

The Thing About Jellyfish Study Guide

The Thing About Jellyfish by Ali Benjamin

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Plot Summary

Middle school can be hard, especially if you're struggling with the death of your best friend like Suzy Swanson was in the novel "The Thing About Jellyfish" by Ali Benjamin. Suzy was not the typical seventh-grader. When she saw her best friend turning into one of the pretty girls they'd always made fun of Suzy knew she had to send her friend a message. After all, she'd made a promise. After Franny died of drowning during a beach vacation Suzy grieved not only because she missed her friend but also because their relationship did not end the way it should have. In hopes of redeeming herself, Suzy set about to prove that her friend's death had been caused by a jellyfish. Through the course of her journey, Suzy learned a good deal about jellyfish along with the finality of death.

When Suzy Swanson learned her best friend Franny Jackson had died while swimming in the ocean Suzy was not happy with her mother's explanation that sometimes things just happened. She wanted a concrete reason to explain why her friend had died. During a class trip to an aquarium Suzy learned about the Irukandji jellyfish. The stings of these jellyfish were so powerful that many had died because of them. It was believed that deaths attributed to other causes might even have been caused by these organisms. Suzy set about to prove that Franny's death had been the result of a jellyfish sting. In order to prove her point, Suzy located Dr. Jamie Seymour, a man she considered to be a jellyfish expert especially since he had once been stung by an Irukandji jellyfish. Suzy planned a trip to Australia to visit Jamie. She hoped he'd be able to help her pin down the cause of Franny's death.

Suzy had more than one reason for wanting to find out how exactly Franny had died. She sought closure not only for her loss of her friend to death but also because their friendship had been such a mess when Franny died. The two girls had been inseparable from the time they met as five year olds. In middle school everything seemed to change. Franny began hanging out with the popular girls and worrying about hair, clothes and boys. Suzy didn't understand Franny's new priorities. Franny began ignoring Suzy after Suzy embarrassed her in front of her new friends. Suzy was hurt by Franny's hatefulness but didn't retaliate until after a class trip where Franny not only let a boy she liked kill a frog but also spat on Suzy - apparently on a dare from the other students. Suzy made frozen discs of urine that she slipped into Franny's locker on the last day of school. Franny had once told Suzy to send her a message if she ever began acting like the pretty girls. Suzy hoped Franny would recognize the message and that they could repair their friendship. Because Franny died, the last time Suzy ever saw her friend was when she was walking down the hallway crying and carrying the bags of urine soaked belongings from her locker.

After Suzy's plan to go to Australia was destroyed when she learned she couldn't fly internationally alone, Suzy began to come to grips with Suzy's death. She sat on the floor of the airport and realized that even if she had been able to pinpoint the cause of Franny's death it wouldn't have changed the way the girls' friendship had ended and it

would not have brought Franny back. With the help of her family and friends, Suzy realized that Franny would live on through the people who loved her and knew her best.



Ghost Heart — Part One: Sometimes Things Just Happen

Summary

In the section “Ghost Heart” Suzanne “Suzy” Swanson, the narrator of the novel, describes jellyfish as appearing to beat like a heart. Her science teacher, Mrs. Turton, had told her that over an 80-year lifetime, a heart beats three billion times. Suzy’s focus turns to a person standing on a beach looking at the waves. That person’s mother is taking a picture of her. She suggests that person’s heart might stop beating in just a few minutes without that person or her mother being aware.

In the section “Purpose” of Part One of the novel, Suzy uses her teacher’s words to explain the reasons for including an introduction in a scientific report and how this introduction should explain the purpose of one’s research.

In the section “Touch” Suzy believed she had become invisible to her classmates just by refusing to talk. She stood at the back of touch tank room during a field trip to the aquarium watching as her classmates held their hands out to sharks and stingrays. It had been a month since what Suzy classified as the “worst thing” (p. 8) happened and since she stopped talking. Her parents were taking her to a “doctor she could talk to” (p. 8) later that day. She knew her parents thought she had mental problems, which her friend Franny would have referred to as being “cray cray” (p. 9) or crazy. When she thought about how Franny would have been giggling with all the other girls, Suzy had to get away from the room. She noticed a sign pointing down the stairs to a jellyfish exhibit. No one noticed her leave the group.

In the section “Sometimes Things Just Happen” Suzy writes to this other person, assumedly Franny, again. She tells Franny how she was dead two days before Suzy even knew. Suzy’s mother had called her in from outside and told her that Franny Jackson had drowned. Suzy thought her mother’s words didn’t make any sense because Franny had been such a good swimmer. Suzy also knew things had not ended between them the way things should end between friends. When Suzy questioned her mother’s announcement, trying to make sense of it, her mother told her that things sometimes just happen. Suzy thought that was the worst answer she could have given. It was not until Suzy looked at the jellyfish that she felt there might be another explanation.

Analysis

One of the first things the reader should notice about this book is its structure, the changes in tense and the changes in intended audiences. The book is arranged into five different parts, loosely based on the format of a scientific research paper. The majority



of the chapters in the novel are written from the first person point of view of Suzy Swanson, the main character of the story. In this first section the chapter “Touch” is written in the first person point of view and from the past tense. This intended audience for this chapter appears to be the reader. The chapter following “Touch” which is entitled “Sometimes Things Just Happen” is also written from the first person point of view of Suzy. The difference is that this chapter is written in the present tense. It is also written as if Suzy is speaking directly to Franny with Franny being the “you” to whom she refers. The sections in which Suzy talks directly to Franny are written in italics so it is easy for the reader to know right away to whom Suzy is speaking.

Notice also in the book there is an emphasis on science. This emphasis on science can be seen not only in the structure of the novel but also in its subject matter. Suzy is a middle school student who is very interested in science and scientific reasoning. She knows how many times a person’s heart will have beat by the time he turns 80 years old. She knows about how many times Franny’s beat before her death. With her scientific mind, Suzy wants to be given a reason why her friend died. She doesn’t want to be told that it just happened.

The major theme, that of grief, is introduced very quickly in this novel as the author foreshadows even in the introduction to the story that a person, who was only twelve, had died. This introduction includes information telling the reader that the heart will beat 3 billion times in the lifetime of a person who lives to be eighty. The heart of the person in the introduction only beat about 412 million times, getting them only to 12 years old. Other information that indicates a death is imminent is given when the writer indicates that neither the person to whom she is speaking or that person’s mother knows what is about to happen. In the next paragraph there is a mention that the person’s heart might be given the message to stop just a few minutes from the point the picture was taken and no one would know.

Another theme in the novel is that of Suzy’s interest in jellyfish. As can be assumed by the ending of the chapter “Touch” Suzy became interested in the jellyfish during her class trip to the aquarium. At the beginning of the introduction to the novel Suzy notes that a jellyfish pulses like a heartbeat even though they have no heart. Notice this emphasis on the heartbeat continues through this section of the novel. Suzy gives stats on heartbeats in the introduction section of the novel. She indicates the waves of the ocean are like a heartbeat. The worker at the aquarium told the students the sharks and stingrays could feel their heartbeats in the room, they didn’t need to wiggle their fingers at them.

Another theme that is introduced in this section of the novel is that of Suzy’s self-imposed silence. She refers to her decision by the term “not-talking” and believes it is different from refusing to talk. She has learned that her silence has somehow made her invisible, a phenomena that interests her because she’d always thought that invisibility had to do with vision, actively seeing or not seeing someone, and wasn’t dependent on whether or not they talked. Suzy tells her reader she wasn’t talking because she didn’t want to fill up the silence with unnecessary words. She put communication into two different categories. This first was “constant-talking” which her parents had once



accused her of doing. The second was small talk. Suzy said she got the feeling many people wished she would make small talk.

A final theme addressed is that of friendship. By the information that has been given so far it can be deduced that Suzy and Franny were friends when Franny was still alive but that something had gone wrong in their friendship. Suzy made the comment to her friend in "Sometimes Things Just Happen" that their friendship should never have ended the way it did. It can be guessed that Franny might have become friends with the pretty girls in the class. Suzy gives two clues that suggest this. First, she indicated that if Franny had been at the aquarium field trip, she would have been giggling with the other girls. Second, Suzy mentioned Sarah, the new girl in school. Suzy had liked Sarah because she was quiet but soon noticed she was hanging around with the pretty girls. Suzy's presentation of Sarah's new friendship makes it seem as if Suzy resented Sarah's choice.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Suzy's reasons for not talking. Why did she stop talking? Why does she say she isn't refusing to talk?

Discussion Question 2

Why was Suzy not happy with her mother's reasoning that Franny died because "some things just happen"? Does anything besides Franny's death seem to be bothering her?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the aspects of science (i.e. heartbeats, distance of the stars, jellyfish) that have been introduced so far. How do you think science will be important in the novel?

Vocabulary

perceived, psychedelic, immediately, chaperones, mantel, rigid, insisted, grotesque, explanation, remotely

Part One: Invisible — Part Two: Best Educated Guess

Summary

In the section “Invisible” it was the Irukandji jellyfish that particularly caught Suzy’s attention. She read on an informative sign that said the venom of this particular jellyfish was among the most dangerous poisons in the world. Deaths had been attributed to that jellyfish and it was suspected even more deaths might have been caused by these jellies that had been attributed to other causes. She read that this particular jellyfish was native to Australia but that the warming of the ocean waters was causing them to migrate to areas further and further away. When Suzy returned upstairs, her group of classmates had moved on without even visiting the jellyfish exhibit. Because they didn’t know about the tiny but fatally poisonous jellyfish, she knew she would be the only one who would wonder if that was what had caused Franny’s death.

In the section “How to Make a Friend” Suzy meets Franny for the first time at a swim class when they were five years old. Suzy is surprised when Franny swims underwater the whole way across the pool to where the rest of the class is. She believes then it is easy to make and keep a friend.

In the section “150 Million Stings” when Suzy returned home from the trip to aquarium her brother, Aaron and his boyfriend, Rocco, were there. On the way home she had calculated that for the 150 million jellyfish stings that were reported each year that meant there were four to five stings every second. Rocco told her that he and Aaron had hoped they could take Suzy and her mother to the movies but that her mother had told them Suzy had a doctor’s appointment. Rocco tried to get her to sit with him but she wanted to keep thinking about the jellyfish stings so she waved goodbye.

Inside, Suzy was greeted by her brother. He told her that middle school sucked. He mentioned even when he was in middle school all he wanted to do was get out. He almost told her that he hadn’t even lost his best friend, but stopped himself. Aaron tried to encourage her by telling her that it would get better. Suzy went up to her room and watched as Aaron and Rocco put a box of things her mother had given them in the car. They kissed and went off to the movies. Suzy believed their life was the kind people got to have when their words didn’t mess everything up. She believes she doesn’t deserve to be happy.

In Part Two the section “Hypothesis” defines a hypothesis as a best educated guess, a definition given to Suzy by Mrs. Turton.

In “Best Educated Guess” Suzy lined out the facts behind her belief that Franny’s death had been caused by the sting of a jellyfish. Because the relationship between she and Franny had ended badly, Suzy hoped to be able to at least prove there was a cause



behind Franny's death. The led her to her hypothesis that Franny's death had been caused by the sting of an Irukandji jellyfish. Her mother interrupted her thoughts telling her it was time to go to the doctor.

Analysis

While she was in the jellyfish exhibit by herself Suzy learned all sorts of interesting facts about jellyfish. The type of jellyfish that interested her the most was the Irukandji jellyfish. She was interested in this type of jellyfish in particular because information about it indicated that a number of documented deaths had been attributed to a sting by that jellyfish. Information also suggested others deaths that had been attributed to other causes could have been caused by a sting from the jellyfish. It was at this time that Suzy set her mind to prove that Franny's death had been caused by a jellyfish sting.

The theme of science continues in this section of the novel as the story enters Part Two. The introduction section of Part One was entitled "Purpose" and included a quote from Suzy's science teacher describing the way the students should introduce the purpose of their report. One of the things they were to show was how their topic related to human concerns. In Suzy's case, her topic, that of the jellyfish, related to Suzy's concerns because Suzy wanted to prove Franny was killed by the sting of a jellyfish. In the introduction to Part Two, a quote from Mrs. Turton explains what a hypothesis, or best educated guess, is. Now that Suzy has learned about these tiny jellyfish it is her hypothesis that Franny drowned because she was stung by an Irukandji jellyfish. Also relating to the theme of science, Suzy seems to be fascinated with numbers. She determined the number of people stung per second by jellyfish from the figure of 150 million stings per year given to her at the aquarium. She continued to count to five, imagining the growing number of people who had been affected by stings from jellyfish.

The theme of silence is addressed in Suzy's reference to her brother and his boyfriend. Suzy noticed how happy they were and believed they were happy because they hadn't ruined everything with their words. This comment indicates that Suzy somehow believed it was with her words, her talking, that she'd ruined the friendship she had with Franny. This suggestion gives the reader a clue why Suzy decided to stop talking. She hoped not to hurt anyone again. Even though she was punishing herself and others by not talking, notice Suzy indicated at the end of the chapter that she was the type of person who didn't deserve happiness.

In the section "How To Make A Friend" Suzy tells Franny what she remembered about the first time they'd met. They'd been in a swimming class. They were five years old. Suzy had been impressed not only because Franny could swim across the pool underwater but also because she smiled at her. Notice that Suzy presents the early days of their friendship in a way that shows how easy and natural their relationship was.

