "I'll guide the conversations, like taking a car around a long, gentle curve in the road, and we'll hardly realize we're talking of love, and family, and life, and beauty, and friendship, and sharing . . ." Reagan's popularity and the success of his advertising campaign suggest that many Americans wanted someone to lead them through this familiar sentimental landscape. His television commercial entitled "Spring '84" did just that. Accompanied by similar music and the same voice that we hear on the "America is Back" commercial, this advertisement opens with an old pick-up truck pulling away from a white farmhouse. The shot of the house is beautifully framed, highlighting the buttercup covered fields which surround it. "This is America, spring of '84," says the voice which then introduces various representations of Reagan's America to us: two young girls in Easter bonnets, an elderly couple watching young children play, a clown standing in front of a busy carousel, an interracial basketball game, an astronaut drifting in space. As we watch these images flash before us, we hear the following text:

> Just four years ago people were saying its [America's] problems were too big and too difficult to be handled by any one president. Yet what do we see now? Jobs are coming back. Housing is coming back. And for the first time in a long time, hope for the future is coming back.

As the commercial ends, the final frame shows the old pick-up truck carrying the farmer home at sundown after a hard day's work in his fields. Similarly, *Shoeless Joe*, Ronald Reagan, and baseball bring us home to America's Golden Age. They take us back to a mythic time when things were less complex, when leaders seemed to be in control, and a powerful patriarchy seemed a bit more certain about where America was headed and what dreams needed to be fulfilled. If you build the myth, people will indeed come. On reading Kinsella's novel, watching a Reagan political commercial, or attending a baseball game, many Americans have declared, "This must be heaven." These mundane pastimes make us feel good, whether we want them to or not. And good feelings sell books, win elections, and call millions each year to the field of dreams.

Source: Bryan K. Garman, "Myth Building and Cultural Politics in W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*," in *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Winter 1994, pp. 41-59.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Randall explores the 'fellow-feeling' of Kinsella's Shoeless Joe*.*

In his essay on Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, Thomas Carlyle writes of a humor that manifests itself in smile rather than laughter. "Richter is a man of mirth," says Carlyle, whose humor is "capricious . . . quaint . . . [and] heartfelt." The three adjectives represent for Carlyle the essence of what he terms "true humor" because they suggest Richter's enormous respect for humanity. "True humor," he goes on to say, "springs not more from the head than from the heart; it is not contempt, its essence is love; it issues not in laughter, but in still smiles, which lie far deeper." These smiles are not Hobbesian smirks of superiority but genuine signs of compassion for, sympathy toward, and empathy with the object of the humor. Carlyle further provides a direct link between humor and both pathos and nobility; the link is the smile of the caring man. For Carlyle, this smile is one of "fellow-feeling":

> It has sometimes been made a wonder that things so discordant should go together; that men of humour are often likewise men of sensibility. But the wonder should rather be to see them divided; to find true genial humour dwelling in a mind that was coarse or callous. The essence of humour is sensibility; warm, tender fellow-feeling with all forms of existence.

The humor of fellow-feeling denies humor that negates or denies life. Black humor, of course, with its laughter at the fallen, is anti-Carlylean, but in some senses so is Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival humor, not because it is life-denying (it expressly is not) but because its dependence on the "lower body stratum" and indecent language renders it, in Carlyle's terms, "coarse or callous." True humor, for Carlyle, is affirmative without being coarse, a celebration of life without the outrageousness of Bakhtinian festivity. The problem with such humor, of course, is that it is apt to become, well, mushy. Out of context, the phrase "warm, tender fellow-feeling with all forms of existence" gives an image of a flower-child communing with nature on a soft-focus day in 1967, hardly the stuff of an inspiring novel. But the humor of fellow-feeling in fiction, I think, despite its inherent nostalgic dangers, is more complex than this. It demands that we grow to love the characters, and it forces us to examine why we do so. If done well, and this is the hard part, Carlylean humor asks of us a willing suspension of distrust and cynicism.

