

# **Sleeping Freshmen Never Lie Study Guide**

**Sleeping Freshmen Never Lie by David Lubar**

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## Plot Summary

Scott Hudson begins his year as a freshman at J.P. Zenger High School with some trepidation. He soon realizes that some people have changed, including a class mate named Julia Baskins who has become beautiful over the summer. Scott is soon connected every morning to another classmate, Loudon, who is better known as Mouth. Scott finds that he's not in classes with any of his three best friends, Mitch, Kyle, and Patrick, because he's carrying all honors classes and college prep classes. He likes English from the beginning and Mr. Franka becomes a mentor to him.

Scott works hard to get near Julia. He becomes a writer for the school paper because he thinks she's on staff only to discover that she had written a single guest column for the paper. He runs for student government and wins a seat only to discover that Julia had not won her own run for freshman class president. When he resigns his seat on the council, others quickly follow and Julia winds up holding the office after all. He tries out for the senior play and is selected as a member of the crew only to discover that Julia isn't picked for the cast or crew.

Meanwhile a new student arrives at Zenger High. Her name is Lee and she has dozens of piercings with wildly colored hair and strange clothing. She and Scott connect over literature and Scott quickly realizes they have some similar likes though he can't get past the need to catch Julia's attention. Scott suddenly has another new "friend" in Wesley, a tough senior who comes to like Scott though they have little in common.

Scott tries to find the place where he'll fit in but his best friends are slipping away. Mitch quickly gets a girlfriend who takes all his time and Patrick moves away, first to Texas then to Japan. Kyle joins the wrestling team and soon puts Scott down for his crush on Julia. Time passes and Julia's boyfriend, Vernon, beats Scott up. Scott realizes that what a person says and does can have a profound impact on the life of another when Mouth attempts suicide. He also learns that people are not always what they seem.

In the midst of the whirlwind of his freshman year, Scott's older brother Bobby is struggling to find his own place in the world and Scott discovers that Bobby can barely read. Scott is also watching his parents deal with the impending birth of their third son and Scott sets out to write down words of wisdom for the baby.



# Chapters 1 through 3

## Chapters 1 through 3 Summary

As the story opens, Scott Hudson is playing basketball with his three best friends, Kyle, Patrick, and Mitch. The boys are talking about the coming day - their first day as freshmen at J.P. Zenger High School. Scott asks about classes and whether the subjects will be difficult, which prompts Mitch's comment that Scott has only to show up in order to pass. Scott returns home and finds his parents deep in conversation on the living room couch. They seem worried and when his mother mentions his first day of high school, Scott believes they must be worried about him. His brother Bobby had problems in high school and Scott reassures them that he won't go in the direction that Bobby went.

Scott heads out after a big breakfast the following morning - a first-day-of-school tradition. When he arrives at the bus stop he encounters Loudon Kandeski. Loudon never stops talking which, combined with his name, prompted the nickname "Mouth." Scott also encounters Julia Baskins. Julia has changed dramatically over the summer and Scott sees her as beautiful. She's changed her hairstyle and has developed a nice figure.

In chapter two, some of the older students arrive at the bus stop, putting the freshmen at a disadvantage. Scott isn't a big guy anyway but wasn't accustomed to being "at the bottom of the food chain." They strike at Mouth first, knocking all his stuff to the ground. Scott notes that they aren't even mad but seem to strike out by habit. There's a twenty-minute bus ride to J.P. Zenger High. Scott is soon lost in the huge school and when he asks directions of an older student, winds up in the furnace room.

Scott eventually finds his way to his honors English class and finds Julia there. The teacher is Mr. Franka and Scott is soon engaged in the conversation and very interested in the subject. Some of the other classes are also interesting but by lunch time Scott says he's figuring up his reading assignments "by the pound instead of the page," but he's confident he can keep up.

In chapter three, Scott meets up with Mitch, Kyle, and Patrick for lunch. Some of the older students pick on Scott as he's leaving the lunch room, but Kyle stands up for him. Scott expects a fight but it doesn't happen. Kyle had a broken nose as a child when he fell off a rocking horse, and the effect of the crooked nose is that people think he's tough and likes to fight. Kyle uses that reputation though it's not true.

After lunch, Scott goes to his Spanish class, taught by Ms. De Gaulle. Scott can't understand anything but realizes his classmates are similarly confused. Scott is feeling a bit overwhelmed at the amount of work he has waiting for him that evening. He barely makes it to his bus and finds Mouth going on about how wonderful his day had been. Scott notes that Mouth's backpack has a footprint on it and he's rumpled and missing a



shoelace, but seems ecstatic about his first day of high school. On the way home, Scott tunes out Mouth's commentary and writes about his assignments, adding funny comments along the way. In chemistry, he's to read a section of pages, answer some questions, then "count the atoms in your house." In history, he's to read a specific section and "try to stay awake. In art he's to read about Van Gogh and sketch something he finds in his room. He notes there's a piece of pizza that fell behind his dresser the previous month.

## Chapters 1 through 3 Analysis

Mouth is obviously the epitome of a "dork." He's pushy and loud. His actions are those of someone who doesn't understand how to make friends though he wants desperately to do so. An example of this is seen when Mouth and Scott encounter Julia Baskins for the first time at the bus stop. Julia is no longer wearing glasses and Mouth hones in on that fact. Instead of complimenting Julia on her appearance, he immediately makes the connection between his glasses and her contacts. He says he'd asked for contacts but his mother refused, saying he isn't responsible enough to handle them. He then elaborates, saying she's basing this on the fact that he'd lost his retainer three times, but then goes on to say one of those wasn't his fault because the dog ate it. Mouth shares other information, such as the fact that he'd let his braces get "gunked up."

Scott's classes include the initials "H" and "C.P." He doesn't know what those initials stand for but the reader can soon figure out that he's attending "honors" and "college prep" classes. None of his immediate friends - Mitch, Patrick, or Kyle - are attending those classes. The academic differences are soon evident and will become one of the reasons the four boys begin growing apart. This is seen in the scene in which the four were in the lunch room. Scott makes a reference to the school is like a "tesseract," a word from the novel, "A Wrinkle in Time." None of the others understand the reference. Scott doesn't understand why none of them care to learn things like this.



# Chapters 4 through 6

## Chapters 4 through 6 Summary

In chapter four, Scott arrives home. His mother is looking at wallpaper samples and Scott asks his mother if she's thinking about redecorating. He notes the page that's open is rocking horses. Scott works on homework until suppertime. Scott's dad is already home from his job at Linwood Mercedes, a car dealership.

While they are eating supper, Scott's dad looks at Scott's mom with a question Scott doesn't understand. Scott almost lets the conversation drop but then remembers several suspicious moments he'd had over the previous day that his mother was keeping something from him. He gets up from the table, goes to the counter and looks at a couple of magazines his other had covered with a newspaper when he entered the room. He discovers magazines about babies and immediately fears that his brother, Bobby, has fathered a child. His parents then reveal that it's Scott's mom who's expecting a baby. Scott's mom says that they are considering the names Sean and Emily.

Later Scott tries to call Bobby but gets no answer. He wants to see if Bobby has advice for him about how to survive being a freshman. Scott says it would have been good if someone was able to give him advice. Toward that end, he picks up a notebook and begins writing advice to his sibling. Scott calls the baby a "microscopic intruder," and offers up survival tips including the need to stay away from seniors, avoiding "dorky hats," and staying off the bus if at all possible. He also points out it's a good idea to stay friends with girls you meet in kindergarten because you never know if they'll turn out to be completely gorgeous.

In chapter five, Scott is very tired the following morning, having stayed up very late working on his homework. He arrives in English class to discover the projector screen is down and some are hoping they'll watch a movie. Julia says they should watch "Princess Bride," which is one of Scott's favorite movies as well. Then Mr. Franks introduces the class to a literary device he calls "Tom Swifties." Scott is immediately interested and is called on to explain of the phrases.