Two particular things to note in this section are Suzy's observation that her brother seemed too good to be true. Also note that Suzy wanted to prove there was a villain involved in Franny's death. She wanted that villain to be one who was worse than she.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the way the author uses simile to describe her characters. How do these simile fit the themes of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Suzy felt guilty about Franny's death? Is this a natural part of the grieving process or was there more to Suzy's guilt?

Discussion Question 3

Consider Suzy's calculations of the number of jellyfish stings. At one point while she was calculating she indicated she felt as if she was causing the stings. Why do you think she felt this way? Why was she so obsessed with counting?

Vocabulary

tentacles, enigma, deliberately, excruciating, hemorrhage, impending, imminent, migrated, mottled, constellations, defying, successive, fondue, rummaging, hypothesis, tentative, underlies, probability, random, villain



Part Three: Background — Dumb Old Words

Summary

In the section “Background” Suzy uses Mrs. Turton’s words to explain that the background portion of a research project describes why the research is important.

In “Early Life” Suzy describes the longevity of jellyfish. They have survived five mass extinctions and have been in existence at least 600 million years. She concludes they are the bridge from the world of the past to the present world. They are survivors.

In “How to Have a Friend” Suzy writes about a sleepover where she and Franny are supposed to stay at Suzy’s house but go to Franny’s because Franny got scared. Suzy likes Franny despite her faults. She remembers how upset Franny had been when Aubrey LaValley had told the class out loud that Franny wasn’t pretty or smart. Suzy had been the one to cheer Franny up after that comment. Even though their first grade teacher had suggested the two girls branch out and have more friends, Suzy had thought she and Franny had all they needed.

In “Dr. Legs” Suzy’s father met her and her mother at the doctor’s office. Suzy at first didn’t get out of the car but eventually gave into her mother’s request to give the psychiatrist a chance. Suzy was surprised because the doctor was a woman with long, thin legs. Suzy began calling her “Dr. Legs” to herself. Dr. Legs talked to Suzy even though Suzy never responded. She told Suzy there was no right or wrong way to grieve. Both Suzy’s parents told how Suzy’s refusal to talk affected them. Because she didn’t like what was happening Suzy made a list of the most interesting things she’d seen online instead of listening to her parents. Suzy turned her attention back to the doctor when she mentioned people sometimes needed the help of a professional. Suzy realized she needed the help of a professional with her jellyfish research. Suzy considered for a minute that her idea that she could prove Franny had been killed by a jellyfish was crazy, but pushed it out of her mind.

In “Dumb Old Words” Suzy had decided to stop talking one Saturday evening during dinner with her father. After her father had asked how her first days of school were Suzy knew that her father didn’t really want to hear the truth, he was trying to make small talk with her. She thought that small talk really amounted to nothing so she wondered why she should bother saying anything. She thought about the things she could have told her father. She liked her new science teacher. She liked the fact they’d be putting together research papers for her class. Instead of speaking, Suzy decided to listen to the sounds around her. Her father asked if she wasn’t speaking to him as if it were a joke. Her dad had been frustrated and told her to let him know when she was ready to make conversation. She’d already decided she might never make small talk again.



Analysis

Suzy is full of scientific knowledge. In the section entitled “Early Life” Suzy describes how long jellyfish have existed. In this section the amount of time that jellyfish have been around is compared to an 80-year life span. It is determined in this comparison that humans had lived during only the final 10 days of this lifespan. This comparison gives the reader, whether a middle school student like Suzy or an older reader, a comparison to which he can easily relate.

In her address to Franny in “How To Have A Friend” Suzy talks about the way she likes Franny even though Franny has faults. Notice in this section it is the pretty girl Aubrey who hurts Franny’s feelings by making the comment that Franny is not pretty or smart. This is the same Aubrey with whom Franny would become friends.

Adding to the themes of both grief and silence is Suzy’s visit to the psychiatrist. Suzy’s parents had chosen to take her for counseling because she had stopped talking. Ironically, they tell her the psychiatrist is a person to whom she can talk even though Suzy doesn’t plan to talk to her at all. One of the first things the psychiatrist told Suzy during her first visit was that there was no wrong way to grieve. This idea that there is no wrong way to grieve will come up later in the novel. Dr. Legs, as Suzy had nicknamed her because of her long, thin legs, tried to get through to Suzy by having her parents talk about how Suzy’s refusal to talk affected them. Without realizing it, Dr. Legs gave Suzy a clue to help with her jellyfish research when she told the girl people sometimes needed the help of a professional. Even though Dr. Legs was speaking in reference to Suzy’s grief, Suzy was thinking in terms of determining what had happened to Franny.

It is in this section of the novel that the reader learns the basis of Suzy’s decision not to talk. It had happened one night during her weekly dinner with her father at the Ming Palace. He’d asked her a question. She knew if she really told him what was on her mind he’d give her a sigh so she chose not to say anything. As she considered her answer she thought about the uselessness of small talk and how it filled up so much space without really meaning anything. She guesses that small talk has killed more friendships than silence. Suzy believed it was words that had ended her friendship with Franny. Instead of making small talk, Suzy concentrated on listening to the noises in the restaurant around her.

Notice also in this section the inclusion of the scientific facts that Mrs. Turton, Suzy’s science teacher, had taught her. There are 60,000 miles of blood vessels in a human body, snails can sleep for three years and every person has at least 20 billion atoms from William Shakespeare inside him. These facts add an extra dimension to a novel that is about death and grief. The author acknowledges death and the hurt and confusion that follows but doesn’t focus on it to the point that the tone of the novel is sad or depressing. While the reader gathers that Suzy is sad, they also understand her fascination with the world around her and her desire to make sense out of friend’s death.



Discussion Question 1

Do you think Suzy understands the difference between small talk and conversations? Why or why not? Give reasons to defend your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Dr. Leg's statement that there is no wrong way to grieve.

Discussion Question 3

Re-read the section "How To Have A Friend." What qualities of friendship does Suzy describe in this section of the novel?

Vocabulary

quest, extinction, barren, compressed, implanted, tedious, crisis, vortex, wretched, velociraptors, bioterrorism, exasperated



Part Three: Expert # 1 — How to Make a Promise

Summary

In “Expert #1” at home that night Suzy began researching jellyfish experts. She found one, a man from Japan, whom she found interesting. When she learned more about him she discovered he also wrote poetry. She rejected him because of the poetry.

In the section “Mote of Dust,” in science class Mrs. Turton showed the students a picture of Earth taken from outer space in 1968. In contrast she showed them a picture taken from three billion miles away that showed the Earth as just a dot. Suzy considered both views. She liked the one from 1968 better because it looked more like the Earth mattered. In the newer photo, the Earth looked insignificant. After showing them the pictures Mrs. Turton announced they needed to pick lab partners. Suzy thought the new girl, Sarah Johnston, was coming toward her but Aubrey grabbed her. Suzy wound up with Justin Maloney. Justin had a reputation for messing things up. While they were working, the stopwatch Justin had around his neck went off and Justin took a pill. He told Suzy he had ADHD. He promised her he would not mess things up for her.

At the end of class Mrs. Turton pulled Suzy aside and asked if she had a topic for her paper yet. Mrs. Turton seemed excited when Suzy told her in one word her topic was jellyfish. Before Suzy left, Mrs. Turton reminded her the project required the report be given orally.

In the section “How To Make a Promise” Franny has trouble remembering the names of the world explorers they are supposed to memorize so Suzy comes up with tricks to help her remember. As they dance and sing Suzy gives a princess wave like Aubrey. Franny asks her to send her a message if she ever begins acting like Aubrey. Franny tells Suzy she’s serious, that she wants Suzy to send her a big, major message. Suzy promises.

Analysis

In this section of the novel Suzy shares with the reader the promise that she made to Franny. It seems this promise is part of the reason why their friendship ended so badly. Suzy had imitated Aubrey one day when Suzy and Franny were studying together. Franny had made Suzy promise to send her a big message if she ever started acting like Aubrey.

In the theme of silence, Suzy got the bad news that her science class required her report be given orally. Mrs. Turton gave Suzy the news specifically and Suzy understood that if she wanted to pass sixth grade science she would have to talk out loud. Mrs. Turton probably gave Suzy the heads up about the oral report because Suzy was so



hesitant to say anything out loud. She'd had to ask twice to understand what it was the Suzy was telling her was the topic of her report.

Friendship is another theme addressed in this section of the novel. Suzy had always been of the opinion that Justin Maloney was a major mess up. She had made comments in the past that Justin was not intelligent as he still mouthed words when he read and was always doing outrageous things. She appears not to have a high opinion of the boy. When choosing lab partners, Suzy and Justin were last to be chosen so they wound up working together. Notice the promise that Justin made Suzy that he wouldn't mess up their lab sessions. Notice also that the boy had ADHD and was on medication for his disorder. He told Suzy that he would work hard. Contrast Suzy's dislike for Justin with her friendship with Franny. She liked Franny even though Franny was dyslexic and had trouble remembering things. Instead of criticizing Franny for not being very smart, Suzy helped Franny come up with ways to remember the facts she needed to know for her tests.

Notice that there are two promises made in this section of the novel. First, Suzy promises Franny that she will send her a message if Franny begins acting like Aubrey. The second promise is that of Justin to Suzy. He promises that he will work hard and not mess things up for Suzy. This promise on Justin's part gives the reader a sense that he admired and wished he could be friends with Suzy.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the first jellyfish expert that Franny identified. Talk about her reasons why she rejected him. Would you have done the same? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Franny meant for Suzy to take her as seriously as she did when she asked her to send a big message if she started acting like Aubrey? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way Suzy treated Franny as a friend. Do you think she was a good friend to Franny? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

evolved, literal, nirvana, conclusion, rejected, mote, vibrant, desolate, cosmologist, dissect, reputation, sarcasm, genuine, habitat, intently, circumnavigated, catered, imitating



Part Three: Experts #2 & #3 — Part Three: Crazy Brave

Summary

In the section “Experts #2 & #3” Suzy found people from all different fields who had researched jellyfish. She wanted one who had been stung so she included Diana Nyad as a possibility. Diana Nyad was a long distance swimmer who had failed four times in her attempts to swim from Cuba to Florida because she’d been stung by jellyfish. Suzy decided to temporarily reject Diana Nyad because she admitted she was a little afraid of the lady who looked so tough.

Her third possible expert was Angel Yanagihara who was lucky to have survived the sting of a box jellyfish when she was young. Angel had also developed a treatment for jellyfish stings. Suzy thought this woman even looked a little like Franny with her strawberry blonde hair. She decided to reject Angel when she saw the woman testing her treatment on a mouse, injecting it with venom and then waiting until the last minute to give it the treatment she’d developed. Suzy thought the woman’s ability and willingness to inflict pain reminded her of herself, not Franny. The chapter concluded with Suzy finding Jamie and deciding he was the one.

In “How Not to Say Something Important” it is their fifth grade year. Suzy has not told Franny her parents are getting a divorce. She tries to tell her on the morning bus but before she has a chance to say anything Franny asks her who she likes. Suzy doesn’t understand at first and Franny clarifies she’s talking about boys. She says she likes Dylan Parker, an admission that surprises Suzy because Dylan has a reputation for being unkind. Suzy realizes things are about to get knotted up in her life, just like her frizzy hair. While she can cut the knots out of her hair, Suzy realizes she can’t just cut the knots out of her life.

In “Crazy Brave” Suzy described Dr. Jamie Seymour, the man she’d decided was the expert from who she wanted to get advice. Jamie had been stung by an Irukandji jellyfish. He suffered for two days. He’d allowed the whole process to be videotaped. As soon as he recovered from the sting, Jamie went right back to the jellyfish. She hoped he was the one who could help her to write a new ending to Franny’s story, one in which Suzy would appear as a good guy and not a villain.

Analysis

At the end of the chapter “Crazy Brave” Suzy states that she hopes Jamie, a jellyfish expert who has caught her attention, will help her change the end of her friendship with Franny so that she becomes a hero instead of a villain. Like many people who grieve, Suzy not only missed Franny, she also felt she was somehow a villain in Franny’s life.



She wanted to prove herself a worthy friend by discovering the reason Franny died. At this point she somehow believed that discovering the cause of Franny's death would make her feel better about it.

In her quest to find a cause for Franny's death, Suzy researched several people she considered experts in jellyfish. One of these was the long-distance swimmer Diana Nyad. Suzy decided not to try to contact Diana Nyad because the tough looking woman scared her, a touch of comic relief in Suzy's tragic story. Suzy did decide to keep an eye on the swimmer.

The third expert that Suzy considered was a woman who first reminded Suzy of Franny because of her straight strawberry blonde hair. After Suzy did more investigation on this woman she was horrified when she saw the woman inject a mouse with jellyfish venom then watch while it suffered. Suzy decided this was not the expert for her because she saw herself in the woman's actions. Suzy believed she treated Franny as this woman had treated the mouse, doing something to hurt Franny; and then watching as Franny suffered.

This section of the novel also gives the reader the first idea what it was that might have broken down the friendship between Franny and Suzy. Suzy's parents had just told her they were getting a divorce. Suzy wanted to share this bad life experience with Franny but wasn't able to because Franny wanted to talk about what boy she liked. Suzy was shocked to learn that Franny liked Dylan, the boy who was often unkind. Notice the way Suzy compares her life, which she felt was getting knotted up, to her frizzy hair that often got knotted up. While she can cut the knots out of her hair, she can't cut the knots out of her life. While Franny was becoming "girly" Suzy didn't yet understand her friend's new outlook on life. Just because they were entering middle school, Suzy didn't understand why that meant she "had" to like a boy. She's too caught up in the tragedy of her parents' divorce, a life change she hasn't even been able to tell Franny about.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss why Suzy was drawn to Jamie as a jellyfish expert. What did she hope he could do for her?