One of the twentieth century's most renowned practitioners of Carlylean fellow-feeling is J. R. R. Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings* demands that we suspend cynicism, asks us to smile benignly on its hobbits, and insists that we love its characters. If we do so, we are rewarded with beauty and terror, joy and sorrow, and a true sense of the sublime. If we do not, the book is meaningless. Edmund Wilson, among others, found Tolkien's demands impossible, even as W. H. Auden accepted and praised them. But Tolkien knew precisely what he was asking. His famous essay "On Fairy Stories" presents his theories of fantasy, one of them being the insistence on the "consolation of the happy ending." Among the important elements of this consolation is the experience, in the reader, of the fantastic "turn":

> It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or
> more complete kind, that however wild its elements,
> however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can
> give to child or man that hears it, when the "turn"
> comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the
> heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as
> that given by any literary art.... In such stories
> when the "turn" comes we get a piercing glimpse
> of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes
> outside the frame, rends indeed the very web of story,
> and lets a gleam come through.

The "piercing glimpse of joy," Tolkien goes on to say, is "a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth." The Tolkienesque turn, to be sure, takes us beyond Carlyle's "warm, tender fellow-feeling," but the two ideas are clearly related. The goals for both men, one through humor and the other through fantasy, are truth, goodness, and, we can presume, beauty.

Toward the end of W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*, Moonlight Graham walks off the playing field of Ray Kinsella's magical ballpark to treat Ray's daughter, Karin. Ray describes the scene as follows:

> Then I feel compelled to look at the baseball field.
> In order to do that, I stand up and walk a few steps
> up the bleacher. What I see is Moonlight Graham loping
> in from right field, lithe, dark, athletic: the same
> handsome young man who played that one inning of
> baseball in 1905. But as he moves closer, his features
> begin to change, his step slows. He seems to become
> smaller. His baseball uniform fades away and is replaced
> by a black overcoat. His baseball cap is gone,
> supplanted by a thatch of white hair. As I watch, his
> glove miraculously turns into a black bag. The man
> who without a backward glance walks around the corner
> of the fence—a place where none of the other
> players will venture—is not Moonlight Graham, the
> baseball player of long ago, but the Doc Graham I
> spoke with on the moonlit night in Chisholm, Minnesota,
> when I flew softly across the dimensions of
> time....
> I wonder how much he has sacrificed to save Karin's
> life. It seems to me that he will never be able to walk

> back onto the ballfield as Moonlight Graham. He has
> violated some cosmic rule that I vaguely know exists,
> and do not even attempt to understand.

To understand how such an incident triggers a humor of fellow-feeling, and I argue that it does, it will help to examine the stylistics, the "turns," and the necessity for belief in Tolkienesque fantasy. *Shoeless Joe* merges Carlyle's humor with Tolkien's fantastic, and the resulting demands on the reader are many.

In fantasy, Tolkien writes in "On Fairy Stories," "new form is made . . . Man becomes a sub-creator." Furthermore, for the subcreation, the Secondary World, to be successful, requires the reader's belief. Tolkien distinguishes between the need for "belief" and the more commonly used Coleridgean "willing suspension of disbelief," suggesting that the latter is necessary only if the former fails:

> "willing suspension of disbelief" . . . does not seem
> to me a good description of what happens. What really
> happens is that the story-maker proves a successful
> "sub-creator." He makes a Secondary World
> which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates
> is "true": it accords with the laws of that world. You
> therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside.
> The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the
> magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in
> the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive
> Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged,
> by kindliness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief
> must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening
> and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension
> of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine
> thing, a subterfuge we use when condescending to
> games of make-believe, or when trying (more or less
> willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of
> art that has for us failed.

We do not suspend disbelief, then, until belief itself has been lost, and then we never recapture the initial belief. For enchantment to work, for the Secondary World to be accepted, we must believe in it in a primary way.

The demands placed on the reader of *Shoeless Joe*, then, are great. The book asks of us the highest degree of belief: we must accept a magical ballpark within the Primary World of modern Iowa. Tolkien himself, in his creative works, never makes such enormous demands; he never brings the Primary World into his texts. Even fantasies that do contain both Primary and Secondary Worlds—Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*, Guy Gavriel Kay's The *Fionavar Tapestry*, Stephen Donaldson's *The Chronicles* *of Thomas Covenant*—rarely have both worlds operating at the same time. *Shoeless Joe*'s Secondary World *seems* to be confined to the magical ballpark (a technique similar to the closed-off world of Peter S. Beagle's *A Fine and Private Place*), but in fact it is not. J. D. Salinger, another of Ray's creations, hears the Voice while watching a baseball game in Fenway Park, and Moonlight Graham appears during Ray's visit to Chisholm. The Secondary World, in fact, seems to follow Ray around, another feature that tests our belief.