Scott heads to gym next where he finds Kyle is in the same class. The boys run for a great deal of the class. At lunch, Scott discovers that Mitch has a note from his doctor exempting him from gym and wishes he'd come up with a way of avoiding gym. The other three realize something is off with Scott and he reveals that his mom is having a baby. Kyle offers the only piece of advice, saying that Scott's mother should stay out of bookstores so that the new baby isn't a bookworm like Scott. Mitch quickly makes friends with a girl he believes to be pretty, leaving the other three to eat lunch by themselves. Patrick and Scott make up Tom Swifties during lunch. Scott finishes the day without falling asleep. Scott writes in his journal that evening, telling the baby that it



would make more sense to buy a wading pool than a crib because it would be easier to hose off a pool.

In chapter six, Scott has a list of Tom Swifities. In English class, he hands them to the girl who sits next to him, Kelly. He believes Kelly will laugh, Julia - who sits next to Kelly - will ask what's funny and Kelly will pass them over. Scott hopes to use that to make a connection with Julia. But it's a girl named Vicky who asks to see the list and Scott loses track of the paper.

On Friday, Scott goes to the movies with Patrick and Kyle. Mitch is spending a great deal of time with a girl from school. On Saturday, the phone wakes Scott and he hears Bobby's voice, begging someone to pick up. Scott goes to the phone and discovers Bobby's been arrested. His mother comes to the phone Scott discovers Bobby was arrested for outstanding parking tickets, though he no longer has a car because he wrecked it.

Bobby arrives home with Scott's parents and moves back into his old room. Bobby says everything will change after the baby is born. Scott says he disagrees but doesn't seem to believe it.

## Chapters 4 through 6 Analysis

Scott begins the advice to his unborn sibling on a whim but it will become a focal point of the book and an important part of Scott's life over the coming years. He makes it clear that the advice is not a diary because guys don't keep diaries. He is very uncomplimentary to the baby, calling him all sorts of names including a "quivering sack of viscous fluids." Scott says he is offering up the hints as a way to make up for some of the mean things he'll probably do to the baby once he's born.

The Tom Swifites are dialogue tags that make veiled references back to the comment. Examples provided by Mr. Franka include, "I don't know the words to this son," Tom said humbly. The phrase is a Tom Swifty because the person who doesn't know the words to the song would likely "hum" along and the word "hum" appears in the dialogue tag, "humbly." Another example is "I don't like hot dogs," Tom said frankly. Frank is another word for hot dog.

Bobby's self-centered attitude is evident from his first appearance in the book. Bobby seems confident in himself and tells Scott he never had to work at having girls notice him. But it will later be revealed that he's actually not as confident as he seems. Bobby says he was only four when Scott was born but can remember that everything changed. Bobby says his parents will have time for nothing except the baby once it arrives. This indicates his self-centered attitude and his need to be the center of attention. This will be even more evident in just a few days when Scott's mom has a medical scare. Bobby is still living in the house when their mom is rushed to the hospital. Rather than remaining at least long enough to be sure his mom is alright, Bobby immediately moves out.



# Chapters 7 through 9

## Chapters 7 through 9 Summary

In chapter seven, Scott's interest in Julia continues to grow. Mr. Franka asks Scott to remain after English class the following Monday. Mr. Franka has seen the list of Tom Swifties that got passed around and he suggests Scott might want to write book reviews for the school newspaper. Scott says he's just too busy to take on another task. Scott finishes the week and realizes he's going to have to study very hard. He spends some time with Patrick and Kyle that weekend and Scott finishes reading "To Kill a Mockingbird" for English.

Bobby invites Scott to go out with him for awhile and they go to Hobby Land to race slot cars until Bobby is kicked out for running the cars so fast that he flies off the track. Scott writes in his journal later and says he believes his dad would like the book, "To Kill a Mockingbird." Scott explains that his father is "quiet, but he's not a wimp." Scott has by now come up with a nickname for the baby. Using the names Sean and Emily, he's calling the baby Smelly.

In chapter eight, Scott overhears Kelly ask Julia if she's finished her article for the school newspaper. Julia says she has Scott goes to Mr. Franka after class, saying he'd like to write the book reviews for the "Zenger Gazette" after all. Mr. Franka says they've already asked someone else but tells Scott there's always a need for writers and invites him to show up at the next meeting anyway. Scott does show up and discovers a beautiful upperclassman named Mandy in charge. She sees that he's wearing a t-shirt with the logo of the Baltimore Ravens and immediately assigns him to cover football games. Scott wants to object but is overwhelmed by Mandy's beauty and agrees. Scott then discovers that Mouth is writing the book reviews and that Julia isn't even on the school paper, but had just produced a guest column for one edition. She is present at the meeting but Mandy dismisses her, thanking her for the column and saying there's no need for her to stay.

Scott writes in his journal again and says he's going to assume his sibling will be a boy. He says his best advice toward girls will go unheeded because guys just need girlfriends. He says if the baby is a girl, he'll just say that she should take pity on the guys. Scott wraps up the entry by saying that his mom has purchased curtains for the nursery, and that she "thinks" the images are butterflies. Scott says he happens to know the images are really a "rare form of vampire moth." He ends with the advice, "Don't let the dead bugs bite."

In chapter nine, Scott arrives home and tells Bobby he's on the school news paper. Bobby asks why Scott wanted to take on that task and he says the editor, Mandy, is "hot." Bobby remembers Mandy and suggests Scott can "take up where I left off." Just then they hear the rumble of an engine and Bobby identifies the car as a Corvette. He's right and their father is driving.





Scott, Kyle, and Patrick arrive at the football game and discover the Zenger High Team is terrible. They are beaten badly and Scott can't figure out how he's supposed to write about the game. Scott comes up with a list of ways the team might have managed to score, including buying the points off eBay and using a catapult to launch the football. He then comes up with a few Tom Swifties about the game and manages to use them for the entire article. He believes that it's a good article and that it included the major points of the game.

## Chapters 7 through 9 Analysis

Scott really enjoys reading. When he finishes reading "To Kill a Mockingbird," he wants to share the joy he has discovered from the book. He offers the book to Bobby. Scott says Bobby hasn't yet found a job and has time to read. Scott tries to get Bobby interested in the book by telling him about the plot, but Bobby interrupts and doesn't want to hear. Scott is disappointed but shouldn't have been surprised. Reading doesn't interest Bobby. Scott also asks his mom if she wants to read the book but she says she's already seen the movie. His mom asks if Scott would like to read some of the book to her while she makes applesauce and he does.

Scott has tried on several occasions to get Julia's attention but so far hasn't managed to do so. Scott has seen several reasons to really like Julia, other than the fact that she's so pretty. When they thought they were going to be watching a movie in English, Julia says she hopes it's "The Princess Bride," a movie Scott loves. When Mr. Franka asks whether it would be more difficult to write a novel or a short story, most of the students say novel because it's longer but Julia - echoing Scott's thoughts - says a short story because the writer has to remain so focused on the topic. Scott says that he wishes she would do or say something to make her less perfect in his eyes but it's some time before that happens. When it does, he doesn't immediately recognize it for what it is - a character flaw on her part.

Bobby and his dad immediately connect when they begin to work on the Corvette but Scott is completely lost. He recognizes the car as "cool" as a whole but doesn't understand anything about the inner workings. Scott asks his mom if he might be adopted and she realizes he feels that disconnection that binds Bobby and his dad. Scott's mom assures him that the ability to work on a car - or the inability to understand it - don't make him any more or less a Hudson.



# Chapters 10 through 12

## Chapters 10 through 12 Summary

In chapter ten, Scott is awakened Saturday morning by his mother's racket in the nursery. He has a makeshift bookshelf in the room made of cinder blocks and she makes him take them down. Scott then spends some time on homework before heading to see Kyle and Patrick. Mitch, as usual, is with the girlfriend. They shoot hoops for awhile before Scott quits, moving to a bench to read while Kyle and Patrick continue to play. When Scott arrives home he discovers his mom has baked a cake, apparently to celebrate the fact that Bobby has a job at a nearby market, close enough that he can walk to work.