Discussion Question 2

How did Suzy's parents' divorce affect her? How did it make a difference to Suzy that she couldn't tell Franny about the divorce?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the image of the bottles hung from the tree representing each horrible mistake. Why is it significant that these bottles made music when they knocked together?

Vocabulary

propulsion, anatomy, remotely, temporarily, accusation, cinch, nonchalantly, writhed



Part Four: Variables — How to Get Things Wrong

Summary

In “Variables,” the introduction to Part Four of the novel, Suzy quotes her science teacher’s definition of variables, the things that help scientists determine what is causing the phenomena they are researching.

In the section “Blooms” Suzy reports the jellyfish are taking over the oceans. Because too many fish have been taken from the ocean the jellyfish have less competition for food. Additionally, jellyfish can survive in warm, chemical filled, oxygen deprived water where other species can’t live. Their populations have gotten so big, Suzy states, that it is feared they might eventually starve out the whale population.

In “How to Drift Apart” Suzy notices Franny begins worrying about her clothes. Every time Susy tries to tell her that her parents are divorced, Franny is busy smoothing her skirt or looking in a mirror. Franny doesn’t just worry about her hair, she also worries about Suzy’s, telling her if they found the right product they might be able to make it look cute. Suzy wonders what happened to the time when Franny wanted to hear about the things Suzy knew. Suzy doesn’t understand any of the things Franny is beginning to like and wonders what they’ll have to talk about.

Because Suzy never bought anything for her hair, Franny buys something for her. It only makes Suzy’s hair worse. Franny suggests Suzy really does have impossible hair. Suzy remembers her promise to tell Franny if she ever began acting like Aubrey. Suzy isn’t sure how to tell Franny how she’s acting and how she’s making Suzy feel. About the same time Aaron and Rocco came to eat dinner with Suzy and her mom. Aaron seems concerned and tells Suzy she has a few hard years ahead of her. Rocco agrees saying he wouldn’t want to go back to middle school.

In “A Click, Then Silence” Suzy tried to contact Jamie by e-mail. She tried putting her words several different ways but couldn’t get her message right. She decided to try calling. She waiting up until midnight knowing it would be in the afternoon in Australia. Her call was answered but Suzy couldn’t bring herself to say anything. She heard a click, and then silence when the receptionist hung up.

In “How to Get Things Wrong” everything changed in middle school. Suzy and Franny are in a new school with more kids. They have lockers. At first, Suzy and Franny still sit together at lunch but soon Suzy notices Franny beginning to talk to other people instead of coming straight to their table. One day Franny even sits with the pretty girls instead of with Suzy. Franny waves Suzy over but Suzy refuses to sit with them.



A few days later Franny tells Suzy she's going to sit with the pretty girls again. She invites Suzy again and this time Suzy joins them. The following day one of the girls talks about wrapping her legs and stomach in plastic wrap during her dance class. Suzy learns this is so she'll sweat more so her pants will fit better. Suzy began talking about sweat being sterile and pee being sterile. The girls look like they are trying not to laugh at her. Suzy offered Franny her strawberry Fruit Roll-Up and called her strawberry girl, her old nickname. Franny was angry. Before she walked away, Franny asked Suzy why she had to be so weird. Suzy was surprised when she saw all the popular girls were following Franny.

Analysis

As has become a pattern, Suzy starts this part of the novel with one of the surprising facts she has learned about jellyfish. Because people are taking more and more fish from the water decreasing the competition the jellyfish have for food, the jellyfish population is exploding. One of the interesting facts that she notes about jellyfish is that one scientist believes the whale population might eventually be in danger of extinction because the jellyfish are multiplying so rapidly. Unlike other species, the jellyfish aren't harmed by the warming of the ocean waters or the presence of chemicals in the water. Jellyfish have even caused problems for power plants when these organisms clogged the seawater cooling systems.

Suzy makes a point in her discussion of jellyfish that even though people aren't thinking about these creatures, they are still taking over the world. Suzy indicates that people spend their time thinking about things that don't really matter while they ignore things that threaten to harm the universe and life as humans know it.

While Suzy shares in this section of the novel that the populations of jellyfish are robust, she shares that her friendship with Franny was withering. Although the two had always sat together during lunch, Franny had begun sitting with the pretty girls. At first she invited Suzy to join them but after Suzy went off on a scientific tangent about the sterility of human urine the other girls laughed at her and Franny accused her of being weird.

Suzy's hair, which she describes as a frizzy mess, is one of the first areas of contention between the two girls. Suzy had noticed that Franny has begun obsessing about her clothes and hair. At first, Suzy is just frustrated because she wants the old Franny back, the Franny who used to talk about important things. Suzy has still not felt free to share with Franny the hurt she feels about her parents' divorce. Apparently Franny has shown no interest in the status of her friend's family. Franny seemed most worried about Suzy's frizzy hair. In fact, Franny was so obsessed with Suzy's impossible hair that she managed to make Suzy feel bad about her hair even though Suzy had really never thought about it before. It was during the visit where Franny tried to work on Suzy's hair that Suzy remembered the promise she had made to Franny to let her know if she ever started acting like Aubrey. Suzy believed it was time to send that message to Franny but wasn't sure how to go about it.



Remember from this section Suzy's comments about urine. First, she told the girls that urine was sterile. Second, she told them that urine had been used by animals at times to send signals to other animals.

Discussion Question 1

Because Suzy is narrating the novel she is able to tell the reader how Franny made her feel bad when she started acting like one of the pretty girls in school. Consider Suzy's story from the other point of view. How do you think Franny might have been feeling about the changes in the relationship with Suzy?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Suzy's desire to talk about "important things" with Franny. Can a thing be important to one person and not another? Do you think Suzy was being selfish and just wanting to talk about what was important to her?

Discussion Question 3

What was the significance of the increasing populations of jellyfish that Suzy noted at this point in the novel?

Vocabulary

variables, independent, controlled, dependent, simultaneously, expertise, perished, decade, biodiversity, obvious, sterile



Part Four: Face-to-Face — Zombie Ants

Summary

In “Face to Face” Suzy spent her 45-minute sessions each week with Dr. Legs in silence. She has realized how much people miss when they are talking all the time. They don’t hear the sounds of their lives or pick up on other people’s signals. It was in her fourth session that Dr. Legs explained to Suzy that she thought people had developed language because they needed to be understood. She encouraged Suzy to say what was on her mind, but to do it face-to-face and not through email or texting. She said this kind of communication often led to miscommunications as people missed out on nonverbal cues. Suzy smiled imagining herself talking face-to-face with Jamie. Dr. Legs assumed her smile meant she’d been of some help. She told Suzy’s parents they’d made a major breakthrough that day.

In “Millions of Things to Learn” as Suzy continued her research on jellyfish, she realized how much there was to learn about these organisms. She wished she could sit down with Jamie and ask him all sorts of thing about jellyfish. She knew the idea of going to see him in Australia was crazy but wondered if such a trip could happen.

In the section “How to Know Things Have Changed” Suzy continues to sit with the pretty girls and Franny for a few weeks. They don’t talk to her and she doesn’t talk to them. Finally she goes back to the table where she and Franny used to sit. Franny doesn’t join her. One day Suzy decides to ride her bike to Franny’s house and apologize for being weird. When she gets there she hears three girls in Franny’s back yard. They are laughing and spraying each other with a water hose. Franny looks up at Suzy but says nothing, just returns to the game. Suzy sees herself as she believes Franny sees her, as someone who is out of place.

In “Zombie Ants” students in Suzy’s science class began giving reports. She counted down how many reports they were away from hers. Sarah Johnston researched zombie ants, a topic Suzy found interesting. The students applauded when Sarah was finished. Suzy wrote a note to Jamie in her science notebook that she hoped when she gave her report the students would do more than applaud; they would feel something and understand.

Analysis

The topic of silence is addressed again in this section of the novel as Dr. Legs tried to explain to Suzy the reason why humans began talking to one another to begin with. Dr. Legs told Suzy that language had been developed to give humans a way to communicate with one another. When she asked Suzy if she had something she wanted to communicate Suzy nodded but didn’t tell the psychiatrist what it was she wanted others to understand. Again, while Dr. Legs thought Suzy was listening to her advice



with Franny's death on her mind, Suzy was actually applying what Dr. Legs was telling her to her goal of discovering if it was a jellyfish that caused Franny's death. Again, it is ironic that Dr. Legs sparked a thought in Suzy that she might be able to travel to Australia to talk to Jamie face-to-face as Dr. Legs suggested that she do.

On the flip side of Dr. Leg's argument in favor of communication, Suzy gives her opinion of the value of silence in this section. She makes her point using an actual piano composition called 4'33" in which the pianist plays nothing for a time span of four minutes and thirty-three seconds. In the information Suzy gives about the piece, she indicates that those in the audience learned to listen to the sounds of life around them instead of just thinking of it as silence. The idea is presented almost as if there is music in everyday noises. Compare this with the image of the bottles hung in a tree to represent a woman's regrets. Even over time these symbols of regret made music in the way they knocked together. It was only in silence, Suzy says, that she began paying attention to the sounds that were all around her. Although she admitted she wasn't very good at it yet, she also began trying to interpret nonverbal clues people gave about what they wanted to say. Suzy has grown up from a girl who had once chattered all the time, to the point her parents accused her of constant-talking, to the point she believed fewer words were better because it made what one did say more important.

It seems that in order for Suzy to distract herself from her grief that Franny was dead, she focused on researching jellyfish. She grasped at the idea that Jamie could share with her his knowledge about jellyfish, face-to-face and could help to improve her knowledge of the creatures.

In the theme of friendship Suzy explains to Franny in one of her present tense sections that her feelings are hurt again as the pretty girls at the table no longer acknowledge her presence when she eats lunch with them. She eventually moves back to the old table where she and Franny used to eat. Franny doesn't ask her to come back. Suzy continues to call Franny but Franny always makes excuses not to spend time together. One day Suzy decides to go to Franny's house in person to beg her to let them start over as friends and but she goes away when she finds that Franny is playing with two other girls, two of the pretty girls. Franny notices Suzy watching them but doesn't speak to her or invite her to join them.

Going back to the theme of silence, Suzy wrote a note to Jamie in her notebook telling him what she hoped to be able to communicate through her report. She hoped she'd be able to get the students to understand how the jellyfish are changing the oceans and how these changes pertain to their lives. She wanted her report to make her fellow classmates feel something.

Discussion Question 1

Consider Suzy's idea that less frequent talking makes what one does say more important. Do you think this is necessarily the case? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way that Franny is treating Suzy. What message is she trying to send Suzy? Why is she trying to send this message?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the references to music as presented this far in the novel. Do you believe there is music in everyday noise? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

fundamental, conspiracy, nonverbal, clones, replica, primitive, syndrome, factorials, scoliosis, mutated, precise, desiccated



Part Four: How to Lose a Friend — Part Five: Stronger Than Us

Summary

In the section “How to Lose a Friend” Suzy and her class are at a campout at Rock Lake. Mr. Andrews calls the students over to the place where he is standing. He asks them what they hear. Suzy hears a variety of things including birds, the thud of a base line in someone’s music and the rustling of students. Suzy says she hears an orchestra in all the combined songs of the birds and insects. Mr. Andrews tries to make it sound like he’s interested but it is clear he isn’t and the class laughs. He says he was actually talking about the base line, teaching them things with lower frequencies travel farther than those at high frequencies.

Later, Suzy hears a commotion down at the pond. Dylan and Kevin are throwing a frog back and forth. Franny is standing next to Dylan as if she is encouraging him. He turns to a tree. Suzy senses he’s about to throw the frog at the tree and stares at Franny hard. Suzy remembers a Franny who used to cry at cruelty. Now Franny narrows her eyes at Suzy and Suzy sees a deadness in them. Suzy is angry with herself because she didn’t know how to stop it. Later in the evening Suzy hears the other kids whispering and laughing in the dark. Someone is standing over her spitting on her check. Suzy pretends to be asleep as Franny runs away.

In “Taking Over” Suzy couldn’t sleep the night before she was to give her report in science. She hoped after she was finished, she wouldn’t be the only one who understood. In “How Not to Forget” Suzy remembers her promise to give Franny a signal, a big one, if she started acting like Aubrey. She thinks that if she is going to do so before school is out, she is running out of time. The introduction section of Part Five “Procedure” includes Mrs. Turton’s explanation to the students that this section of the report should include a list of materials, what they did and how they did it.

In the section “Stronger Than Us” Suzy explains that a jellyfish is stronger than a human because their sting is the fastest reaction in the animal kingdom and because they can sting even after they are dead. Suzy also notes these jellyfish don’t get bogged down by drama or even love. Their mating was even done in a way that was void of emotion.

Analysis

In this section of chapters notice that Suzy seems to wish she were void of emotions, just like jellyfish are. This desire not to feel anything is a step in the grieving process. It appears that the grieving process began for Suzy long before Franny ever died. Even though they’d been best friends since they were five, Franny had abandoned Suzy for the popular group. Suzy can remember a time when Franny cried when she saw a



person being cruel to another person or an animal. Now, Suzy watches as Franny allows a boy she likes to kill a frog just because he thinks it will impress Franny. Suzy tries to make eye contact with Franny to beg her to stop what is about to happen but when Franny meets Suzy's gaze, all she sees is coldness. Later that evening, the kids in the class dare Franny to spit on Suzy as she slept in her sleeping bag. It is this act on Franny's part that seems to hurt Suzy the most. Notice that it is in this section of chapters that Suzy describes her decision to send Franny the sign for which Franny had asked.