Shoeless Joe's success at drawing our belief (and most of the reviews suggest that it has been successful) is the result, I think, of the book's use of Carlylean fellow-feeling. Ray must appear to us as a character with whom we can sympathize, with whom we can share the bizarre journey he makes across the continent to kidnap Salinger and the unreal circumstances under which Shoeless Joe Jackson comes to life. If we are to be drawn into the world without the willing suspension of disbelief, we must never lose sympathy with Ray's quest. To retain that sympathy, Ray must prove himself worthy; he must invoke our fellow-feeling. He must, in short, enchant us.

Linguistically, says Tolkien, the adjective has, in its ability to transform nouns, the power of enchantment:

> The human mind, endowed with powers of generalization and abstraction, sees not only *green-grass*, discriminating it from other things . . . but sees that it is *green* as well as being *grass.* But how powerful, how stimulating to the very faculty that produced it, was the invention of the adjective: no spell or incantation in Faerie is more potent.... When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter's power.

One short passage from the first part of *Shoeless Joe* will suffice to demonstrate the Tolkienesque stylistics in Kinsella's descriptions. This kind of passage can be found almost by opening the book at random:

> I carried out a hose, and, making the spray so fine it was scarcely more than fog, I sprayed the soft, shaggy spring grass all that chilled night. My hands ached and my face became wet and cold, but, as I watched, the spray froze on the grass, enclosing each blade in a gossamer-crystal coating of ice. A covering that served like a coat of armor to dispel the real frost that was set like a weasel upon killing in the night. I seemed to stand taller than ever before as the sun rose, turning the ice to eye-dazzling droplets, each a prism, making the field an orgy of rainbows.

The adjectives "soft," "shaggy," and "spring," which precede "grass," alter the meaning of "grass," making us see not only that it is grass, but also that it is spring, shaggy, and soft. "Spring" imbues the grass with youth and hope, "shaggy" with both the domesticity of a living-room carpet and the playful innocence of the family sheep-dog, and "soft" with a pleasurable tactility and a dreamlike quality. The spray does not simply cover the grass with ice; it works magic by "enclosing each blade in a gossamer-crystal coating of ice." All elements of this non-finite clause are important to the creation of magical effect: "enclosing" suggests a loving, godlike attention to "each blade," and the metaphoric noun-modifier "gossamer-crystal" emphasizes both the fineness of the strand and the glasslike beauty of the coating. These modifiers, in

turn, render the harsh monosyllable "ice" beautiful rather than deadly, a notion confirmed by the subsequent simile of the armor. Finally, the ice is magically transformed through metaphor not once but twice, into " eye-dazzling droplets" (itself an adjectivally oriented phrase) and then into a prism. As a prism, the ice further transforms, making the field "an orgy of rainbows," and rainbows themselves are signs of magical legend. The act of watering the grass is now an act of enchantment.

Baseball itself, Ray tells us, enchants. It is both timeless, with largely unchanging rules and a wholly unhurried atmosphere, and perfect, "solid, true, pure and precious as diamonds." Furthermore, like all enchantments, it can transform:

> Within the baselines anything can happen. Tides can reverse; oceans can open. That's why they say, "The game is never over until the last man is out." Colors can change, lives can alter, anything is possible in this gentle, flawless, loving game.

With its transformative abilities and its qualities of gentleness, flawlessness, and lovingness, baseball brings together Tolkienesque fantasy and Carlylean humor. Baseball becomes, of course, a metaphor for what Ray espouses as important writing, the gentle, flawless, loving kind practiced by Salinger in *The Catcher in the Rye*, a metaphor realized only at the novel's end when Salinger accompanies the ghostly players through the fence, promising Ray that he will fulfill his duty as writer. With that promise, baseball and writing become one.

"The consolation of fairy-stories," writes Tolkien, is "the joy of the happy ending":

> this joy . . . is not essentially "escapist" or "fugitive." In its fairy-tale—or other-world— setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace; never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure; the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final

> defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting
> glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world,
> poignant as grief.

Perhaps the most notable quality of *Shoeless Joe* is its continual attempt at joyfulness. Ray Kinsella, the narrator and main character, is above all a happy man, one who understands the possibility of joy as it comes through the magic of creation and the fulfillment of dreams. To Salinger he says, "I'm one of the few happy men in the United States," and the novel certainly bears this out. But for Tolkien joy does not imply only happiness; in fact, he states that the "joy of deliverance" is possible only through "dyscatastrophe," through sorrow and failure. What separates the joy of true fantasy from the sentimentality of simple nostalgia is precisely this dyscatastrophe. What dyscatastrophe means is that true joy is achieved only with the recognition of immense loss.