On Monday at school, Scott discovers his Spanish teacher is from France, which explains why he can seldom understand anything she says. In the journal that night, Scott writes a review of teachers as a guide for his baby brother. The list includes the "newbie" who is fresh out of college and might be very pretty, the "ogre" who hates kids in general, the "legend" who makes class fun without being stupid, the "lifer" who teaches because he couldn't come up with a better career choice, the "lame duck" who is nearing retirement and could care less, and the "natural" who is a great teacher without trying.

In chapter eleven, Scott receives a copy of the Zenger Gazette with his story in it. In the lunch room he overhears the quarterback, Vernon Dross, who was furious about the article. Vernon says the article should have focused on the actions of the quarterback and wants to know if anyone knows the student who wrote the article. That night Scott doesn't show the article to his parents and Bobby is leaving for work as Scott returns home. Scott's mom plans to make lasagna for dinner but gets a craving for tacos instead. Scott and his dad make a food run together. Scott's dad says Scott will be amazed to see his mom with the baby, that she's a natural at mothering. Scott then asks how his father had been with babies and he replies that he'd managed not to drop either Scott or Bobby. Scott thanks him for that.

Scott writes in his journal that night. He says Mr. Franka has introduced the idea of streaming consciousness in writing but didn't spend a lot of time on it.

Scott attends the next game and notes that Vernon is one of the biggest handicaps the team has. He is, however, determined to pay close attention to Vernon's plays so he can mention him a lot in the next article. He is surprised to see Julia walk over to the players' bench and talk with Vernon after the game. He's also surprised to find that he doesn't have a great deal of trouble writing the article. He writes the article like a diary entry, saying the Zenger Panthers fought "a difficult battle" and citing Vernon's actions in nine different places. He signs decides to make up a girl's name as the writer since he's written it as a diary piece. He chooses "Ema Nekaf," which is "fake name" written backwards.



Later in the day, Scott's mom has a medical scare with the baby. Scott's dad rushes her to the hospital, promising to call home as soon as he knows what's going on. While they are gone, Bobby announces that he can't stand the tension and is leaving. He borrows money from Scott and departs without even waiting to see if his mom is alright. Scott's dad calls later and says they've seen the doctor, everything is fine and they're coming home. Scott doesn't reveal Bobby's decision to leave until his parents are home. His mom is upset about it. In Scott's next journal entry, he admonishes the baby, saying "whatever it was you did that sent mom to the doctor, just cut it out." He says the baby will have the opportunity to cause plenty of trouble later. Scott writes that he can't believe Bobby just left, but that he agrees with Bobby's assessment that there's too much tension in the house.

In chapter twelve, there's a new girl at school and Scott's first impression is that she's dressed for trick-or-treat though it's only the first part of October. She has several piercings including a safety pin in her lip. The girl, who is identified as Lee, is wearing a black t-shirt with the name of a band Scott doesn't recognize. The singer is crying blood and clutching a beheaded teddy bear.

At home, things have calmed down. Bobby calls saying he's visiting friends in Ohio and Scott's dad alerts the market that Bobby won't be returning to work. At school, elections for class president and other officers are nearing. Julia is running for class president and Scott fully expects her to win. He hopes she can do something about "crime" in the halls. At lunch, Scott is accosted by Wesley Cobble, a boy who isn't the largest kid in school but who has a look that indicates he doesn't really care if he has to fight. Wesley demands Scott's change and Scott hands it over to avoid a fight.

Patrick also expects Julia to win class president and tells Scott he should run for student council. There are two openings on the council and the students who win will meet regularly with other officers, including the class president. Scott decides he'll run. Mouth is another of the candidates and at lunch time Mouth says he's working on his speech which is the first clue Scott has that he has to give a speech.

## Chapters 10 through 12 Analysis

Scott's journal entries become very entertaining in some places. He is writing to the baby as if he were big enough to understand the words but still an infant unable to do anything about them. For example, in chapter eleven, Scott sees that his parents are preparing to decorate the nursery with decals of small animals all over the walls. He says the sight of all the squirrels and bunnies makes him want to go hunting. In his journal, he writes to the baby that squirrels are rodents just like rats. He says he thinks the baby should know that about all the squirrels that decorate the nursery walls. He then goes on to say that they're just little squirrels and there's nothing to be afraid of as long as the lights are on. He warns that there's no telling what those cute squirrels become once the lights are off and the room is dark. He concludes the thought by saying the baby doesn't even want to know the information Scott has about "flesh-eating ducks."



Scott and Mouth are picked on equally by the upper classmen, including Wesley, who demand money on a regular basis. One day Scott notes Wesley headed toward them and he ducks into a classroom, leaving Mouth alone. Wesley hits Mouth up for money and Mouth hands it over. Scott then sees Mouth at his locker and almost keeps walking but decides to offer to lend him some money - an offer Mouth accepts and that makes Mouth feel he and Scott are now friends. Scott continues to avoid being Mouth's friend as best he can but will later come to realize that he and Mouth have a great deal in common.

Scott writes in his journal that he's been trying to get Patrick involved in books, believing Patrick would enjoy reading if he just got started. Scott reveals how he became a reader. He'd had a bicycle accident when he was in fifth grade that left him injured to the point that he spent a couple of nights in the hospital. A boy in his room named Tobie read continuously and kept at Scott to read as well. In an effort to shut him up, Scott pretended to read a book but was really watching television. When he finished the book, Tobie began asking him about the book and Scott played along, presenting vague answers that convinced Tobie he'd read the book. Much later, a box arrived for Scott from Tobie's parents. Tobie had died but wanted Scott to have some of his books because they'd become such good friends in the hospital. Scott felt guilty that he'd misled Tobie and doesn't seem to realize that the pretense of friendship was likely enough for Tobie. Scott's guilt prompted him to carefully read each of the books in the box and he'd been a voracious reader ever since. This says a great deal about Scott's personality. He went to the trouble to make Tobie feel better even though he'd later felt guilty for the lie he'd told in order to achieve that. No one would have known if Scott had simply thrown the box of books away but Scott felt he owed something to Tobie and to himself, prompting him to read the books.



# Chapters 13 through 15

## Chapters 13 through 15 Summary

In chapter thirteen, Scott presents his speech. He points out that there are nine kids running for student council and that each member of the student body gets three votes. He presents the idea that most of them don't have more than two friends running for student council so challenges them to give him their third vote just to see if he can bring some fresh ideas to the student government.

Scott goes to English class where he discovers that not all poetry is horrible and he's struck by some that's really good. Mr. Franka teases him with the information that Byron wrote a poem about vampires but doesn't tell him the name of the poem and Scott has no luck finding it on his own. At the end of the class, Mr. Franka says that April is national poetry month which is why they're studying poetry in October. Scott is the first to ask what they'll be studying in April and Mr. Franka says he always lets the first person to ask that question choose the topic of study for April.

At the ballgame that night, the Panthers score a touchdown. Scott says the fans are so amazed they don't know what to do. On Tuesday the elections are held and Scott learns that he has a seat on the student council but that Julia didn't win the class president's spot. Scott's mother sets out to find all the things in the house that might be dangerous to a baby and Scott wonders how he and Bobby survived with all the dangers his mom has discovered.

In chapter fourteen, Scott's friends, including Mouth, are going to the Harvest Dance. Scott, Patrick, and Kyle stand around drinking sodas and eating potato chips. They each dare the other to ask girls to dance but none of them does. Mitch spends the evening with his girlfriend. Mouth asks lots of girls to dance but none of them does. On Saturday, Patrick announces that he's read half of a book Scott convinced him to try, and that he likes it. On Sunday, Patrick announces that his father has a job in Texas and they're moving.

In English, Mr. Franks introduces the class to the mixed metaphor then to oxymorons. In his journal, Scott says he can't wait for the chance to dress the baby up for Halloween and suggests a mummy's outfit would give Scott the opportunity to practice tying knots. He says he does want the baby to remember two important rules of Halloween. The first is that the baby has to share the candy and the second is that Scott gets first choice.

In chapter fifteen, Scott's parents spend a great deal of time shopping for a mobile for the crib. Scott says the crib hasn't yet been chosen and that he doesn't understand the order of things, but that's just another of the mysteries of this pregnancy.