Also in this section an incident that relates to the theme of silence garners the criticism and ridicule of Suzy's classmates when she gave a good answer to a question that her teacher had asked, just not the one for which he was looking. Although he was in the wrong because he didn't tip the members of the class off in anyway about what he wanted them to listen for, Mr. Andrews was hoping one of the members of the class would comment about the base line they could hear from someone's rap music. Instead of pointing out the validity of Suzy's answer, he made a joke out of her response when Suzy told the class she could hear an orchestra in the different sounds being made by the birds and animals. By hearing music in the everyday sounds, just as the composer in the previous section had hoped to make his listeners aware, Suzy has recognized the individual sounds come together to make music.

Discussion Question 1

After Dylan kills the frog, Suzy is upset with herself because she wasn't able to stop it. Do you think she's referring to the death of the frog or the changes in Franny? Or is she talking about both?

Discussion Question 2

How did Mr. Andrews help to encourage the other students in the class to make fun of Suzy? Compare his response to Suzy's unexpected answer to Mrs. Turton's response to Justin's comment about the zombie ants. How might Mr. Andrews have handled the situation differently?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Suzy's desire that she, like jellyfish, was devoid of emotions. How does this desire relate to the grieving process? What do you think humans might be like if they didn't have emotions?

Vocabulary

category, permission, rhythmic, frequencies, commotion, procedure, harpoons, detached



Part Five: Imagine a Creature — Part Five: Even More Wrong

Summary

In the section “Imagine a Creature” as Suzy prepared to give her report about jellyfish, she remembered Jamie allowing himself to be videotaped as he suffered from the sting of the jellyfish. She believed if he could go through that for the public, she could give her report. Suzy began talking and told her classmates all about jellyfish. Mrs. Turton finally interrupted her, telling her she’d have to wrap up soon. Suzy forcibly told her teacher she wasn’t finished. She told them about the most important part, about the Irukandji jellyfish and the number of documented deaths it had caused as well as those that had been attributed to something else. She thought at first she had made them understand but when she looked at her classmates she saw one of the pretty girls making the signal for crazy with her finger next to her ear. She noticed that even the teacher looked like she was concerned about Suzy’s behavior. Suzy realized she’d said something wrong. She was so upset she dropped some of her papers. As she picked them up she heard someone cough into their hand, actually saying the word “medusa.” The others laughed and then all of them began coughing the word medusa. Suzy couldn’t stop the tears welling up in her eyes even after Mrs. Turton told the students to hush. She wrote another note to Jamie telling him she wished she could meet him because she thought he would understand. She asked him also in her note how he could love a creature that everyone else hated.

In the section “How to Send a Message” Suzy decides to send Franny her message with urine. The day before the last day of school, she pees into small round takeout containers then puts those containers in the freezer. The next morning she packs them in an insulated cooler and tells her mother she needs to be at school early. Once she’s at school Suzy heads toward the lockers.

In “Terribly Wrong” Mrs. Turton asked Suzy to stay after class. Before he left Justin put a piece of notebook paper covered with jellyfish sketches on her desk. Mrs. Turton started by telling Suzy she was giving her an “A” on her report, something she rarely did. Then she told Suzy she could join her in the classroom for lunch if she’d like. They could talk, or just be quiet, she said. When Suzy left the room she wondered how she could have made an “A” on the report and still feel like she’d done something wrong.

In the section “Even More Wrong” the frozen disks of urine slip out of their containers easily. Suzy slides them in through the slats in Franny’s locker. Even as she works, Suzy thinks to herself that her actions aren’t about revenge but instead about sending Franny the message she’d said she wanted. Suzy believes that when Franny sees and understands what she’s done she will know this was Suzy’s sign. They will be able to start over again. After she finishes Suzy goes to the bathroom to wash her hands. She thinks how in 40 minutes, Franny’s locker will be soaked.



Analysis

Suzy hits a particularly low spot in this section of the novel. All this time she'd been hoping the report she was writing about jellyfish would make her fellow students think about the world around and understand there is a bigger world than just middle school. Instead of getting through to the students Suzy just earned a bad nickname for herself. The students began calling her medusa probably because of her frizzy hair. After she had worked up the courage to give her report orally, Suzy felt as if she were the most hated creature in the world.

This idea that she is the most hated creature in the world made Suzy want to meet Jamie even more. She wanted to meet him because she saw the way he still interacted with the jellyfish even after they hurt him. She wanted to know why he still liked the jellyfish and if he could like her as well as though she believed she was hated by everyone. Notice that when Suzy psyched herself up to give her oral report it was the information she'd found about Jamie and his experiences with the jellyfish that she drew on for the courage she needed. She figured if Jamie could survive the sting of a jellyfish and had the courage to allow his suffering after that sting to be videoed, she could garner the courage she needed to give an oral report in middle school.

The reader finally learns the details of the terrible thing that Suzy did to Franny to make her understand she was acting like Aubrey and the other pretty girls. Just as she'd told the girls in an earlier section of the novel that animals often sent messages using urine. Susie decided to send her message using urine.

Notice also in this section of the novel that Justin again made an offer of friendship to Suzy. While she was giving her report about jellyfish, Justin had been filling a piece of notebook paper with sketches of jellyfish. The sketches show he was paying attention to what she was saying and also that he was interested in her topic.

Discussion Question 1

Consider the reactions of Mrs. Turton as well as the individual students to Suzy's report. What reaction stands out most to you?

Discussion Question 2

How does Justin make an offer of friendship to Suzy?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Suzy actually said anything wrong in her report? Or was she just the victim of immature classmates? Give reasons to support your answer.

Vocabulary

cringed, writhing, attributed, devour, accurate



Part Five: Venom — Part Five: What I Don't Want to Talk About

Summary

In the section “Venom” Suzy wrote another note to Jamie telling him that she thought they both understood that just because a creature had venom didn't make it bad. It was the more fragile creatures that had the most need to protect themselves.

In “Look at Me” Suzy closes her locker and walks toward homeroom when she sees Franny walk up. She doesn't turn around when the other kids start shouting and laughing when they see that Franny's locker is soaked with urine. Suzy waits to turn around and looks up when she knows the students are moving away. Franny's shoulders are rounded as if she is crying. Suzy thinks to herself that Franny has to look at her in order for the message to work. The secretary brings Franny plastic bags and Franny fills the bags with her things. She walks away with the bags and never looks at Suzy.

Suzy realizes she never thought that would be the last time she'd see Franny. She'd only thought that instead of a new beginning, this is an ending. Suzy feels nothing, even with the other kids celebrate the end of school by having paper airplane contests. It is not until when she's at home and discovers she's started her period that Suzy feels shame, like the blood is accusatory.

In “Pollination” the day after Suzy gave her report, the students were still calling her medusa. She decided to eat lunch with Mrs. Turton. Mrs. Turton told Suzy she'd talked to her teachers from the previous years and knew there had been some changes in Suzy's behavior. She wanted to make sure Suzy was okay. Suzy nodded that she was okay. Mrs. Turton started a video about pollination she thought Suzy would like. In the middle of the video Justin interrupted to bring in his bibliography. He greeted Suzy with the name Belle. He asked what she was watching and Mrs. Turton invited him to join them. He did even though Suzy frowned. Justin was engrossed. They watched the video several times before lunch ended. In the hall, Justin thanked Suzy for letting him watch with her. He called her Belle again. She turned and put her hands on her hips but before she had a chance to say anything he asked her if the bell was the biggest part. Suzy realized he was talking about jellyfish. He said he'd never been a fan of Medusa, but thought Belle was a good name. Suzy realized he was telling her he wouldn't ever call her Medusa. They walked to math class together but in silence.

In “The Worst Kind of Silence” in the days after school ended Suzy waits for a phone call. She knows her mother will be mad when she learns what Suzy did but Suzy hopes she can make her understand. In “Two Days' Silence” Suzy is still waiting for the phone or doorbell to ring. In “And Then More Silence” after four days Suzy realizes Franny isn't going to call. She thinks their relationship is somehow unfinished.



In “What I Don’t Want to Talk About” Suzy doesn’t want to talk about the funeral at St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church. Even though Suzy and her mother got there early, all the seats were already filled. Suzy looks at a program with a picture of Franny standing on the beach the day she died. Suzy sees Aubrey and Molly, two of the pretty girls, sitting in the back pew crying. She hates them because she believes that their tears, proof they cared about Franny, and her lack of tears mean that Franny was right in leaving Suzy behind. More than anything, Suzy remembers being angry at the funeral because she felt like everyone had given up. She knew the funeral was a sign that everything was over and they were supposed to start getting on with life but Suzy just couldn’t accept it.

Analysis

In the theme of grief Suzy finally shares with her reader information about Franny’s funeral. Suzy felt there was something wrong with her because she couldn’t cry at the funeral. She watched as the girls who had been friends with Franny such a short time sat in their pew in the church and cried. Suzy was angry with them because they felt they had the right to cry even though they’d known Franny only a short amount of time. Although the book has not really focused on Suzy’s guilt as much as it has her search to find some way to understand Franny’s death, Suzy has moved through most of the five generally accepted stages of grief through the course of the novel. She first denied that Franny was dead when her mother originally gave her the news earlier in the novel. In this section of the novel, the readers sees her dealing with her feelings of anger.

Notice the way the Justin was able to communicate with Suzy even though she wouldn’t talk to him. He accepted her strangeness just as Suzy had accepted Franny when she was strange as a younger child. Justin heard the other students making fun of Suzy and her hair by calling her medusa. The tentacles of a jellyfish would look somewhat like medusa with snakes wiggling and swirling around her head. Instead of calling Suzy by a nickname based on the most dangerous part of the jellyfish, the tentacles where the stingers are located, Justin decided to come up with a different nickname for Suzy. He began calling her Belle, an interesting choice since the bell of the jellyfish is the only part of the jellyfish that a person can touch without being in danger of being stung. Even Suzy recognized Justin’s nickname for her as a a symbol to her that he didn’t want to hurt her feelings and would not call her by the hateful nickname the other students were calling her by.

The theme of silence is addressed also with Justin and Suzy’s growing friendship. Even though Suzy won’t talk to him, Justin still communicates with her. It doesn’t seem to bother him that she isn’t talking. Notice the way that Suzy says that after Justin explained to her why he was calling her Belle, that they walked to math class together. She describes the silence between them as they walked together as the “not talking kind of silence, the kind that so few people seemed to understand” (p. 206). In the opposite of this best kind of silence, Suzy also describes the worst kind of silence. This silence came after Suzy sabotaged Franny’s locker with her urine. Suzy had expected Franny to get in touch with her, say that she realized how wrong she had been acting,



apologize and suggest that they start over. Instead of getting in touch with her, however, Suzy heard nothing from Franny except for silence.

Notice in this section that Suzy describes the picture included on the program for Franny's funeral. It is the same one she described being taken in the introduction to the novel. The reader now knows that in that introduction Suzy was guessing what a few of the last minutes of Franny's life might have been like. She imagines her friend looking out at the sea as her mother took her picture. Notice that Suzy believed it was cruel for that photo to be the one chosen for the program as it was printed on the program that the picture was taken the last day of Franny's life.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Franny realized who had sabotaged her locker? Do you think she knew it was Suzy sending a message? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think might have happened had Franny looked up at Suzy the way that Suzy wanted her to? Do you think Franny would have understood any better about what had happened?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Suzy feel angry at the funeral? Do you think this was a reasonable reaction? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

fragile, disconnected, linger, crimson, accusation, predators, pollination, bibliography, essential, detention, evidence, hovers, radiated, droning, caption



Part Five: Things Are Closer Than They Appear — Part Five: Spare Change

Summary

In “Things are Closer Than They Appear” even though her mother had woken her up, Suzy had gone back to sleep. They were running late. Even as she tried to hurry Suzy struggled to remember the dream she’d been having. She’d been having to swim to get to Jamie through water filled with Irukandji jellyfish. Just as she had gotten close enough to Jamie to reach for his hand, she saw a jellyfish in the water next to her. She didn’t know if she’d get out of the water or get stung first. It wasn’t until she was waiting for the bus she realized that whatever had happened in the dream, whether it was reaching Jamie or getting stung, it was better than doing nothing. At that point, she wondered if it was really so crazy for her to think she should go see Jamie.

In “Bridget Brown” Suzy tells the story of a girl who’d bought a ticket and taken a plane from Florida to Nashville by herself. She’d learned for the story that it was legal for a child over the age of 12 to fly alone as long as they had a valid boarding pass. Suzy decided to get together money, make a good plan, gather her nerve and fly to Australia.

In “Deadline” Suzy began seeing flyers advertising the school’s winter dance in the hallways. Suzy decided she wasn’t going to the dance because she’d be out of the country by Feb. 10, the day on which it was scheduled.

In “Instant Calm” as soon as Suzy made her plan to go to Australia, she felt instantly calm. She continued to eat lunch with Mrs. Turton. Justin joined them as well. One day Sarah Johnston came to Mrs. Turton’s room to deliver a note while Sarah and Justin were there watching a film about an astronomer who described that among the atoms in living creatures were those of collapsed stars. Sarah looked interested and Mrs. Turton asked her to stay but when Suzy frowned Sarah left.

In “How to Plan Your Escape” Suzy learned she’d need a credit card to buy her plane ticket to go to Australia. It would cost \$1,000. She knew her father always went to the bathroom to wash his hands after he put the card on the table to pay the waitress. In the time that passed between the time he left the card and the time the waitress picked it up, she began copying the card onto a pink index card. It took her four different tries to copy all the information onto her index card. She didn’t wonder if she was doing the right thing. She believed her father would understand when she explained to him why she had done it.