The moments of joy mixed with loss Tolkien calls "turns." For Tolkien, the turn gives us —along with "a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart," and "a piercing glimpse of joy"—not only "a 'consolation' for the sorrow of this world but a satisfaction, and an answer to that question, 'Is it true?'." There are at least four major turns in *Shoeless Joe*: Kid Scisson's failure on the diamond; Ray's questioning of the phantom ballplayers; Salinger's departure at the novel's end; and Moonlight Graham's sacrifice. Each provides a moment that is true in Ray's world as he has defined it, and each brings the emotional reactions and the glimpse of joy that Tolkien demands.

Eddie Scissons, the fraudulent "oldest living Chicago Cub," receives, through the magic of Ray's ballpark, a chance to fulfill his desire to pitch for the Cubs. Ray's magic has already granted Moonlight Graham his dearest wish—to play in the majors—and we expect that Scissons will be similarly successful. But, unlike Graham, Scissons simply is not good enough for the majors; his chance on the mound fails, and he is humiliated. "[W]hen most people reach out for their heart's desire," Ray tells us, "it appears not as a horse but as a tiger, and they are rewarded with snarls, frustration, and disillusionment." Scissons' failure is a turn precisely because it *is* a failure, and we have not seen Ray's magic fail before. That failure confirms the "truth" of Ray's Secondary World because in its allowance for failure it ceases to be a Never-Never Land and becomes a valid Secondary World.

The novel's second turn similarly destroys the seemingly pure felicity of Ray's magic. When Ray asks of the ballplayers, "What do you become when you walk through that door in center field?," he is asking the question that has, throughout the novel, concerned us as well. But in asking it he is attempting what seems an impossible task: to bridge the gap that must exist between the subcreator and his creation. Of all the characters in the book, Ray alone is unable to discover precisely what his magic does. This gap seems confirmed by the placement of the question: immediately after the players have asked Ray if they can help work the farm to make it profitable, a similar attempt to cross the gap between Primary and Secondary Worlds. Like Ray, we have feared throughout that attempting such a crossing will destroy the magic completely, and now our fears are confirmed:

> "But can you do that," I say. "I've never seen any of
> you anywhere except on the field. What do you become
> when you walk through that door in center
> field?"
> The silence that follows is long and ominous. I feel
> like I have just stomped across an innocent children's
> game, or broken a doll.
> "We sleep," says Chick Gandil finally.
> "And wait," says Happy Felsch.
> "And dream," says Joe Jackson. "Oh, how we
> dream. . . . " He stops, the look of awe and rapture
> on his face enough of an explanation.
> The magic has been broken.

As in the Eddie Scissons case, the magic cannot process an impossible wish, one at odds with the truth of Ray's Secondary World. The turn here is first that the question has been asked and second that the answer has broken the magic. We fear it has been irretrievably lost.

J. D. Salinger, at the end of the novel, provides another turn by leaving with the players through the gate in center field. He thus becomes the only character to leave the Primary World and enter the Secondary. We are initially startled at this crossing, especially after the destruction of magic at Ray's attempt to bridge the worlds, but Salinger's "rapture," as the title of the last section calls it, becomes possible when we realize that he is as much Ray's creation as are the players and is thus not subject to the same law as Ray. Salinger's explanation of why the players chose him, and not Ray, further clarifies the incident and establishes the turn:

> "I thought of turning them down," says Salinger. "I
> really did. Telling them it was you who created
> them—you who deserves to be first. But then I
> thought, they must know; there must be a reason for
> them to choose me, just as there was a reason for
> them to choose you, and Iowa, and this farm....
> "If you can package up your jealousy for a few minutes,
> you'll see that I'm right. I'm unattached. My
> family is grown up. And," he says, smiling sardonically
> at me, "if I have the courage to do this, then
> you'll have to stop badgering me about the other business
> [publishing new fiction]. I mean, publishing is
> such a pale horse compared to this. But what a story
> it will make"—and his voice rises— "a man being

> able to touch the perfect dream. I'll write of it.
> I promise."

Salinger can enter the Secondary World because he has understood his moral duty as a writer. This is, of course, the end of Ray's quest—to find Salinger and "ease his pain." We catch our breath at the mere possibility of Salinger's entering the Secondary World, and we feel the joy of the quest's fulfillment. But it is a joy mixed with loss: like Ray, we have come to know Salinger, and with his passing something of happiness also passes.