Scott says that he always notices books other people are carrying and has noticed recently that many of the kids are carrying whatever Mouth has recently reviewed. On



Tuesday, Scott sees that Lee is carrying a book and expects it to be something really dark. Instead, he finds the book is by S. Morgenstern which is a pen name for William Goldman, the author of "The Princess Bride." The title of the book is "The Silent Gondoliers" and Lee asks if Scott likes the author. Scott nods but suddenly realizes he doesn't want to start a conversation with her because she's so weird.

Over the next few days, Scott endures an outdoors gym class with snow flurries, his voice begins to change so that he sometimes croaks and he says good-bye to Patrick who is leaving as soon as he arrives home from school that Friday.

## Chapters 13 through 15 Analysis

Scott writes in his journal soon after learning of Patrick's departure. He says he and Patrick have been friends since second grade and that he's so angry about the move he wants to punch the wall. In this entry, Scott doesn't make fun of the baby, call him names or make any jokes. These are indications that Patrick's leaving hits Scott harder than he lets on.

Scott tries to figure out how to attract Julia's attention while watching as she continues to hang out with Vernon. He asks his mom why girls would choose to date someone who is a bully and his mom suggests the girl is going through a "bad boy stage." She promises the smart girls grow out of it pretty quickly. He asks his dad how to get a conversation started. Following that advice, he pledges to just walk to up Julia and say "hi," then keep walking. He chickens out once and another time gets nothing out but a croak because his voice is changing. Scott writes in his journal that he's going to figure out how to get past this. He wonders if this younger brother will be like Bobby in his ability to attract girls without trying. He says he hopes he doesn't have to watch that happen again.



# Chapters 16 through 18

## Chapters 16 through 18 Summary

In chapter sixteen, Scott sees Lee reading a copy of Byron's poems and asks if she knows his poem about the vampire. She quotes some of it, says she has it at home, and offers to let Scott borrow the book. He declines. Scott searches for the poem online but can't figure out how to spell the title Lee had given him. The following day, Lee and Mouth are both absent from school. Scott says Mouth has always missed a lot of school and he has a mental image of Mouth being hooked up to a dictionary via an IV in an effort to refuel his word pool for his incessant talking. When Scott gets home, Bobby's returned. The following weekend, Lee returns to school and hands Scott a book. He notices she has bandages on both wrists and can't stop staring until she tells him she "did something stupid in the kitchen." Scott doesn't comment.

In his next journal entry, Scott addresses his feelings on the issue. He tells his little brother that he's known some kids hurt themselves but wants Smelly to be sure he understands it's not an option. Scott warns that suicide is sometimes made out to be romantic but the reality is there's no way to return to life and the death leaves someone else to clean up a mess.

In chapter seventeen, Kyle announces his plans to join the wrestling team. Scott declines Kyle's offer to join as well and later presents a list of reasons he shouldn't, including that he doesn't want to know what his small intestines look like. That day, Lee asks if Scott liked the poem and he admits he hasn't yet read it, prompting her comment that he doesn't have his priorities in order. The poem is titled, "Giaour" and he reads it during study hall. He's completely captivated by the poem though he admits there are references he doesn't understand.

Scott writes in his journal about Thanksgiving, warning Smelly about some foods that are always lethally hot, including pizza and hot chocolate. The Panthers lose the game that Friday, 103 to 3. In class the following Tuesday, Lee asks how he'd liked the poem but he doesn't want to get into a conversation with her. He says he has to go but immediately feels guilty for the lie and turns back only to find she's gone. He hopes there will be the opportunity for something fun in the newspaper meeting that day because football season is at an end.

In chapter eighteen, Scott walks into the newspaper meeting that afternoon expecting to take the initiative to broach the subject of writing some book reviews. Mouth has still not returned to school and Scott hopes to fill in with some fantasy book reviews. Mandy immediately asks if he likes basketball or wrestling better and in the following conversation, Scott somehow finds himself assigned to cover both. In his journal later, Scott advises Smelly to never be afraid to ask for what he wants. Scott is lifting weights in gym class and Kyle predicts the soreness the second day will be worse than the first.





Scott's entries the following two days are that he'll refuse to take on anything else and "Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow. Ow."

## Chapters 16 through 18 Analysis

Scott's attitude toward Lee is one of uncertainty prompted at least partly by the fact that she's a girl but mostly by the fact that she's so much different from his friends. The kids call Lee "Weirdly," which is shortened from "Weird Lee." She seems intent on making herself different. She wears clothing that can probably best be described as "goth." She has her hair dyed bright colors and one day Scott notices she's spiked her hair, which is already dyed bright green.

Mouth has been out of school a great deal, a fact that Scott doesn't find all that unusual. He doesn't spend a great deal of time wondering about it, which offers up a sense of foreshadowing.





# Chapters 19 through 21

## Chapters 19 through 21 Summary

In chapter nineteen, Scott overhears Julia and Kelly talking about an upcoming play. Both agree they're going to try out. Scott decides he'll try out as well. Scott arrives at school Wednesday and sees a sign on Lee's locker that says, "This is not a locker." Scott tries to convince himself to walk past without saying anything but can't help stopping. Scott tells her the sign is crap which prompts a conversation between them. Lee says she believes Scott is one of the few students in school who cares about knowledge for the sake of knowledge and tells him it's a "meta-statement," or "words about words." She says "90 percent of everything is crap," then challenges Scott to discover who said that. That afternoon Scott sees the sign is gone and another sign that reads "this is a locker" is in its place.

Scott writes again in his journal after seeing the list of those who were chosen to be in the play. Julia is not on the list.

In chapter twenty, Scott hears Mr. Franka saying that he has a lot of paperwork. Scott stops by his desk and says, "Ninety percent of everything is crap," which prompts Mr. Franka to say, "Sturgeon's law. How true." Scott has the answer to Lee's challenge. Scott sees that Lee has printed a new sign that says, "This is not a cantaloupe" on her locker and someone writes a derogatory name below it that includes the word "freaky." Scott can't bring himself to pass it up and he tears the sign off Lee's locker, hoping she hasn't yet seen it. Later, Scott reveals that he knows Lee's quote is Sturgeon's Law which prompts her approval.

Mouth is back at school and plans to review the book, "The Princess Bride." He says he has read only a little of the book but watched the movie. Scott misses Kyle at lunch one day and discovers he's hanging out with the wrestling team. Kyle doesn't suggest that Scott join them. One afternoon Scott sees a student named Mike Clamath leaning on Wesley's car. Wesley punches him, drags him out of the way, and drives away.

In chapter twenty-one, Christmas vacation arrives. Scott buys a watch for Bobby, trout baits for his dad, and cooking oils for his mom. He says he'd hoped for a computer but there wasn't one, probably because of all the money his parents were spending getting ready for the baby. On New Year's Eve, Scott is home alone watching television and reading a book. His parents call at midnight and Lee calls right after that but neither can think of anything to say. Scott writes to the baby on January 1, saying he knows most people make promises to do things better in the coming year but usually just go on being themselves. He says the baby is truly starting "from scratch. Or from goo."



## Chapters 19 through 21 Analysis

Scott writes in his journal about his decision to pull the sign off Lee's locker. He says that guys are supposed to stand up for people, mainly because it's the right thing to do. He seems convinced of this and says it's important even when the person doesn't know what you did for them.

Lee's phone call to Scott indicates that she's interested in him but he hasn't yet figured out that they have a lot in common. He's still trying to avoid begin associated with her for fear that he'll be tagged as a strange person by the other students. It's obvious from the sounds on the phone that Lee is also not at a party and Scott wishes, almost as soon as he hangs up, that he'd asked what she was reading. He considers calling her back but doesn't.

Scott does try out for the play and discovers it's a musical. He's offered a spot on the stage crew, tries to decline but is talked into it. In his journal that week, he writes that his parents are out buying baby furniture and that he believes there's going to be a serious cash flow problem because of the baby's arrival. He writes, "I hope I can recover our investment when I sell you." Scott's attitude toward the baby is quickly becoming sentimental though he continues to joke about getting rid of the baby. Scott is slowly coming to accept the fact that he will no longer be the baby of the family and he will eventually come to relish the idea of being the older brother.