In “Spare Change” Suzy knew she’d also need cash in Australia. She had nearly \$300 in her piggy bank but knew she’d need more. She began stealing a little bit of money out of her mother’s wallet each week. She hoped to collect \$500 before she left. Suzy



felt bad because she was taking from her mother's wallet but reasoned it was because of her mother's bad excuse that she had to go to Australia in the first place.

Analysis

It is in this section of the novel that Suzy began to put together a real plan to go to Australia to talk to Jamie. She's had a dream in which she was a split second away both from being stung by a jellyfish and by being rescued from the jellyfish by Jamie. After she's had time to think about her dream she decided she was being given a message that the most dangerous stance for her at that point in her life was to stay still. In the grieving process, it is dangerous to get caught in one stage and not move beyond that stage. Suzy interpreted the dream, however, as physically standing still. She decided the dream was a sign that she should make her trip to Australia.

Notice in this section that Sarah had come into Mrs. Turton's classroom one day while Suzy was there eating lunch. Sarah had seemed interested in the film that Suzy was watching but instead of being forward and sitting down anyway like Justin did even though Suzy frowned at him, Sarah took the hint and left. Notice this is not the first time that Sarah has shown interest in Suzy. This is, however, the first time that Suzy discouraged Sarah's interest.

Notice Suzy's rationale when she stole money from her mother for her trip to Australia. She reasoned that she was justified in taking money from her mother because her mother had given her the bad explanation for Franny's death that had caused Suzy to want to go to Australia in the first place.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the dream that Suzy had about Jamie and the jellyfish. Do you agree with her interpretation of her dream? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the flaws that Suzy saw in Bridget Brown's plans. If Suzy were to make more careful plans than Bridget, do you think she would be able to pull off her trip? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of the heroes and villains dance. How does the theme of the dance tie in with the novel?

Vocabulary

inexplicable, disheveled, verge, rummaging, emerged, valid, astounding, oxymoron, trapezoids, exact, replica



Part Five: Goodbye, Thor — Part Five: Tuesday, 3 p.m.

Summary

In the section “Goodbye, Thor” on the day they were to dissect the earthworm Justin offered to do the cutting. He decided they should give it a name to give it some dignity. Suzy smiled when he mentioned Thor. As they worked together Justin asked if Belle was Snow White’s real name. To Justin’s surprise Suzy answered it was Beauty’s name. As they continued with the dissection, Justin’s stopwatch beeped. He got out his pill. Suzy held out her hand. He handed her the pill and she examined it. When she asked, he said the pills slowed everything down so all the sounds and colors and lists he made weren’t all coming at him at once. When Suzy asked if it was like hearing an orchestra instead of just random sounds, he said that was exactly it.

In “How to Say Goodbye” Suzy saw Dr. Legs a week before she was to leave for Australia. Suzy believed she’d collected everything she would need for her trip. She’d even made a reservation online at a motel. The only thing Suzy was having trouble with was the idea of leaving home. She asked Dr. Legs how to say goodbye. Dr. Legs assumed she was talking about saying goodbye to Franny, something of which Suzy hadn’t thought. At the end of their session Dr. Legs told Suzy she was proud of her as she had come so far.

In “Goodbye, Ming Palace” as Suzy sat with her father at Ming Palace for their 21st dinner since she’d stopped talking she thought about the plans she’d made for her trip. She’d buy her ticket on Tuesday and leave for Australia on Thursday. He dad told her about a place where they had found real dinosaur tracks. He suggested they could visit sometime. Suzy’s fortune from her fortune cookie was blank. She thought she should have gotten her father’s that stated: “SMOOTH LONG JOURNEY! GREAT EXPECTATIONS.” (p. 254). On the way home, Suzy heard an announcement about Diana Nyad’s coming fifth attempt at swimming from Cuba to Florida. She had to admit that even though she woman seemed scary, Suzy liked her because she knew what she wanted and wouldn’t let any limitations get in her way. She waved goodbye to her dad when he dropped her off at her mother’s house. She’s learned its easier to keep a secret when she isn’t talking.

In “Tuesday, 3 p.m.” Suzy was surprised how easy it was to buy her ticket. She also called the Green Hills Airport Shuttle and arranged a ride to the airport. The shuttle would pick her up at the university.



Analysis

The most significant part of this section is the strides that Suzy made in connecting with Justin. Even though she still really didn't consider him a friend, she spoke to him for the first time during a lab class where they had to dissect an earthworm. Even though he was a boy, Justin recognized that Suzy wouldn't want to do the actual cutting and offered to take care of that part. He also suggested they give the earthworm a name. Suzy had begun to like Justin because he showed respect to her and to the worm even though it was already dead. It was after they named the worm that Suzy spoke to Justin for the first time. Also in this same scene, Suzy showed Justin that she was able to understand what the world must be like for Justin without his ADHD medication. She was interested in the struggle he faced even though she didn't suffer from the same condition or completely understand what his life was like. The developing friendship between the two shows that even people who are different can be friends.

In her final appointment with Dr. Legs before she planned to leave for Australia, Suzy asked the doctor how a person should say goodbye. Dr. Legs believed Suzy was talking about saying goodbye to Franny and believed they'd made a huge breakthrough. Suzy, however, was thinking about saying goodbye to her family when she left to go to Australia.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Suzy spoke to Justin when she was still not talking to other people? What made Justin different?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of the fortunes that Suzy and her father received at the Chinese restaurant. Why did Suzy think she should have received the one that her father got?

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean that Suzy struggled so badly with finding a way to say goodbye to her family and home when she was only planning to be gone to Australia for such a short period of time? Is this symbolic of a bigger issue for Suzy?

Vocabulary

magnifying, preservatives, dignity, reveal, gizzard, scalpel, seminal, receptacles, transit, miniature, versions, affordable, international, departure, foiled, merged, barren, limitations



Part Five: Wednesday — Part Five: Endings

Summary

In the section “Wednesday” Suzy was strangely happy knowing that it would be her last day there. At the end of the day Justin asked her if she would be at the dance. Even though she badly wanted to tell someone about her plans, Suzy told him only that she would be out of town. He told her he had a great costume planned. She guessed he was planning on dressing as a villain for the school’s heroes and villains themed dance. Once she got off the bus, Suzy went to Aaron and Rocco’s apartment. They weren’t home but Suzy knew where they hid their key. On the mantel she saw a picture of Aaron that had probably been taken when he was in middle school. He was skinny with braces and thick glasses. A note from Rocco stuck to the picture tells Aaron that he loved him even when he looked like this. There is \$48 tucked under the photograph. Suzy took it even though she didn’t want to steal from her brother also, along with the picture. Once she was outside the apartment and the door was locked, she realized she’d left the key inside.

In “Goodbye, Home” Suzy was irritable her last morning at home. She slammed drawers and burnt her toast. She knew she was leaving but couldn’t tell her mother what was going on. She wanted that part of her journey to be finished. Her mother tried to calm her but Suzy asked her to just leave. As she listened to the sounds of her mother’s footsteps walking away, Suzy wanted both to make her escape and wanted for her mother to put her to bed and let her sleep until things were back to normal.

In “Phone Call” Suzy called Franny’s mother. It was her way of saying goodbye. She was surprised when Franny’s mother told her that Franny had always admired her. Franny had wished she had a little more of Suzy’s ability to not care what others thought about her. The two were silent for a while before Suzy told Franny’s mother she had to go. After she’d hung up the phone Suzy put Aaron’s picture in her bag and left the house.

In “Endings” Suzy surmises that a person’s end might not be when they die but the last time their name is mentioned. She warned her reader to be careful about when they mentioned a dead person because they never knew when their words about that person might be the last time their name is mentioned.

Analysis

There are several things of significance that happen in this part of the novel. First, Suzy saw a picture of Aaron when he was in middle school. Remember that she’d thought that her brother always had things pulled together. In the middle school photo, however,



Aaron had thick glasses, braces and was skinny. On this unbecoming picture Rocco, Aaron's boyfriend, had stuck a note on the photo telling Aaron that even when he was unattractive, Rocco already loved him. Although the note was meant for Aaron, Suzy was encouraged that just as Aaron had grown into a competent, pulled together adult she could do the same.

Even though Suzy had not yet gotten to the point that she considered Justin a friend, she considered confiding in him what she was about to do. Because she was still not talking, Suzy believed it had been easier for her to keep her secret. Still, on the day she was to leave, Suzy was a mess as she tried to avoid making a scene with her mother in the morning. She didn't want to tip her mother off that anything was out of the ordinary. Instead of breaking down, though, Suzy became angry and demanded her mother leave. Had Suzy been able to go to Australia, her farewell to her mother would not have been ideal.

Notice that before Suzy left she called Franny's mother. Significant in their discussion was that Franny's mother told Suzy that Franny had always wished she was more like Suzy. Franny had admired that Suzy was able to be herself and not care what people thought about her. There was no mention made by Franny's mother about the urine in Franny's locker.

Also addressed in this section of the novel is the theme of silence. Suzy and Franny's mother are silent together when they talk on the phone. The silence takes place after Franny's mother has told Suzy that Franny always admired Suzy and wished she could have been more like her. As Suzy thought about what took place between the two her thoughts were as follows: "It's peculiar how no-words can be better than words. Silence can say more than noise, in the same way that a person's absence can occupy even more space than their presence did" (p. 277) .

Also notice the mention of the ghost heart in the section "Wednesday." This mention of the ghost heart more completely ties together Suzy's trip to Australia and the idea of the jellyfish being like a ghost heart at the beginning of the novel. In this section Suzy disappears as if she, like the jellyfish, were a ghost heart.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think it was important to Suzy that she call Franny's mother before she left for Australia? Why was it significant that Franny's mother told Suzy that Franny had always wished she'd been more like Suzy?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Suzy's idea that a person's end is when someone speaks their name the last time. Do you agree with her? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Why was important that Suzy saw the picture of Aaron when he was in middle school?
What does she learn by seeing this photo?

Vocabulary

elation, peculiar, absence, presence, silhouette



Part Six: Immortality — Part Six: She Made It

Summary

In the introduction to this section “Results” Suzy includes her science teacher’s explanation of the results section of a paper. This is the section of a paper that tells if the research supports or doesn’t support the hypothesis.

In “Immortality” Suzy describes a type of jellyfish that is considered immortal in that it can return to a younger stage from the adult stage. She wished humans could do the same. Suzy believed if she had been able to do that she would never have had to send Franny the message she did and everything would still be okay between them.

In “To Australia” Suzy believed that if she were confident enough, she could successfully make her trip even though she was scared. She felt she had prepared for her journey as well as she could. As she stood in line to get her loading pass she thought about how close she was to Australia.

In “Sit” Suzy gave the woman at the counter her name and passport. When the woman said it didn’t appear that Suzy had applied for a visa, Suzy thought she was talking about a credit card and slid the copy of the pink index card with all of her father’s card information written on it across the counter. The woman asked where Suzy’s parents were, and then told her she couldn’t fly out of the country alone. Passengers twelve and over were allowed to fly alone only on flights within the United States. When Suzy began to cry the lady guided her behind the counter and told her to sit. As Suzy sat there, she believed she was a failure.

In the section “She Made It” Suzy sat watching the people in the airport. As she sat there she realized that even if she had been able to talk to Jamie and confirm that Franny was stung by a jellyfish, it wouldn’t have brought Franny back or undone the mean thing that Suzy had done to her. As she thought back over her mistakes, Suzy told Franny how sorry she was for what she had done and how she had gotten so much wrong.

Suzy woke up lying on the floor behind the counter. She’d been covered with several fleece airline blankets. She went to sleep and woke again when her mother came. She was crying and hugged Suzy. Aaron was there also. He asked Suzy what was going on. She told them about her plan to go to Australia and talk to Jamie about Franny’s death and her suspicion it had been caused by a jellyfish. After she finished telling her story, she remembered Dr. Legs telling her there was no wrong way to grieve. She wondered if the counselor would change her mind when she heard Suzy’s story.



Suzy's mother then told her she'd always assumed that Franny had drowned because she'd gotten caught in a rip tide but that she could have hit her head or just been too tired. Rocco joined them with hot cocoa. The picture of a mermaid on the cup made Suzy feel as if the logo was meant as a message to her that her family understood. She gave them the envelope of money telling her mother a good deal of it was hers but some was also Rocco and Aaron's. Aaron told Suzy they'd already figured out what had happened to the money and picture on the mantel. Suzy put her head in her mother's lap. She noticed television footage of a person swimming from Cuba to Florida. She stood up and went to the television. The family watched as Diana Nyad swam her last few strokes, she stood up to stumble out of the water. After they watched the swimmer be taken off in an ambulance, Aaron asked Suzy if they could take her home.

Analysis

In this section of the novel Suzy reached the stage of grief where she became depressed. She'd kept herself so preoccupied with her research about jellyfish and planning her trip to Australia that she really hadn't had time to think about the reality of Franny's death. It was when the worker at the airline counter told Suzy she couldn't fly to Australia alone that Suzy finally had to face the reality there was nothing that she could do to change anything about what she had done to Franny, what Franny had done to her or the fact that Franny was dead. This point during which Suzy sat on the floor of the airport waiting for her mother to come and get her was probably the lowest point she reached in the novel. Not only was she sad because Franny was gone and there was nothing she could do about it, she was also disappointed in herself because she'd failed in her attempt to go to Australia. Just as he had done in other parts of the novel, author Ali Benjamin includes an inspiring note. Throughout her research of jellyfish, Suzy had been keeping her eye on Diana Nyad a woman who she'd considered contacting for information about jellyfish stings. Diana Nyad had tried four times to swim from Cuba to Florida with no luck because she'd been stung so badly by jellyfish. It was while Suzy was at the airport that a news program carried coverage that Diana Nyad had finally succeeded in her goal to swim from Cuba to Florida. Even before Suzy learned that Diana Nyad had been successful in her swim, she admired her because she was so determined to make her dream a reality. When Suzy learned that Diana Nyad did finally succeed in her goal, it was as if her faith in the ability of humans to succeed was renewed.