The final turn I shall discuss is Moonlight Graham's sacrifice (quoted above). As a Tolkienesque turn it is perhaps the most climactic scene in the book: Graham is the only character to make the transition from the Secondary to the Primary World, and the nobility of his action is wondrous. Of all the scenes in the novel, this is, I think, the most likely to elicit the tears that accompany a turn, first for Graham's nobility and second for his subsequent show of humility. "Well, now," he says immediately after making the transformation from Moonlight Graham to Doc Graham, "it's lucky I happened on the scene, Ray Kinsella. That little girl wouldn't have lasted much longer." Graham here is no longer the Moonlight Graham we have come to know but is rather the Doc Graham we met on Ray's journey through time in Chisholm, Minnesota, and this consistency furthers the internal truth of Ray's Secondary World. Once again the turn mixes a "piercing glimpse of joy" (at Graham's nobility) with a profound sense of loss (at what Graham has given up).

Graham's sacrifice reflects as well the novel's theme of moral duty. Moonlight Graham must face his duty as a doctor to save a life, thereby sacrificing his dream of baseball. J. D. Salinger must realize his duty as a writer, thereby sacrificing his solitude. And Ray Kinsella must affirm his duties as husband/father and as enchanter, thereby sacrificing his desire to enter his own Secondary World and keep it for himself. In essence, each of these duties demands the sharing of one's gifts: Graham his medical skill, Salinger his writing, Ray his magic, and all their ability to impart joy.

On seeing the magical baseball game for the first time, Salinger insists that Ray share it:

> "This is too wonderful to keep to ourselves. You have
> to share."
> "With whom?" [Ray asks.] "How many? How do we
> select? And first, how do we make people believe?"
> ...
> "You're difficult to convince."
> "The pot calling the kettle names. But don't you see,
> we have little to do with this. We aren't the ones who
> decide who can see and who can't. Wouldn't I let my
> own twin brother see my miracle if I could? But more
> important than that, the way you feel now is the way

people feel who react to your work. If I share, then
so must you."

Moral fiction is one of *Shoeless Joe's* primary concerns, going so far as to speak internally of it. Ray frequently attempts to convince Salinger to publish, but Salinger refuses on the grounds that readers will not allow it. "It's a sad time when the world won't listen to stories about good men," he says. "It's one of the reasons I don't publish any-more."

Source: Neil Randall, "*Shoeless Joe*: Fantasy and the Humor of Fellow-Feeling," in *Modern Fiction Studies Special Issue: Modern Sports Fiction*, Vol. 33, No. 1, Spring 1987, pp. 173-80.

Adaptations

Shoeless Joe was made into the movie *Field of Dreams*, directed by Phil Alden Robinson and starring Kevin Costner, in 1989.

Topics for Further Study

Why is Karin usually the first person to see the baseball games on Ray's field?

Is *Shoeless Joe* just a harmless fantasy, or does it have relevance for day-to-day life? What guidance for how life should be lived does Ray provide?

Research the Black Sox Scandal of 1919. What is the evidence for and against the guilt of Shoeless Joe? Were the owners really to blame because they underpaid their players?

Should Shoeless Joe be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, even if he was guilty? What might be the arguments for and against this proposition?

Kinsella has commented that today's major league baseball players and owners are greedy and have no regard for the baseball fan. He thinks that admission prices are too high and many fans may prefer to watch minor league games in which players still play for the love of the game. Do you agree with Kinsella's opinion? What arguments could be made for or against his views?

Watch the movie *Field of Dreams*, and write an essay explaining how the movie differs from the novel. Do you think the film is an effective adaptation? What does the movie lose or gain by substituting the fictional black writer Terrence Mann for J. D. Salinger?

Compare and Contrast

1920s: After the Black Sox Scandal of 1919, baseball is at a low point in its history. Baseball owners are worried that spectators will stay away, thinking the game is corrupt. To punish the players and reassure the public, eight players, including Shoeless Joe Jackson, are banned from baseball for life in 1920.

1980s: Baseball player Pete Rose, the all-time leader in hits, is banned for life in 1989 by baseball commissioner Bart Giamatti for betting on baseball. Also, Giamatti refuses to consider a request to reopen the Jackson case.