# Chapters 22 through 24

## Chapters 22 through 24 Summary

In chapter twenty-two, Scott discovers he's going to be called on to do most of the work on the set for the play while the upper classmen goof off. One day Scott is sent to the office to pick up a file for Mr. Franka. He's waiting for the file when Wesley walks in and takes a seat by Scott. Wesley asks why Scott's at the office and he doesn't want to lie but knows he'll be ridiculed if he says Mr. Franka sent him to pick up a file. He says he got to the office by "perambulation," which means walking. Wesley buys it and thinks Scott's in trouble as well. Later, Wesley takes a seat by Scott in the lunch room. Scott notes all the other kids are looking at him like they're trying to figure out this turn of events but Scott says he's also trying to figure it out. At the bus stop one morning, Wesley pulls up in his car and tells Scott to get in. Scott does and they arrive at school without incident. Another morning, Wesley makes them late for school and gives Scott a ride home after detention. Scott catches a ride with Wesley again a few days later but says he has to get straight to school because he's been late a lot and fears being kicked out. Wesley drops Scott at school but leaves.

Scott spends hours in school council meetings but notes that the freshmen are so completely ignored that his presence doesn't seem to mean anything. He asks the advisor if it's possible to quit and is told it's as easy as not showing up. Then Scott reads in the school newspaper that the entire freshman body took his lead and all quit. The runners-up were put in their places, meaning Julia is now the class president.

Scott has a new Spanish teacher. This one is a man with a serious Australian accent. After hours of hearing something that sounds like, "Nwarries, Might," he realizes the teacher is saying, "No worries, mate."

In chapter twenty-three, Scott gets a copy of the school paper and discovers an expose he'd written as a joke had been published. The story was about the football team and compared each of the players to food. Vernon was a "hot dog" while the offensive line was nachos because they break so easily. Scott doesn't know until later that Mouth had turned it in because the paper was short stories because of mid-term testing. Scott goes home early to avoid Vernon but returns to school the following day. Vernon confronts Scott and has him by the collar when Wesley intervenes. Scott thanks him and realizes he's going to be spending time with Wesley until Vernon graduates.

In chapter twenty-four, Scott watches as Wesley steals gas. Scott offers to give Wesley gas money but Wesley says there's really no need. Scott's mother discovers the baby is a boy. There's a major snowfall and school is canceled. Scott plans to sleep in and read but Wesley comes by with a snow mobile and they ride for about an hour and a half. Scott receives an email from Patrick who announces his family is moving to Japan.



## Chapters 22 through 24 Analysis

Scott tries to avoid being at the bus stop where Wesley will offer him a ride even though the bus ride has become torture. The majority of the upperclassmen smack Scott on the head as they walk past him. He and the other lower classmen are teased and tormented on the bus and Scott says that's the worst place to endure it because there's nowhere to run. But Wesley smokes and Scott also doesn't want to ride with Wesley, at least partly because Wesley made them late one day and partly because he's afraid of Wesley. Then Scott decides riding with Wesley is the better option and the ride becomes routine.

At one point Scott is standing at his locker when Julia comes by. He says that he barely notices she's there but he obviously has more of a reaction than he realizes. Lee notices and teases him about it, then says he should just go talk to her. Scott becomes defensive and says he doesn't know how to talk to girls. Lee then becomes offended, obviously because Scott is talking to her at that moment. However, if Lee would look back at her conversations with Scott, he's often tongue-tied and can't think of anything to say. Scott writes in his journal, advising his baby brother to simply remain quiet throughout high school in order to keep from making girls angry. Scott and Lee are at odds for a time. One day Lee is looking particularly depressed and Scott mentions it. She says that she hates winter and Scott seeks to reassure her, saying it'll soon be over. Her response is that there will always be another winter. This offers some insight into Lee's personality but it's really an effort at misdirection. Scott takes it for depression but later discovers that's not the case.



# Chapters 25 through 27

## Chapters 25 through 27 Summary

In chapter twenty-five, Scott gets a bag of black jelly beans from Lee. Scott attends another dance and Mouth reveals that he's asked every single girl to dance, working through the class alphabetically. He asks Scott if one might change her mind and Scott says he has no idea what girls think, prompting Mouth to start the process again. Mouth drops by Scott's house one afternoon to pay him back the lunch money he'd borrowed. Mouth is strangely quiet and doesn't stop to talk. The next day Scott and Wesley arrive at school to the news that "the weird kid" committed suicide. Scott runs in the direction he'd seen Lee walking and is relieved to meet her on her way to school. She says it's sweet that he was worried about her and promises that she would never commit suicide. Scott can't help glancing at her wrists and discovers the injury really was a burn. Scott learns that Mouth had tried to hang himself but the ceiling fan broke. He survives but damaged his throat and can't speak.

Scott goes to the hospital to visit Mouth. Mouth has to write to communicate and says little but seems glad to see Scott. Several kids at school begin to make jokes about Mouth "hanging around," and when a student tells one of them to Scott, he becomes incredibly angry, slamming the kid into a locker. Wesley surprises Scott later, asking if Scott heard about the attempted suicide. When Scott says he has and expects some sort of joke, Wesley says only that it was "bad stuff."

In chapter twenty-six, Scott's reminded he's supposed to come up with a topic for study in English class and spends some time in the library. He decides to suggest comic books though he's surprised when Mr. Franka agrees. Scott goes again to visit Mouth and can't stop himself from asking why. Mouth says there wasn't a reason not to but Scott counters, saying it's cheating. Mouth says he's lonely and no one likes him but Scott says that can't be a reason or the world would be littered with corpses. He points out that he also has no friends but wouldn't consider suicide. Scott then asks the question that's been haunting him. He asks if his conversation with Mouth the night of the dance had anything to do with Mouth's attempted suicide. Mouth says Scott was the only student in the entire school who was nice to him.

The next day, Scott broaches the subject of bullying with Wesley. He suggests Wesley imagine a younger brother who gets his lunch money taken by an older bully. Wesley realizes that a youngster would feel horrible while he was being bullied. Scott receives a letter from Mouth who is moving to a different school. Scott mentions his guilt to Lee but she points out that he was at least nice to Mouth and that it's much easier to be nice to someone you like than someone you don't.

In chapter twenty-seven, the English class begins its study of comics which turns out to be fun. A new teacher who speaks perfect English and was born in Argentina arrives, a change that catches Scott's attention. Scott is thrilled with his latest article about a track



meet. He shows it to his mom who loves it. He then tries to get Bobby to read it but Bobby puts it off, pretends to have read it, then throws a fit, and rips the paper.

## Chapters 25 through 27 Analysis

Scott can't get past the idea that he might have been the last person to see Mouth before Mouth attempted suicide. Scott feels guilty that he hadn't been nicer to Mouth or at least more tolerant. Scott feels doubly guilty when he considers that Mouth's absence might mean an opening for a book reviewer on the school newspaper. When that's mentioned at a newspaper meeting, Scott turns down the opportunity. When Mouth asks Scott to review a particular book during his absence, Scott promises to try. He reads the book but can't bring himself to write the review.

Scott suddenly finds his stride as a sports reporter when baseball season and track season kick off. He has spent a great deal of time and energy trying to come up with gimmicks to package his stories up to this point but realizes that he just needs to settle in and write about the sports events and the people competing. He does so and is very pleased with the results.

One day Scott and Wesley are riding around together when Wesley sees three guys he knows. He says they owe him money and gets out of the car to confront them. Scott immediately wonders what he should do because the confrontation is three against one. He doesn't know why Wesley believes the boys owe him money or why Wesley is confronting them now, but he gets out of the car and joins Wesley. Wesley thanks him.

Scott's efforts to get Bobby to read his article are the result of Scott's need for approval from Bobby. Scott wants Bobby to see that he can do something well. Bobby's refusal to read the article is probably a clue to the reader that there's something wrong, probably with Bobby's ability to read at all, though Scott doesn't see it at first.