The fact about jellyfish that Suzy discusses in this part of the novel is the fact that some jellyfish that have reached the adult stage of their development can go back to their childlike form. Suzy liked the idea that if the jellyfish got stressed it could go back to its childlike stage. This idea appealed to her because she wished she could go back to the time when she and Franny got along.

Notice in this section of the novel that Suzy thought back to the advice of her psychiatrist when Dr. Legs told her that there was no wrong way to grieve. There is a bit of comic relief when Suzy wondered if Dr. Legs would change her mind about her idea



that there was no wrong way to grieve. In her grieving process Suzy has stolen from her parents and her brother, has lied and has skipped school.

Also, the idea in this section that even though Suzy's mother had at first told her that she didn't know why Franny had died, she told Suzy at the airport that she's assumed that Franny had gotten caught in a riptide. At the time that Suzy's mother first told her about Franny's death, she didn't realize how important it would be to Suzy that she have a reason for Franny's death.

Discussion Question 1

If Suzy's mother had told her Franny had perhaps been caught in a riptide when she told Suzy that Franny was dead, do you think it would have made a difference in Suzy's grieving? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why would the ability to go back to a more childlike stage appeal to Suzy? Do you think this ability would be good for humans? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Diana Nyad's story in this novel?

Vocabulary

summarize, observations, outcomes, immortal, exaggerating, theoretical, indefinitely, tethered, confidence, conservation, terminals, arctic, conveyor, laminate, retrieved, reluctant, assumed, cascading, misdeeds, blubber, slipstream, stilted



Part Seven: What If? — Part Seven: Heroes and Villains

Summary

Part Seven opens with Mrs. Turton's definition of the conclusion portion of a research paper. In "What If?" Suzy realizes that humans are the only creatures on Earth that are aware of their surroundings and have the ability to decided to change.

In "The Only Thing That Ever Made Sense" Suzy learned from her mother the next morning that the airline had agreed to refund the price of her ticket back to her father's credit card. Her mother hadn't woken her for school that morning. Suzy went outside thinking that if her plan had gone as she had expected it to she would have been in Australia. She suddenly realized her home was the only thing that really made sense. Back inside, Suzy mother told her that she owed her dad a phone call. Suzy couldn't get up the nerve to call him yet.

In "Any Other Kid" Suzy didn't think about the school dance until her mom took a phone call from Justin. Suzy wouldn't take that phone but her mother took a message for her. She's told Suzy that Justin had said his costume was awesomesauce and that Suzy needed to go to the dance so she could see it. Suzy got together a costume made of her brother's old painting hat and a grey t-shirt.

In the section "What Remains" Suzy remembers she and Franny together at the beginning of their fifth grade year. They are under the big tree in her backyard. They are playing a hand-slapping game. Their knees are touching. After each game they begin again.

In the section "Heroes" and Villains" as Suzy sat in her mother's car outside the school gymnasium, her mother handed her a cell phone so she could call if she wanted to come home. Her mother reminded Suzy how brave she'd been when she'd planned her flight to Australia and asked her to try. Just as Suzy opened the door a crack Justin thumped on the window. He was wearing big fuzzy mitts. When Suzy stepped out of the car, Justin asked her what she was. She replied she was a regular guy. Justin saw and waved to Mrs. Turton. Mrs. Turton was dressed as a science teacher with glittery sneakers. She guessed Justin was a werewolf but Suzy corrected her, telling her that he was Beast.

Justin urged Suzy to go inside with him but she told him she needed to make a phone call first. When he answered, Suzy called him Dad for the first time in nearly five months. She told him she thought they should go and see the dinosaur tracks. She asked if Aaron and Rocco could go as well. When her dad mentioned he'd see her the following day, Suzy asked if they could eat somewhere else.



After she hung up, Suzy felt someone tap her shoulder. It was Sarah Johnston. Sarah asked if they could go in together as she still didn't know a lot of people. When Suzy mentioned Sarah was friends with all the pretty girls, Sarah admitted they weren't really friends. Suzy said Mrs. Turton was inside dancing with Justin. They agreed Mrs. Turton was their favorite teacher.

Suzy thought about Mrs. Turton's lesson that everyone had some of Shakespeare's atoms in them. She deduced that they must also have Franny's atoms in them too as she lived so close to all of them. She imagined life as a set of legos where everything was connected. She notices how the groups of dancing kids could look like a pulsing rhythm, almost like a heartbeat.

Analysis

This final section of the novel ends of the novel opened, with the image of a heartbeat. In the beginning, the heartbeat that was described was that of the pulsing jellyfish and Franny's heart. In the end, the heartbeat is illustrated by the music and the image of the groups of kids dancing in rhythm to the music, an image that Suzy believed must look from overhead like a beating heart. Suzy additionally thought about what Mrs. Turton had told the students about each of them have a certain number of Shakespeare's atoms in them. Suzy believed that since she and the other students had been around Franny so much more they would probably have even more of Franny's atoms in them than they did of Shakespeare's atoms. Suzy uses this illustration to indicate that in a way, Franny lived on through the people who had been around her and had been her friends. This is a sign that Suzy had finally accepted Franny's death and has found a way to move on with her life.

It is not until this section of the novel that Suzy finally admitted to herself, and to her mother, that Justin was her friend. Even though Suzy had told Justin she wouldn't be at the dance, Justin called Suzy's home to encourage her one more time to go. With her mother and Justin encouraging her, Suzy got up to courage to attend the dance. She got the best surprise when Sarah asked to walk into the gymnasium where the dance was being held with Suzy. When Suzy asked why Sarah wasn't with all of her other friends, Sarah admitted to Suzy that those pretty girls weren't really her friends.

Notice also in this section that Suzy showed her respect for her brother in the costume that she chose to wear to the dance. She wore the hat her brother wore when he painted along with a grey t-shirt. When Justin asked her what she was dressed like she indicated she was dressed like an ordinary man. She told Justin that just regular people could be heroes. It seemed that Suzy also finally realized she didn't have to discover the cause of Franny's death in order for her to keep from being a villain in the story of Franny's death.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Suzy change her mind about going to the dance?



Discussion Question 2

How does Suzy indicate that she finally accepted Franny's death and felt she could go on with her life?

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean when Suzy finally realized that her home was the only thing that really made sense?

Vocabulary

implication, inquiry, graze, apologetically, bioluminescence, sync



Characters

Suzanne “Suzy or Zu” Swanson

Suzanne “Suzy or Zu” Swanson is the main character and narrator for the novel. She is a seventh grade student who is intrigued by science. While she was struggling with the typical stress of middle school, Suzy was also grieving the death of her friend, Franny. She regretted the way their friendship had ended. Suzy was not a typical middle school student. Instead of being obsessed with boys and makeup like the popular girls in school, Suzy was interested in science and knowledge. Her friend, Franny, however had joined the popular girls when they began middle school and left Suzy behind.

Suzy made friends with Franny when they met each other as 5-year-olds in a swimming class. Suzy had been impressed with Franny when she first saw the girl swim underwater across the pool at their first lesson. They had been best friends since that time. Suzy had not cared that Franny was not pretty or that she was dyslexic. She didn't care that Franny was scared to sleep at Suzy's house during their first sleepover. She didn't make fun of Franny when she learned Franny still drank out of a sippy cup as a six-year-old. Suzy cheered Franny up after another girl hurt Franny's feelings. One day when the two were studying together, Franny made Suzy promise that if she ever started acting like Aubrey, one of the popular girls at school, that Suzy would send Franny a message to let her know.

Once they were in middle school and Franny not only joined the popular girls but also began teasing Suzy like the popular kids did. It was not until a class campout when Suzy watched as Dylan killed a frog to impress Franny and Franny did nothing to stop him that Suzy decided it was time to send Franny a message. She froze her own urine into flat disks that she could slip into Franny's locker through the slats on their last day of school. When Franny opened her locker that morning, her things were soaked with urine. Suzy was hoping Franny would look at her and understand that this was Suzy's way of sending her a message but she never did. The last time that Suzy saw her friend alive was when she was walking down the hallway crying and carrying the bags of wet things.

After Franny's death Suzy was grieved not only because Franny was gone but also because of the way their friendship ended. One of the things that bothered Suzy most when she learned Franny was dead was that her mother couldn't give her a good explanation for Franny's death. Franny had been a good swimmer so she didn't think it made sense that Franny would drown. Her mother, however, told Suzy that sometimes things like that just happened. During a visit to an aquarium, Suzy learned about jellyfish and how dangerous their stings could be. Suzy realized that Franny could have died because she had been stung by a jellyfish. She went about studying these creatures and searching for experts that could help her to answer her questions.



During a therapy session Suzy's psychiatrist suggested to her that if she needed to talk to someone, she should do it face-to-face. This suggestion gave Suzy the idea that she should travel to Australia to meet with a biologist who studied jellyfish and had been stung by one. Suzy planned her trip to Australia carefully stealing a credit card from her father to buy the ticket and money from her mother for other expenses. Her plans fell apart when she arrived at the airport to learn that she was too young to fly internationally alone. As she sat at the airport after she'd been told she couldn't go to Australia Suzy came to an important realization. She realized that even if she had definitively determined that Franny had been stung by a jellyfish it wouldn't have brought Franny back to life. It also wouldn't have changed the way their friendship ended.

Dr. M. Legler “Dr. Legs”

Dr. M. Legler was the psychiatrist to whom Suzy's parents took her when Suzy stopped talking. Suzy didn't think the woman, whom she called “Dr. Legs,” looked very professional on her first visit because she wore a short skirt and lacy tights on her long, thin legs. Dr. Legs sat patiently for several sessions while Suzy refused to talk at all. During their first session Dr. Legs told Franny there was no wrong way to grieve. Most of the benefit that Suzy gained from her appointments with Dr. Legs were unintended suggestions that helped Suzy on her quest to prove that Franny had been stung by a jellyfish. For instance, when Dr. Legs suggested Suzy needed a professional to help her deal with her grief, Suzy realized she could use the help of a profession to help her determine the cause of Franny's death. When Dr. Legs told Suzy that if she needed to talk to someone Suzy needed to talk to that person face-to-face. Although Dr. Legs had thought that Suzy understood she was referring to any person she needed to talk to about Franny's death Suzy took her suggestion a little further and decided she needed to talk to Jamie in Australia face-to-face. After her failed attempt to fly to Australia Suzy wondered if Dr. Legs would change her mind about there being no wrong way to grieve when she heard about what Suzy had planned.

Justin Maloney

At the beginning of the novel Suzy described Justin Maloney as being messy and a mess up. Because they were the only ones in science class who had no lab partners, the two ended up working together. Justin promised Suzy that he would work hard and wouldn't make a mess of things for her. He told her that he had ADHD but the new medicine he was taking was really helping. After Suzy gave her report about jellyfish and the other students began calling her medusa, Justin started calling her Belle. He took the nickname from the name of the biggest part of the jellyfish, the part a person could touch without getting stung. Justin told her that he thought it was a better name than medusa but in reality he was telling her he wouldn't call her by that hateful name. Soon after Suzy began eating her lunch in Mrs. Turton's classroom, Justin began eating there as well. They enjoyed watching her science videos together even though they rarely spoke to each other. Justin got Suzy to talk one day when he asked her if Snow



White's name was Belle. Suzy later asked him about his ADHD and what it was like before and after he'd taken the medicine. He was surprised she was able to understand. At the heroes and villains dance, Justin dressed up like the Beast, sending Suzy a clear message that he liked her.

Jamie Seymour

Jamie Seymour was a biology professor at James Cook University in Australia. Suzy took note of him because he loved jellyfish, a creature others hated, even after he'd been stung by one and spent two days in pain from the venom. Suzy felt Jamie could help her because she felt she was almost someone everyone hated. She believed he would like her and help her to figure out for sure if Franny's death had been caused by a jellyfish sting. Suzy tried to contact Jamie by email but wasn't able to come up with the right words to write. She called the university where he worked but couldn't bring herself to ask for him. Suzy finally decided she had to make a trip to see Jamie face-to-face after her psychologist suggested to Suzy that if she had something she needed to talk to someone about she needed to do it face-to-face and not through electronic communication. Because Suzy was not able to fly internationally alone she never got to meet Jamie. She realized though that even if she had met Jamie and he'd told her she was right in believing her friend was killed by a jellyfish it still wouldn't change the fact that Franny was dead and that their relationship had ended badly.

Mrs. Turton

Mrs. Turton is Suzy's seventh grade science teacher and a favorite teacher of many of the students included in the novel. Mrs. Turton made a point to talk to some of Suzy's teachers from her sixth grade year and knew that Suzy was acting differently from the way she had acted as a sixth grader. Mrs. Turton told Suzy she could talk to her if she needed to. When the students laughed at Suzy after she gave her report on jellyfish Mrs. Turton offered to let Suzy eat lunch in her classroom. Even though Suzy still wouldn't talk to Mrs. Turton during their lunches, Mrs. Turton would show Suzy science videos in which she thought Suzy would be interested. Mrs. Turton is also the teacher that is quoted in the introductory section of each of the seven parts of the novel.