Today: Controversy still exists over whether Shoeless Joe Jackson should be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. In 1999, Republican representative Jim DeMint of South Carolina introduces a resolution calling for Jackson to be "appropriately honored" for his achievements.

1920s: Baseball players earn low salaries. The average annual salary in the major leagues is about $5,000 to $6,000. There is no players' union, and players do not have agents, so they are in a weak bargaining position.

1980s: Salaries for major league baseball players rise steadily. In 1981, the average salary is $185,651. By 1989, this has risen to $512,084. In November 1989, Kirby Puckett becomes the first $3-million-a-year player. Within a month, three other players, Rickey Henderson, Mark Langston, and Mark Davis, all top the $3-million mark.

Today: In 2001, nineteen major league baseball players have contracts with average annual values of $12.5 million or more. Many baseball fans believe salaries are too high and are not in the best interests of the game. A Gallup poll in April 2001 reports that 79 percent of fans think that major league baseball owners should be allowed to put a cap on the total amount of money available for players' salaries.

1920s: Although African Americans are not allowed to play major league baseball, there are many black professional teams. The Negro National League is founded in 1920.

1940s: Baseball takes the first steps to racial integration. In 1945, the Dodgers sign Jackie Robinson, who in 1947 becomes the first African American to play in the major leagues.

1980s: Los Angeles Dodger vice president Al Campanis is fired after saying on ABC's *Night-line* that African Americans do not have the abilities to succeed in baseball management. The statement brings attention to the lack of African Americans in leadership positions in baseball and other professional sports. A drive to increase minority hiring begins, and, within two years, an African American, Bill White, is appointed National League president.

Today: Although heavily represented in sports such as professional baseball, football, and basketball, African Americans remain underrepre-sented in leadership positions.

What Do I Read Next?

Like *Shoeless Joe*, Kinsella's second novel, *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* (1986) has mystical overtones of magic and religion as revealed in the rituals of baseball. A man who tries to prove there was a minor league in Iowa in the early 1900s is whisked back in time to witness and participate in it.

Say It Ain't So, Joe!: The True Story of Shoeless Joe Jackson (2nd ed., 1999), by Donald Gropman, is a readable, well-researched biography of Shoeless Joe Jackson. The author argues that Jackson had no involvement in the Black Sox scandal of 1919.

The Boys of Summer (1972), by Roger Kahn, is a classic piece of baseball writing. Kahn grew up as a fan of the Brooklyn Dodgers, and, as a young journalist, he traveled with the team in 1952 and 1953. His memoir includes poignant accounts of the lives of the players after their playing days were over.

Eight Men Out: The Black Sox and the 1919 World Series (1962), by Eliot Asinof, is the most comprehensive investigation of the famous scandal. It makes for a vivid and exciting read.

The Legend of Bagger Vance, by Steven Press-field, does for golf what *Shoeless Joe* did for baseball. It's a novel about golf that also presents golf as a metaphor for life, for which it draws on the religious philosophy of the classic Indian text, the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Some critics regard *The Natural*, by Bernard Malamud (1952), as the greatest baseball novel ever written. The main character, Roy Hobbs, is a composite of Joe Jackson, Babe Ruth, and Eddie Waitkus; his bat, Wonderboy, is a refashioning of Jackson's famous bat, called Black Betsy.

Further Study

Joffe, Linda S., "Praise Baseball. Amen: Religious Metaphors in *Shoeless Joe* and *Field of Dreams*," in *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Spring 1992, pp. 153-63.

Joffe discusses some of the allusions to Christianity in the novel and also the differences between the novel and the movie.

Kirtz, Mary K., "Canadian Book, American Film: Shoeless Joe Transfigured on a Field of Dreams," in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1995, pp. 26-31.

Kirtz argues that the film *Field of Dreams* eliminates the feminine "moral presence" in the novel and presents the story as a "man's story" with a patriarchal political message.

Lord, Timothy C., "Hegel, Marx, and *Shoeless Joe*: Religious Ideology in Kinsella's Baseball Fantasy," in *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Fall 1992, pp. 43-51.

Lord shows how baseball serves as a metaphor for religion. He also demonstrates that the way in which Ray handles the threat to his farm shows his philosophical assumptions about spiritual and material reality.

Pellow, C. Kenneth, "Shoeless Joe in Film and Fiction," in *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Fall 1991, pp. 17-23.

Pellow argues that the film *Field of Dreams* is not a satisfactory version of the novel. It strips the novel of its poetry and distorts its political and social themes.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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