# Chapters 28 through 30

## Chapters 28 through 30 Summary

In chapter twenty-eight, Scott takes a copy of "Tuck Everlasting" to Bobby and demands that he read a paragraph. Bobby refuses and they fight but eventually Bobby gives in and Scott realizes that Bobby can barely read. Bobby says he learned that if he got into enough trouble, no one cared if he didn't do his homework and he got through classes by doing that. Bobby, Scott, and their dad go fishing on the first day of trout season.

In chapter twenty-nine, Bobby asks Scott if he's written another article for the paper. Scott offers to read it to him and Bobby says Scott obviously has a gift for writing. The students begin studying plays in English and Mr. Franka begins with the script for "Terminator." Scott attends the cast party after the final showing of the play and is praised by the other crew members for his hard work.

One day Scott encounters Kyle in the hallway. Scott asks Kyle if he'll mention Scott's name to Kelly in an effort to find out if Julia is at all interested. Kyle says Julia is out of Scott's league and they are soon physically fighting. Scott quickly pins Kyle which surprises him and makes Scott very angry.

In chapter thirty, the final dance of the year is quickly approaching. Lee puts a poster on Scott's locker with the words, "Let's go" on it. Scott first thinks she's serious, then decides she's kidding and says, "Good one" before realizing she really was serious. Scott wants to apologize but knows he can't do anything to make it right.

Kelly begins winking at Scott on several occasions and he begins to think she's trying to tell him something. At the end of the day, she tells him "someone" wants to talk to him about the dance and sends him to a classroom where he expects Julia to be waiting. He steps inside and is blindsided by Vernon who beats him almost senseless before leaving the room. Scott lies still, waiting to see how badly he's hurt. He hears Kelly say she hadn't expected Vernon to beat Scott up and insisting they see if he needs help but Kyle interrupts, saying they should just leave. Scott makes it to the parking lot where Wesley is waiting. Wesley's immediate response is to ask if there's a fight that needs to be finished but Scott insists that it's over. Scott's mom falls for his story that it was a stray baseball that hit him in the face but his father knows better. Scott answers his dad's questions honestly, that it wasn't a fair fight but that it's over.

Scott later asks his dad what he should do to try to make up when he's hurt a girl's feelings, referring to Lee. Scott's dad says the first rule is to let her cool off. Then it's Mother's Day and Scott knows his parents usually go out for dinner. However, on this evening his mom doesn't want to go out. Then a limo arrives at the house and Scott's dad convinces her to go with him. She finally agrees and the whole family goes through fast food restaurants all over town.





Scott tries to hire a limo to take Lee to the dance but can't afford it. He tells Lee he'll be at her house at seven o'clock and that he'll wait all night if that's what it takes. She warns him to bring a tent. Scott is walking home from the library one day when Vernon's car comes to a screeching halt nearby and Julia gets out. She reveals that they've argued and that she's tired of fighting with Vernon. She asks if Scott has a date for the dance. He considers briefly saying that he doesn't but says he's already asked someone else. Julia says it's her loss and kisses him on the cheek before going in her house.

## Chapters 28 through 30 Analysis

Bobby obviously feels stupid and is angry that he can't read. He's also obviously jealous of Scott's academic abilities. Bobby demands that Scott not tell their parents and Scott agrees, though he says he hopes Bobby will.

Scott asks Lee what her parents do for a living and discovers her mom is a phlebotomist and her father an attorney who helps big corporations "get around anti-pollution laws." Lee says the result is that she lives with two bloodsuckers.

Scott's fight with Kyle is prompted by the fact that Kyle mentions the word "freaky" in a derogatory term about Lee. Scott immediately realizes that Kyle was the one who wrote the ugly term on Lee's locker and it makes him furious. Scott has a highly-developed sense of right and wrong and is really upset that Kyle doesn't have the same. Scott is also upset that Kyle - who he'd considered one of his best friends at the beginning of the year - would scoff at Scott's crush on Julia. Scott has understood Kyle's decision to spend so much time with the guys from the wrestling team up to this point. He realizes that Kyle is one of those people who needs to be part of a group. Their own informal group that included Kyle, Scott, Patrick, and Mitch at the beginning of the school year has broken apart and Kyle needs to affiliate himself with another.





# Chapters 31 through 33

## Chapters 31 through 33 Summary

In chapter thirty-one, Scott wakes in the middle of the night to Bobby's guitar playing. He goes to Bobby's room where he learns that Bobby's been asked to join some guys he knows in Nashville for a music audition. Scott convinces Bobby that going is the right thing to do and Bobby leaves. With Bobby's absence, the family's only car is the Corvette and Scott knows his dad can't drop him at the dance with a date in that car. That afternoon when Wesley gives him a ride home, Scott asks if Wesley will take them. Wesley agrees. Scott then dyes his hair an incredible shade of red. He notes that he endures a lecture from his parents for his act but feels the need to make a statement. He's writing in his journal when he hears a car and says Wesley has arrived, though it's not the car he normally drives.

In chapter thirty-two, Wesley is in a huge white limo and he's dressed like a professional driver. Scott appears at Lee's house and discovers she's removed all her piercings, dyed her hair black, and put on a dress for the occasion. On the way to the dance, Scott suddenly sees his parents in the Corvette on the side of the road. They pull over and discover Scott's mom is in labor. They take her to the hospital but she tells Scott to go to the dance. Wesley is speeding on the way and a cop follows them but doesn't issue a citation, saying the situation is "too amusing."

Lee and Scott arrive at the dance and at Lee's insistence, Scott dances with Julia who is alone. Vernon tries to pick a fight but Scott stands his ground backed by others who have discovered Scott is smart and a fun to be with, forcing Vernon to back down. Wesley and Lee go with Scott to the hospital where they discover Scott's little brother has already been born. Scott wraps up a journal entry, pledging to be always honest. He begins by saying all newborn babies are hideous.

In chapter thirty-three, Scott continues to write. He exchanges letters with Mouth and lets Lee and Mr. Franka read some of his plays and short stories. In his final journal entry, Scott says his mother has already bought Sean a book and his dad bought Sean a tool set. Bobby is in the middle of a tour, currently in New Orleans and that he bought the family a computer with his first check. Scott says Wesley is about to graduate and he's no longer a freshman.

## Chapters 31 through 33 Analysis

Scott's parents are initially upset that Bobby left in the middle of the night with their car and without asking. However, Scott's mother realizes this might be the dream Bobby's been chasing, even though he hasn't given it a concrete name. She says she hopes all their sons will follow their dreams, whatever those may be, and that she's glad Bobby went.



Scott dyes his hair bright red for the dance with Lee. His parents are upset and he gets a lecture about it from them. Then he goes to pick up Lee and discovers that she's done away with all the "hardware" jewelry that she usually wears and has dressed appropriately for the event. Scott says she didn't have to change and she says that's why she didn't mind doing it. She points out that Scott didn't have to dye his hair red either. They seem to both be trying to step outside their normal identities in an effort to grow and they both wonder about this new phase.

Scott has been careful to make sure Wesley and Lee don't meet, fearing it would be a disaster. However, as Lee and Wesley are getting out of the limo at the dance, Wesley looks at Lee very carefully and makes a derogatory comment. At first Scott believes Lee is calling her a name but then Wesley clarifies his comment, saying he'd seen Lee with those words written on her shirt. She had actually worn a t-shirt with those words on it after Kyle wrote them on her locker. Lee confirms that was her and Wesley compliments her.

Scott and Julia dance and Julia says she's envious of Scott. She cites his ability to be involved with various activities and still make good grades. She says everyone loves his writing for the paper. Scott has come to realize that Julia is not as self-assured as she should be and tells her that he believes that she has everything going for her.