Aaron

Aaron was Suzy's older brother. He worked as a soccer coach at a university and had a boyfriend named Rocco. Suzy admired her older brother and once noted he sometimes seemed too good to be true. He was athletic and tan, and always had a ready smile. She believed her brother deserved happiness while she didn't because of her hateful words that had destroyed her friendship with Franny. Later in the novel when Suzy visited her brother's apartment she saw a picture of him when he was in middle school. He was skinny, wore thick glasses and had braces. Suzy realized from this picture that



Aaron hadn't always had his life pulled together. It was with him in mind that dressed as a hero for the school dance, an average guy.

Franny Jackson

Franny Jackson is never an active character in this novel because she was dead at the time the story was written. Even though she was a strong swimmer, Franny died while swimming in the ocean near Maryland. Before Suzy and Franny entered middle school they were best friends. Once Franny began middle school she began to be interested in boys and the way she looked. She also wanted to be friends with the popular girls. When Suzy embarrassed Franny by talking about urine at the popular girls' lunch table Franny accused Suzy of being weird. Later at a campout at Rock Lake Franny watched as Dylan killed a frog because he thought it would impress her. Franny did nothing to try to stop him.

Sarah Johnston

Sarah Johnston is the new girl who began attending Eugene Field Memorial Middle School the year after Franny died. Suzy liked Sarah because she was quiet but Aubrey and the pretty girls made friends with her first. Suzy thought Sarah had tried to approach her about working as lab partners in science class but another girl got to Sarah first. After Suzy had hung up from her phone call to her father while she was outside the school gym at the heroes and villains dance Sarah tapped Suzy on the shoulder. She wanted to know if Suzy would walk into the dance with her. She admitted to Suzy she didn't really consider the pretty girls as her friends.

James "Jim" Swanson

James "Jim" Swanson was Suzy's father. Because he'd recently gotten divorced from Suzy's mother he didn't get to spend as much time with Suzy as he wanted. They met every Saturday night for dinner at a Chinese restaurant. It was during one of these dinners that Suzy's father suggested they should plan a visit to a place where dinosaur tracks had been found. Later, when Suzy called him after she'd stolen his credit card information and bought a plane ticket with it, she suggested they go and visit the dinosaur tracks, her way of asking if they could start again.

Diana Nyad

Diana Nyad is one of the people whom Suzy had considered contacting as a jellyfish expert because Diana Nyad had failed four times in her attempts to swim from Cuba to Florida because she's been stung by jellyfish. Suzy had rejected Diana Nyad as a contact person because she admitted that she was a little scared of the strict looking woman. Despite her fear of Diana Nyad, Suzy also admired the woman because she was so determined to achieve the goal she had set for herself. It was while Suzy, her



mother, Aaron and Rocco were still in the airport that they saw news coverage showing Diana Nyad finally successfully complete her swim.

Aubrey LaValley

Aubrey LaValley seems to be the leader of the pretty girls. In the year before Franny's death, she and Franny had become close friends. She was one of the girls who cried at Franny's funeral. In grade school, however, Aubrey hurt Franny's feelings by saying out loud that Franny was neither pretty nor smart. Neither Suzy nor Franny had liked Aubrey in grade school because Aubrey bragged about being the most popular girl in school. At one point, Franny had begged Suzy to send her a big message if she ever began acting like Aubrey.

Meg Swanson

Meg Swanson is Suzy's mother. She was a real estate broker and was described as being scattered and forgetful. She loved going to yard sales and flea markets to buy treasures she would never use. It was Meg Swanson who told Suzy that Franny was dead. She told Suzy that sometimes things just happened when her daughter asked why her friend had died. Suzy was not happy with this answer and decided to find out what had happened to her friend.

Dylan Parker

Dylan Parker is the boy in Suzy's class who was known for not being very nice. He was also the boy Franny told Suzy she liked. Dylan was the one who threw a frog at a tree during the class trip to Rock Lake. Suzy had been horrified not only by the frog's death but also because Franny didn't do anything to stop Dylan. It was after Dylan killed the frog that Suzy knew she had to send Franny a message that she was becoming like Aubrey.

Mr. Andrews

Mr. Andrews was the sixth grade homeroom teacher who accompanied the class on its camping trip to Rock Lake. He'd asked the students to be still and tell him what they heard. Suzy said she heard an orchestra in the birds singing. It was not the answer Mr. Andrews was looking for. Because he made it obvious her answer was wrong, the other members of the class laughed at her.

Bridget Brown

Bridget Brown was a girl from Florida who had bought a plane ticket and flown from Florida to Nashville. Suzy used Bridget's trip as proof that she, too, could take an



unsupervised plane trip. Suzy believed, however, that Bridget didn't plan her trip carefully and that it was this lack of planning that made her trip fail.

Rocco

Rocco was Aaron's boyfriend. He taught English literature at the same university that Aaron coached soccer. He often quoted literature to Suzy.



Symbols and Symbolism

Irukandji Jellyfish

The Irukandji jellyfish is a small but deadly jellyfish about which Suzy learned during her class trip to the aquarium. This jellyfish is a sort of scapegoat for Suzy as she hoped to prove that her friend Franny had drowned because she'd been stung by one of these jellyfish. Suzy mentioned that she hoped to find a villain in Franny's death, one that was worse than she. She felt guilt because her friendship with Franny had ended badly. Suzy had never gotten a chance to make things right with Franny or say goodbye. She hoped by pinning the jellyfish as the cause of Franny's death, she could feel less guilty about her own actions.

The Stars

Suzy uses the stars and the fact that it takes four years for the light from these stars to reach Earth as a way to understand the two days that Franny was dead but Suzy didn't yet know she was dead. Suzy surmises that just as she'd thought Franny was still alive but she wasn't, the stars could have all burned out but people on Earth would not be aware because they'd still be able to see the light from the stars.

A Knot

Suzy compared the knots and tangles she got in her hair to the way her friendship with Franny got knotted up when they started middle school. While Suzy could cut out the knots she found in her hair, she didn't know how to handle the knots she was beginning to encounter in her life.

Suzy's Frizzy Hair

In middle school, all of the girls strive to have perfectly flat, straight hair. Suzy stood out because she inherited a wild mop of frizzy hair from her mother. Suzy hair is used in the novel as a symbol of how different she felt she was from the other girls in her grade.

Bags of Wet Things

The bag of urine soaked things that Franny removed from her locker was a physical symbol of the message that Suzy sent to her friend. The last time Suzy saw her friend she was carrying these bags and crying.



A Frog

This frog was an innocent creature that Dylan killed during the class trip to Rock Creek. Franny had watched while Dylan killed the frog but had not done anything to stop it. It after this frog was killed that Suzy realized the time had come for her to send a message to Franny.

Frozen Pee Disks

It was with these frozen disks of urine that Suzy sent Franny the message that she'd asked Suzy to send if she ever began acting like Aubrey. Suzy had been laughed at by the group of pretty girls, including Franny, when she had told them that animals often sent messages using urine. For this reason, Suzy used urine to send her message to Franny.

A Bell

After Suzy gave her report on jellyfish Justin began calling her Belle, a name he took from the bell of the jellyfish, the part that a person can touch without getting stung. He'd decided to start calling Suzy by the name Belle as a sign to her that he would not call her medusa, like the other students were doing.

Aaron's Photo

The photo Suzy found in her brother's apartment that showed him as a skinny middle schooler with thick glasses and braces made Suzy realize Aaron's life hadn't always been as good as she thought it had been. This picture was a symbol to Suzy that her brother had once been an awkward middle schooler and that one day she would be an accepted, competent adult.

A Riptide

When Suzy's mother learned that Suzy was having so much trouble dealing with the lack of an explanation for Franny's death she told Suzy she'd thought Franny had died because she had gotten caught in a riptide. This riptide is possibly the real cause of Franny's death even though she was a strong swimmer.



Settings

Eugene Field Memorial Middle School

Eugene Field Memorial Middle School is the school where Suzy went to school beginning her sixth grade year, the year that she and Franny grew apart, and her seventh grade year, after Franny died.

The Jellyfish Exhibit

While the other kids in her class were at the touch tank at the aquarium Suzy wandered down to the jellyfish exhibit. As she studied information at this exhibit Suzy decided it must have been a jellyfish sting that caused Franny to drown.

Ming Palace

Ming Palace is the Chinese restaurant where Suzy and her father always ate during their Saturday visits. Suzy copied the information from her father's credit card when he left it on the table to pay for their meal and went to the bathroom here. She planned to use the information to buy an airplane ticket to Australia.

Rock Lake

Rock Lake is the place where Suzy and Franny's class went for an overnight trip. It was during this trip that Suzy watched while Dylan threw a frog against a tree to impress Franny. Later that night, Franny spat on Suzy after they were supposed to be asleep.

St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church

St. Mary Magdalene Episcopal Church is the church where Franny's funeral was held.

The Airport

The airport is the place where Suzy was told that even though she had bought a ticket, she could not fly alone on an international flight. When her mother came to get her, Suzy finally told her mother what she thought it was that killed Franny and why she wanted to go to Australia.



The Middle School Gym

The middle school's heroes and villains dance was held at the gym in the middle school. It was at this dance that Suzy learned that even though the popular girls had tried to make friends with the new girl, Sarah Johnston, Sarah didn't really consider them friends.



Themes and Motifs

Grief

Although the focus of this novel is on how Suzy dealt with the grief she felt after her friend's death instead of how Suzy felt after Franny's death, Suzy does move through the five generally accepted stages of grief during the course of the story. These stages include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. It was when Suzy's mother first told her about Franny's death that Suzy denied that her friend was dead. She was forceful in her statement that Franny could not have died from drowning because Franny was such a good swimmer. Suzy feels anger during the funeral. She was angry because she could not cry at the funeral but the other kids who had been friends with Franny for such a short period of time were crying about her death. Suzy never really entered a period of bargaining, but she does enter a prolonged stage where she believed that she could change the way she felt about herself if she could discover exactly what it was that had caused Franny to die. Suzy entered the stage of depression when she got to the airport for her flight to Australia and learned that she was too young to fly internationally alone. She cried when the airport employee told her she wouldn't be able to go to Australia after all. After crying, Suzy lay on the floor and slept until her mother and brother came to get her. Both the crying and sleeping are signs of depression.

At the end of the novel, when Suzy attended the school dance, she began to show that she had accepted Franny's death and felt as if she could move on with her life. It is in the final scenes of the story that Suzy remembers her teacher telling her about the number of Shakespeare's atoms each student had inside them even though it had been so long since Shakespeare had been alive. Suzy reasons that she and her fellow classmates have even more of Franny's atoms in them since they lived so closely with her. It was indicated that Franny would continue to live on through Suzy and the other members of her class.

Jellyfish

Because Suzy hoped to prove that a jellyfish sting was responsible for Franny's death, her study of these organisms is a major theme in the novel. In the course of the novel Suzy stressed several different facts about jellyfish. These facts included the aspect that jellyfish have been in existence longer than any other animal or plant species, that jellyfish are taking over the world, that even though jellyfish seem fragile they are among the strongest organisms in existence and that there is a species of jellyfish that can regress from its adult form to a childlike stage.

Suzy first began learning about jellyfish when she snuck downstairs to the jellyfish exhibit when her class was visiting a museum. She read information about the Irukandji jellyfish and the number of deaths that were attributed to its stings. When she read that



some people whose deaths had been caused by the sting of a jellyfish were actually attributed to other causes Suzy decided that Franny must have been stung by a jellyfish. She could think of no other reason why a strong swimmer like Franny could have drowned. It was not only to find an explanation for Franny's death, but also to find something upon which she could place blame for it.

Even while Suzy was researching jellyfish with the hope of finding the cause of Franny's death, Suzy was also preparing her information for an oral report for her science class. She hoped when she was finished with her report that her classmates would understand not only what a threat jellyfish were to the world in general but that it was one of these organisms that caused Franny's death. Instead of understanding or caring about what Suzy was trying to tell them, Suzy's classmates only began to tease her even more cruelly.

Just as it seemed that Suzy's life couldn't get any worse, it was also because of her report about jellyfish that a boy in her class - Justin - reached out to her as a friend. After he listened to her report, he dropped a piece of paper on her desk on which he'd sketched images of jellyfish. He also began calling her Belle. The other kids were calling Suzy Medusa after her report. Justin told her he wanted to call her Belle instead because he thought it was a better nickname. He was also showing her that he wouldn't call her medusa and hurt her feelings like the other children were doing.

Scientific Method / Scientific Research

Science is a major theme in this novel because Suzy was a very intelligent middle school student who enjoyed science. Her favorite teacher was Mrs. Turton, her science teacher. It was this teacher who shared with Suzy many of the scientific facts that are included in the novel. Additionally, quotes from Mrs. Turton introduce each of the seven different parts of the novel. These parts of the novel are loosely based on the different parts of a scientific research paper.

The seven different parts of the novel are loosely based on different parts of a scientific research paper. These parts come from the scientific method, the method by which scientists conduct their research. Notice that in each of the seven parts of the novel Suzy is following through with the actions necessary to complete that part of the paper. For instance, the first part of the novel is based on the purpose of the paper. In it Suzy is supposed to explain why she decided to research the particular topic she chose and tell why her research is important. It is in this section that Suzy learned about the Irukandji jellyfish and decided she wanted to prove it had caused Franny's death. The research is particularly important to Suzy because she wanted to be able to identify a villain, something on which she could place the blame for Franny's death.