# Characters

## Scott Hudson

A freshman as the story opens, Scott is struggling to find his way in the maze of a new high school with new opportunities and friendships opening to him. Scott loves to read and wants to instill that love in others. His closest friends share little with him with regard to his love of learning but he doesn't recognize that as a reason they might not always be friends. The exception seems to be Patrick. Though he's not as smart as Scott, Patrick is more closely connected to Scott and shares more of his jokes than Kyle and Mitch. When Patrick moves away, Scott is left with a void that he can't initially figure out how to fill. Scott is also dealing with the knowledge that he is soon going to have a baby brother. He's initially upset at the news, feeling that it will shake up what he considers a comfortable home life but he comes to realize that he has a role to fill in this child's life. Toward that end, Scott begins a journal listing pieces of advice and information his brother can use later in life. Scott doesn't initially recognize Lee as someone he likes. He sees the exterior first which is probably a way she keeps most people at bay. However, he soon realizes they like the same kinds of books and share much of the same humor. When Lee invites him to a school dance, he thinks it's a joke and takes a step away from it. When he realizes it wasn't a joke, he sets out to make sure everyone knows he likes her and that she knows he's serious. Scott continues to struggle with his homework and extracurricular activities but also struggles to see where he fits into the grand scheme of high school. He has an enormous wakeup call when Mouth tries to commit suicide, making Scott realize his actions have more of an impact on others than he'd known.

## Lee

She is a girl in Scott's class who is known for her wild clothing, makeup, jewelry, and hair color. She is something of an outcast and Scott initially can't imagine that he has anything in common with her until he questions her about a specific poem and discovers they actually like many of the same things. Lee sees the world differently and seems to be comfortable with her role in the world though she makes others somewhat uncomfortable. When she comes to school with her wrists bandaged, Scott believes Lee has tried to commit suicide. Later he discovers her "stupid" act was really an accident in which she burned herself. Lee assures Scott that she has a "zest" for life and would never take her own. Lee is probably somewhat afraid to let people get close to her. She seems to use her wild clothing and attitude as a way of keeping others from trying to make friends and to protect herself against the need to make friends. When Lee invites Scott to the dance, her feelings are hurt that he thinks it's a joke, but she has set the stage for his reaction by acting as if she would never do anything as ordinary as attending the dance. When she finally decides she will go with him, she does away with the wild hair and makeup, stepping outside her normal comfort zone. She says she was willing to do so because she knew Scott wouldn't demand it.



## Wesley Cobble

He is a bully who is first mentioned in the book when he forces Scott to hand over the change in his pockets. Wesley isn't the biggest boy in school but has a look about him that Scott says makes him scarier than the bigger boys. Wesley is really rather serious and Scott is able to make him see what his demands for money does to the self-esteem of the younger students. Wesley drives Scott and Lee to the dance in a limo.

## Louden Kandeski

Known as Mouth, he talks almost incessantly but goes out of his way to try to make new friends, regardless of the lack of encouragement from his peers. Mouth seems to be always optimistic but is really struggling with his lack of close friendships. He tries to commit suicide by hanging himself but doesn't succeed.

## Julia Baskins

This is the girl who changed so dramatically over the summer prior to their freshman year. Scott doesn't recognize her initially but thinks she's beautiful. He has a huge crush on her early in the year and spends a great deal of time trying to figure out ways to be near her.

## Sean Hudson

Scott's baby brother, he only appears near the end of the book but Scott spends a great deal of time thinking about Sean prior to his birth. Scott doesn't know whether the baby is a boy or a girl initially and tries to come up with some combination of the two names being considered by his parents, Sean and Emily, coming up with Smelly.

## Bobby Hudson

Scott's older brother, he is often in trouble. He moves back in with the family early in the book but moves out abruptly when his mother has trouble with the pregnancy. Bobby is self-centered but Scott comes to realize there's a reason behind his actions and is the first in the family to discover that Bobby can barely read.

## Mr. Franka

Scott's English teacher, he challenges Scott to become involved in the school newspaper and makes the English class fun though it's demanding. He introduces Scott to the Tom Swifties which Scott thinks are incredibly fun and encourages Scott to stretch his writing talent.



## Kyle

One of Scott's three best friends as they begin high school. Kyle is a little tougher than the others and more willing to stand up for himself as they take their role as freshmen. Kyle has a reputation for being tough though it's actually because of a broken nose he sustained as a child when he fell off a rocking horse. Kyle eventually turns against Scott and is in on the plot to arrange for Scott to be alone so that Vernon can beat him up.

## Vernon

Vernon is a jock who plays for the football team. Most of the students are afraid of him because he's very big and has a nasty temper. Vernon and Julia begin dating early in the year. Vernon is angry at Scott because of his coverage of the football team but Scott realizes that Vernon's own fear of being hurt is a great deal of the reason the team never scores.



## **Objects/Places**

### **J.P. Zenger High School**

This is where Scott and his friends attend their freshman year.

### **Smelly**

This is the nickname Scott comes up with for the unborn baby that is the focus of the journal he begins keeping during his freshman year.

### **Tom Swifty**

This is a journalistic tool that catches Scott's attention during English class.

### **Hobby Land**

This is where Scott and Bobby go to race slot cars.

### **Linwood Mercedes**

This is the car dealership where Scott's dad works.

### **Zenger Gazette**

This is the name of the school newspaper.

### **Panthers**

This is the school mascot.

### **Texas**

This is where Patrick and his family move to initially.

### **Japan**

This is where Patrick announces that he and his family are moving to after living in Texas only a short time.

## **Nashville**

This is where Bobby goes for an audition that leads to a music tour.



# Themes

## Actions have consequences

The effects of a person's actions become a pronounced theme in this book when Mouth attempts suicide. Scott spends quite a bit of time with Mouth though Scott denies they are friends. At a dance, Scott and Mouth talk about girls and Scott says he has no clue what to expect from any girl. Mouth takes that thought one step farther and comes to the conclusion that he should ask the same girls to dance again because they might say yes the second time. When Mouth attempts suicide, Scott is suddenly faced with the horrible thought that he might have pushed Mouth over the edge. In fact, Mouth is tired of being alone and lonely. He cites this as the reason for his suicide attempt but Scott points out that suicide leaves a mess behind for someone else to clean up - another effect of one person's actions. When Scott first hears about the suicide, he fears it's Lee. He is immediately filled with guilt, thinking that she might not have done it if he'd been nicer to her. When a boy named Danny makes a joke about Mouth's suicide attempt, Scott gets angry and pushes Danny into a locker. Later he thinks about his own actions and is upset, saying he might have pushed Danny into taking some drastic action if he'd actually hit Danny. Scott finds an opportunity to convince Wesley that beating up smaller students and demanding their lunch money has a negative effect on those students. Wesley seems to understand Scott's point and it may have made a difference in Wesley's life. To a lesser degree, this same theme is seen with Lee. Kyle writes an ugly name on a paper on Lee's locker. Scott sees the note and takes it down, hoping that he's removed it before Lee sees it. He doesn't get it down in time but Kyle's action moves Scott and Lee at least slightly closer to their eventual conclusion - a date to a dance.

## Coming of age

The coming of age theme is seen in the lives of several characters particularly Scott and Julia. Scott begins his freshman year expecting that things will remain the same with his friends. What Scott doesn't realize is that he has already outgrown his friendship with Kyle, simply because the two are so different. Kyle is much less mature and more in need of peers to provide direction. Scott takes it upon himself to step out and try new things though some of those steps are taken for the wrong reasons. Scott admits that he already knew he and Kyle were no longer friends prior to the day Vernon beats up Scott, but he hadn't wanted to face it. The beating he took at Vernon's hands and Kyle's role in it force Scott to accept the fact that his friendship with Kyle is ended. This hurts Scott but not as much as it would have a few months earlier, simply because Scott has matured. Julia's coming of age experience is more pronounced in some ways because Julia changed so dramatically over the summer. Julia is still very unsure of herself and lacks the self-confidence to stand up for herself during the first few months of high school. After awhile, she seems to realize she shouldn't stand for Vernon's bullying. This takes more maturity than Julia has as the year begins. Mouth and Lee are, to lesser





degrees, examples of the coming of age theme. Mouth endures the heartaches of rejection and tries to take his life. It's only after that suicide attempt that he realizes he has to take responsibility for himself, a sign of his emerging maturity. Lee wears wild clothing and makeup, probably in an effort to keep others at bay. She changes that for her date to the dance with Scott. Though it's unclear whether she'll keep those changes, she is willing to step out of her normal comfort zone, a sign of emerging maturity.

## **The inability to fully know another person**

The inability of people to fully understand one another is a theme repeated often throughout the book. An important example is seen when Wesley comes by Scott's house and takes him riding on a snow mobile. When Scott returns, his mom says he should have invited Wesley in for hot chocolate. She says she has the kind with tiny marshmallows. Scott says Wesley doesn't seem like the "tiny marshmallow" kind of guy. However, after Scott takes a stand with Wesley against the boys Wesley says owe him money, Wesley suggests they go to a shop he knows that has great hot chocolate, the kind with the tiny marshmallows. Another example of this theme is seen when Scott believes Lee has slashed her wrists in an effort to commit suicide. Scott believes because Lee always dresses dark and has such an interest in death that she's likely to be the one to try to commit suicide. He later finds out that she'd actually burned her wrists and it wasn't a suicide at all. In addition, Lee says she fully believes in living life to its fullest and can't imagine dying by her own hand. Another example of this theme is seen in Mouth's attempted suicide. Mouth is outgoing and seems never to be put off when someone doesn't respond to him. This is evident when he and Scott talk about girls and their inability to understand them. Mouth says that one of the girls he's already asked to dance might change her mind and agree to dance if he asks again, prompting him to set off to ask again.

# Style

## Point of View

The story is written in the first person from a very limited perspective except for one distinct scene. Chapter twenty-six begins with the sentence, "Scott Hudson settled back in his seat." The first page of that chapter continues in the third person from an obviously omniscient perspective. The author notes that one of the other students is hungry, a fact that Scott wouldn't know and that indicates the omniscient perspective. Then it's explained that Mr. Franka is explaining about third person omniscient perspectives, prompting Scott himself to write in that style. That section is immediately followed by a very brief second-person scene before returning to the first person limited perspective seen throughout the book. The fact that Scott is telling the story about himself and that he spends a great deal of time writing in his journal makes the first person limited perspective the only real option available to the author. Scott's study of English makes the story humorous in some places because Scott explains why this first person perspective might be problematic. He points out that the limited perspective means the writer is presenting the story as he sees it but also as he perceives it. The reader must be aware that a first-person narrative tends to put the writer in the best possible light. The fact that this is a work of fiction makes that unlikely though it remains a possibility.

## Setting

The exact setting of the story is not defined. It seems reasonable that the story is set in the middle or northern United States because Scott and his father go trout fishing. The fact that the place is not strictly identified does not detract from the believability of the story. There are several distinct settings, including the J.P. Zenger High School and Scott's house. The school is a large building that intimidates Scott upon arrival. He has trouble finding his way and winds up lost on several occasions. The Hudson house is apparently fairly large. The author does not get lost in the description but does explain some of the details about the layout. Scott's room, Bobby's room, and the room that will be the nursery are all very near each other upstairs. There are several secondary settings, including Lee's house and the bus stop. All the settings are described in adequate detail. All seem reasonable and acceptable for the story and the time. The time is also not distinctly defined. The book was copyrighted in 2005 and it seems reasonable to believe the book is set in that time frame or some period shortly before then. The technology supports this conclusion. Scott has access to a computer at home though it's not very reliable and is apparently a desktop. The author does not mention cell phones or a dependence on that technology.



## Language and Meaning

The story is written as a combination of a narrative and a first-person journal intended for Scott's little brother. Scott begins by writing about his own life and his anticipation of his first day of high school. The story takes a twist when Scott learns his mother is pregnant. With that information, Scott realizes that he might have had an easier time if he'd been able to turn to his older brother for advice. This prompts him to begin a journal though he has no real intention of keeping it private. The narrative and the journal entries are written very similarly. Both carry an extremely informal tone with only a few exceptions. One is that Scott tries to work vocabulary words into his journal entries. He then teases his little brother about those words, encouraging him to look up any he doesn't know. Narrative, journal entries and dialogue are reasonable for the subject, story, and audience. An interesting aspect of the story is that Scott loves English. As he's learning about literary tools and reading new stories, he puts what he's learning to use in both his narrative and the journal entries. For example, when he learns about the "Tom Swifties," Scott entices one of his friends to make up some with him. He later writes several in his journal. When he learns about "stream-of-consciousness" writing, he provides an example that rambles on for a lengthy run-on sentence. He then says he won't blame Sean for skimming the sentence without really reading.

## Structure

The story is divided into thirty-three chapters of varying lengths. Chapters span events rather than focusing on length. For example, chapter one opens with Scott talking to his friends about the first day of high school and what they'll face. He then goes home and heads off to school the next morning. Chapter one ends at the bus stop with the arrival of the seniors. To a great degree, the older students will define Scott's year, which prompts the beginning of the second chapter. Chapter eighteen begins with Scott's revelation about redundant words, such as "surprise ambush." He says Mr. Franka said the word "ambush" means "surprise attack," making the word "surprise" redundant. However, Scott says he was ambushed that week in the school newspaper meeting, and that it was a surprise. The chapter goes on to include Scott covering a game for the school paper and lifting weights in gym class. Kyle warns Scott that he's going to be sore the following day from lifting the weights. The chapter ends with Scott's journal entry that reads, "Ow. Ow. Ow." The majority of the chapters are between six and twelve pages in length. Most chapters include narrative and dialogue as well as either lists from Scott's imagination or journal entries. Lists and journal entries are in different fonts with different headers to set them apart from the rest of the story.



## Quotes

"If someone cut my head off, the last words whistling through my throat as my face plunged toward the floor would be, 'I'm fine.'" (Chapter 4, p. 28).

"How's this for weird - I'll be reading 'The Outsiders.' And you, my unborn, unformed, uninvited sibling, are the ultimate insider. Ewww." (Chapter 7, p. 62).

"You see, guys have certain basic needs. Food, shelter, clothing girlfriends. Guess which one isn't provided by our parents or the local government?" (Chapter 8, p. 68).

"Meet the Hudson kids - one had split, one hadn't arrived, and the other didn't have a clue about where he was going." (Chapter 12, p. 95).

"Sometimes a dying snake is just a dying snake. Sometimes a leafless tree is just a tree." (Chapter 13, p. 107).

"I didn't want her to start talking to me. She was just too weird." (Chapter 15, p. 122).

"Mom and my aunts are sitting in the kitchen, exchanging stories about pregnancy and birth. From what I could tell, whoever experienced the greatest amount of pain for the longest period of time is the winner." (Chapter 17, p. 137).

"January 23. I might get killed tomorrow. If I don't make it home alive, you can have my books." (Chapter 23, p. 181).

"But he knew as well as I did that if I threw a party for all my friends, we could fit in a phone booth and still have room for pony rides and a moon bounce." (Chapter 26, p. 209).

"I thought about Wesley kicking the crap out of Vernon. As satisfying as that would be, I could imagine things growing from there until someone really got hurt." (Chapter 30, p. 246).

"Maybe it would work out great. Maybe not. But at least he wouldn't spend the rest of his life wondering what might have been." (Chapter 31, p. 258).

"Dad and I are going away next weekend to do some bass fishing on Lake Erie. I'd bring you along but we're not planning to use live bait." (Chapter 33, p. 278).



## Topics for Discussion

Describe Scott. What is his life like? Who are his friends? What does he expect from high school and how does that differ from the reality?

Describe the relationship between Scott and his older brother Bobby. How does this differ from the emerging relationship between Scott and Sean? Why does it differ? How does the relationship between Bobby and Scott change over the course of the book? Why does it change?

Compare Lee and Julia. What is it about each that attracts Scott? What is it that makes him choose to go out with Lee when he's given the opportunity to go out with Julia? What does this say about Scott?

Who is Mr. Franka? What does Scott expect from Mr. Franka? How does that differ from what he actually gets from the class? How does Scott apply what he learns in Mr. Franka's class to his life? List at least three literary terms Scott learns in English class. Give examples of all three.

What do you consider the most important theme of the book? Why? Give at least two examples of that theme.

Who is Vernon? Who is Wesley? How does Scott come to be accepted by one of them but not the other? What is the impact each has on Scott's life? What is the impact Scott has on the lives of each?

Who is Mouth? Kyle? Patrick? Mitch? What is Scott's relationship with each of the four? Who turns out to be the best friend of the four? Why?