Science is also important in the novel as Suzy shows that even girls can be interested in science. Many tidbits of intriguing information about the human body and the world as a whole are shared in the novel. Notice the emphasis on the heart and heartbeat throughout the novel. At the beginning, Suzy compared the movements of a jellyfish to a



heart beat. At the end she compares the movements of her friends as they dance together as being like a pulsing heart beat. Suzy's also identified the number of times a heart beats in the typical human life and the average number of times Franny's heart beat.

Silence

Because Suzy decides not to talk soon after Franny's death; silence, speech and sound make up an important theme in the novel. Suzy decided to not talk because she believed it was her words that caused the split in her friendship with Franny. During the time she is silent, Suzy learned a good deal about the noises of the world around her. She also seemed to be better in touch with the feelings of other as she learned to appreciate silence.

In a world where there is so much noise going on all the time, silence can often be interpreted as a negative quality. Suzy, however, decides not talking would be best for her as she thought her words had helped to destroy her friendship with Franny. Suzy argued the point that not talking was different from refusing to talk. If she had something important to say, Suzy talked but she decided not to just fill up the silence with small talk.

During the time she is not talking Suzy learned some important things about silence. First, not all silence between people is bad. This quality was first noted when Suzy and Justin walked to math class together in silence after Justin let her know that he wouldn't call her by the hateful nickname by which all the other students were calling her. Suzy indicated the silence that was between them was the good kind of silence. This silence occurred again when Suzy talked to Franny's mother on the phone. Suzy noted that in silences like the one between them, more was said than if words had been used.

Friendship

Friendship is a theme in the novel as author Ali Benjamin writes about how even the best of friends can grow apart as they mature. The theme of friendship is developed as Benjamin demonstrates through Suzy's story that sometimes the most unlikely people can be the best friends. He also includes descriptions of the way good friends treat one another and the hurt a person can feel when they loose a friend.

Suzy and Franny were inseparable from the time they first meet at a swimming class when they were five years old. Suzy believed Franny was the only friend she'd ever need. When they entered middle school everything began to change. Franny got interested in clothing, hairstyles and boys. Suzy didn't understand her friend's new priorities. Even though Franny invited Suzy to join her at the table where the popular girls sat Franny began to ignore Suzy and treat her badly when Suzy unintentionally embarrassed her in front of her new friends. Suzy wanted to repair her friendship with Franny but wasn't sure how to do so. After Suzy watched as Franny allowed the boy



she liked to kill a frog because he thought it would impress Franny Suzy decided it was time to send Franny a message.

When they were still friends, Franny had asked Suzy to send her a message if she ever started acting like the pretty girls. Suzy kept her promise and sent her message in the form of frozen discs of urine that she slipped into Franny's locker on the last day of class. Suzy had hoped Franny would understand the message and that they would be able to repair their friendship. Instead, Franny died shortly after the locker incident. They girls never spoke again after that incident and Suzy was devastated because their friendship had ended so badly. She grieved not only because she lost her friend but also because her last experience with Franny had been one in which Suzy had caused Franny pain.

Even though Suzy thought she was a person who didn't deserve happiness, Suzy learned through the course of the novel to open back up to people. Justin, a boy from her class befriended her through his insistent friendship. Even though Suzy had never thought of Justin as friend material before because he was always messy and making a mess, she came to realize how much he empathized with her emotionally because he also had been ridiculed and made fun of by his fellow classmates. Another surprising friend that Suzy made near the conclusion of the novel was Sarah, the new girl. Suzy had thought Sarah preferred the friendship of the pretty girls, just as Franny had. She was surprised to learn that Sarah just considered those girls to be people she knew. She didn't really think of them as friends.

Styles

Point of View

The story is told from the first person point of view of middle school student Suzy. In some sections of the novel Suzy tells her story in the past tense to a general audience. Some of the chapters that are written in this point of view to a general audience include “Touch,” “Invisible,” “150 Million Stings,” and “Best Educated Guess.” Other parts of the story are also told from the first person point of view of Suzy but are told in the present tense. These sections of the novel are written as if Suzy were speaking directly to Franny. It appears in these parts of the novel that Suzy was trying to explain to her friend why she’d done as she had. The parts of the novel that are written directly to Suzy are written in italics to make them easier to identify. Sections of the book written to Franny include “Sometimes Things Just Happen,” “How To Make A Friend,” “How To Have A Friend,” and “How To Make A Promise.”

Language and Meaning

Because this novel deals with science and scientific knowledge, there is a good deal of scientific references in this novel. The seven parts that make up the novel are each dedicated to a part of the scientific research paper based on the scientific method. Each part of the novel has a short introduction that is a quote from Suzy’s science teacher Mrs. Turton. In these quotes Mrs. Turton explains the aspects that should make up that part of the scientific research paper. These quotes are significant because as Suzy is researching jellyfish for personal reasons, she is also writing her research paper for Mrs. Turton’s science class on jellyfish.

In addition to the scientific language used in this novel Suzy uses a good deal of scientific images to illustrate her points. For instance, she uses the way it takes four years for the light from the stars to reach the Earth to illustrate the concept that Franny was dead two days before Suzy even knew she was dead. Suzy surmised that the stars could burn out and no one on Earth would even know because they would still see the light for four years. Suzy also describes things using scientific language. For instance, she says that the freckles on Franny’s skin look like constellations. She compared the students in her class in their tie-dyed shirts to a “school of mottled, neon-colored fish” (p. 25).

Structure

The structure of the novel is both interesting and complex. The novel is broken into seven different parts. Each part of the novel corresponds to a portion of a scientific research paper based on the scientific method: purpose, hypothesis, background, variables, procedure, results and conclusion. As the author writes the novel he makes the parts of Suzy’s research about jellyfish correspond to parts of the scientific research



paper noted in the introduction to each section. These parts of the novel range in length from 6 to 114 pages in length. Each part of the novel is divided into chapters. These chapters are labeled with a title that gives the reader some idea what that section will be about.

Within the novel both the past and present tenses are used but not as the reader would expect. In Suzy's narration of the events after Franny's death, the past tense is used. The sections where Suzy appears to be talking directly to Franny about their time together before Franny died are written in the present tense. These sections are presented as if Suzy is talking directly to Franny, trying to get her to understand why she acted as she did. In these sections of the novel, which are easily identified because they are written in italic, the 'you' to whom Suzy refers is Franny.

The plot of the novel is simple with one major plot and a few related subplots. The main plot is Suzy's journey as she tries to deal with her grief and her guilt about the way she treated Franny just before her death. The subplots connected to the main plot deal with Suzy's attempt to go to Australia, her friendship with Justin and realization that her brother wasn't always as put together as she thought.



Quotes

Sometimes you want things to change so badly, you can't even stand to be in the same room with the way things actually are."

-- Narrator (Part One, Touch paragraph 21)

Importance: Suzy's feeling that she couldn't stay in the room at the aquarium with her classmates without Franny being there was what made her wander away from the group to the jellyfish exhibit. It was there that Suzy began developing her hypothesis that Franny had drowned because she was stung by a jellyfish.

They didn't make sense because the way things ended between us was not the way they were supposed to end. They were not the way anything should ever end."

-- Narrator (Part One, Sometimes Things Just Happen paragraph 16)

Importance: Suzy was grieved by her friend's death not only because Franny was gone but also because their friendship did not end well.

Maybe Mom was wrong. Maybe things don't just happen, like she'd tried to tell me. Maybe things aren't actually as random as everyone seemed ready to accept."

-- Narrator (Part Two, Best Educated Guess paragraph 3)

Importance: Suzy was frustrated because her mother accepted Franny's death as easily as she did. Suzy wanted to find some reason that would help to understand why her friend had died.

Most of all, I don't understand why small talk is considered more polite than not-talking."

-- Narrator (Part Three, Dumb Old Words paragraph 15)

Importance: When Suzy stopped talking she began to consider the importance of speech and silence. She wondered why it was considered polite to make small talk even when a person really had nothing to say, but it was considered impolite to be silent. Remember also when reading this quote that Suzy believed it was her words that ruined her relationship with Franny.

It turns out she didn't remind me of Franny after all. She reminded me of me."

-- Narrator (Part Three, Experts #2 & #3 paragraph 22)

Importance: Although Suzy at first thought one of her jellyfish experts, Angela Yanagihara, reminded her of Franny she changed her mind when she watched the woman inject a mouse with jellyfish venom. Because Suzy believed she had intentionally caused Franny pain then watched her pain without doing anything, she decided instead that Angela Yanagihara's cruelty to the mouse reminded her of herself.

When bottles knock together in the breeze, they sound like chimes, and that is my favorite thing about this book: the image of those dangling bottles, all those terrible



memories that somehow make music when they knock against one another.”
-- Narrator (Part Three, How Not to Say Something Important paragraph 1)

Importance: Suzy thought about an image in a book she'd read where a woman would hang up bottles from a tree to remind her of her mistakes. The amazing fact of the hanging bottles was that when they knocked into each other, they made sounds like music.

And that's when I know: Everything is about to change. It's about to get knotted up in the worst possible ways.”

-- Narrator (Part Three, How Not to Say Something Important paragraph 27)

Importance: It was when Franny told Suzy that she thought Dylan Parker was cute that Suzy began to get the idea that the relationship between she and Franny was about to change. Note the reference to the knots she feels are coming in her life. She compares these knots to the ones she gets in her hair. She can cut out the knots in her hair, but not the ones in her life.

Those girls are following you. You are the girl who was once afraid to read aloud in class, afraid to spend the night away from your mother, and now these girls are following you.”

-- Narrator (Part Four, How to Get Things Wrong paragraph 57)

Importance: Suzy tells Franny that she is both disgusted and angry that the popular girls are following her. She is especially upset because she had been there through all the years that Franny had acted in ways that would not have impressed these pretty girls.

If people were silent, they could hear the noise of their own lives better. If people were silent, it would make what they did say, whenever they chose to say it, more important.”

-- Narrator (Part Four, Face to Face paragraph 5)

Importance: In the time that Suzy spent not speaking she realized that when one wasn't speaking, she could concentrate on other sounds around her. She also believed the less one spoke, the more important her words would be when she did choose to say something.

He is about to kill something for no reason whatsoever.”

-- Narrator (Part Four, How to Lose a Friend paragraph 43)

Importance: Suzy is horrified when she sees Dylan is poised to throw a frog against a tree. She recognizes he is going to kill the animal to impress Franny. Even though she tries to signal to Franny, Franny does nothing to keep Dylan from killing the frog.

I'm going to send a message delivered the same way you delivered your message: with body fluids.”

-- Narrator (Part Five, How to Send a Message paragraph 4)



Importance: Just as Franny had spit on her, Suzy decided to use urine to give Franny a message that she was not acting like herself.

But I want you to know: This isn't about revenge. This is me doing the very thing you asked me to do."

-- Narrator (Part Five, Even More Wrong paragraph 9)

Importance: Although she never got to tell Franny her reasons in person for doing what she did, Suzy believes she is justified in her actions because Franny had once asked her to send a message to her if she ever began acting like the popular girls in their school.

I do not wonder if this is the last image I will ever have of you on this Earth. Why would I wonder such a thing?"

-- Narrator (Part Five, Look At Me paragraph 24)

Importance: Looking back with her knowledge that she'd never see Franny alive again, Suzy admits that she'd never thought the last time she would see her friend would be when she was crying because of what Suzy had done to her.

I realized he was talking about jellyfish. The bell is the round part of the jellyfish that pulses like a heart — it's the only part you can touch without getting stung."

-- Narrator (Part Five, Pollination paragraph 49)

Importance: Suzy got frustrated because Justin kept calling her Belle. When she looked at him crossly, he asked if he was right that the bell was the biggest part of the jellyfish. It was his way of telling her that he wasn't going to be cruel to her. Suzy also thought to herself that the bell of a jellyfish was the only part a person could touch without getting stung.

It was like their tears, or my lack of them, were proof: proof that you'd been right when you left me, that I'd never deserved you after all."

-- Narrator (Part Five, What I Don't Want to Talk About paragraph 10)

Importance: Because the pretty girls are crying at Franny's funeral and Suzy couldn't, she thinks it is a sign that Franny had been right in leaving Suzy as a friend and taking up with the other girls.

The staying still was the worst part. The waiting and not-knowing and being afraid: That was worse than anything else that might happen."

-- Narrator (Part Five, Things are Closer Than They Appear paragraph 27)

Importance: Suzy had a dream in which she believed Jamie was telling her that she could not stay still. Even getting hurt was worse than not moving. It was after she'd interpreted the meaning of the dream that she believed she needed to make a decision to go to Australia.



Maybe if she could have shown me that the world still made sense in some way, that there was still some sort of order to things — I might not even be doing this.”

-- Narrator (Part Five, Spare Change paragraph 17)

Importance: Even though Suzy felt bad about stealing money from her mother’s wallet, she reasoned that if her mother had been able to give a better explanation of Franny’s death Suzy wouldn’t have to go to Australia for answers and wouldn’t have to steal from her mother.

Even if I could get Jamie to tell me that the problem had been a jellyfish, that I’d been right all along, it wouldn’t change anything. Franny would still be gone, and our friendship would still have ended how it ended.”

-- Narrator (Part Six, She Made It paragraph 6)

Importance: While she sat at the airport realizing that she had failed in her plan to go to Australia Suzy also realized it wouldn’t have mattered even if Jamie had agreed with her about how Franny died, it still would not change anything. Franny would still be dead and Suzy would still feel bad about the way their friendship had ended.