

This Boy's Life Study Guide

This Boy's Life by Tobias Wolff

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Contents

This Boy's Life Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 3-7).....	5
Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 8-22).....	6
Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 23-28).....	8
Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 29-33).....	10
Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 37-47).....	11
Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 48-56).....	13
Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 57-64).....	15
Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 65-75).....	16
Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 76-84).....	18
Chapter 3, A Whole New Deal (pgs. 87-91).....	19
Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 95-106).....	20
Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 107-116).....	22
Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs 117-125).....	24
Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 126-130).....	26
Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 131-136).....	27
Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 137-144).....	28
Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 145-154).....	29
Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 155-168).....	31
Chapter 4, Citizenship at Home (pgs. 169-178).....	33
Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 181-191).....	35
Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 192-199).....	37
Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 200-214).....	38



[Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School \(pgs. 215-221\).....40](#)

[Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School \(pgs. 222-228\).....41](#)

[Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School \(pgs. 229-233\).....42](#)

[Chapter 6, The Amen Corner \(pgs. 238-252\).....44](#)

[Chapter 6, The Amen Corner \(pgs. 253-265\).....46](#)

[Chapter 6, The Amen Corner \(pgs. 266-269\).....47](#)

[Chapter 6, The Amen Corner \(pgs. 270-276\).....48](#)

[Chapter 7, Amen \(pgs. 283-288\).....49](#)

[Characters.....50](#)

[Objects/Places.....54](#)

[Themes.....57](#)

[Style.....59](#)

[Quotes.....62](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....64](#)



Plot Summary

This Boy's Life by Tobias Wolff is a painful examination of what happens to a young man who is left to navigate life by himself. The adults in Toby's life are too preoccupied with their own lives to pay attention to him. His mother is self-centered and childish and never really indicates that she wants Toby around. His wealthy father lives with his other son on the east coast and doesn't pursue any relationship with Toby.

Toby is left to fend for himself, which has a negative impact on his personal development. His mother moves from city to city, whenever the wind isn't blowing her way, which is often. Since Toby has no role model and frequently doesn't stay in one place long enough to form lasting relationships, he clings to anyone who will pay attention to him. As a result, he ends up befriendng troublemakers.

Toby's mother sends Toby to live with Dwight, a man who she is considering marrying. Toby doesn't necessarily like the man, but the prospect of a normal family life is attractive to him. Dwight is cruel and immediately lets it be known that he has no intention of treating Toby like a family member. In fact, he treats Toby like a slave until Toby's mother finally decides to move in with them.

Dwight is abusive toward Toby, but Toby doesn't do anything about it for years. He understands that Dwight and his family are the closest thing to a family he will probably ever have. He also holds on to some hope that Dwight will come around.

Toby is constantly seeking acceptance. He doesn't get it at home, so he looks for it at school. Toby wants to be a good kid, but he has no one to show him how to act so he is awkward around other children. He makes a reputation for himself as a tough guy, using physical violence to deal with his emotional pain.

When Toby's in high school, he cuts off a part of his finger in shop class. After this incident, Toby starts complaining about everything. All of the pent up anger and frustration of being a second-class citizen finally boils up inside of him. Once this happens, the course of Toby's life changes. He separates himself from Dwight and gets into serious trouble. It's at this point that Toby starts to lose his humanity.

Luckily, two positive male role models enter Toby's life at this critical time. They give him a hand up by offering him guidance. His older brother gives him companionship, and Mr. Hill gives him the opportunity to get a good education. Though these two influences don't entirely save Toby from himself, they offer enough hope that Toby decides not to throw his life away. They show Toby enough that he makes a critical decision that gets his life back on track.



Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 3-7)

Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 3-7) Summary and Analysis

It is 1955, and Toby and his mother are driving across the country to escape their old life in Sarasota, Florida and start a newer, better life in Utah. They are trying to get away from Toby's mother's abusive, obsessive boyfriend, Roy.

Right as they cross the Continental divide, their car, the Nash Rambler, overheats. Both Toby and his mother are used to this as the car has been overheating since they left. The car is such a piece of junk that when they get to Utah, his mother gives it to a woman she meets in a cafeteria. While they are waiting for the car to cool down, a truck speeds past them and drives over a cliff. The brakes are out, and it can't stop.

After this happens, Toby convinces his mother to buy him a bunch of souvenirs. He knows his mother cannot afford them, but they're both thinking that their new life might end just as badly as the trucker's life. Toby's mother needs his love and support. He makes her pay for it with souvenirs.

Toby is only 10. His mother is convinced their problems will go away when they get to Utah. Toby believes he will be a new person that will fit in. Toby's mother also believes she will get a job in the uranium fields, learn how to prospect for uranium and make a bunch of money. They think this will happen as they have been through some rough times and deserve a little luck.

When Toby and his mother arrive in Moab, Utah, they realize any mining fortune to be made has already been made by other people. The place is completely different than how they imagined it. Prostitutes walk the streets, businesses are not hiring and Geiger counters, which are used to find uranium, cost way too much for Toby and his mother to buy.

Toby and his mother buy a cheap Geiger counter and move to Salt Lake City where Toby's mother is convinced she'll find a job with Kennecott Mining Company, even though one of the company's top officers has told Toby's mother he isn't hiring, and his company is about to go on strike. Toby's mother decides to go anyway as the man's letter is so nice.

Toby's mother does not live in the present. She either daydreams about a better future or thinks about her past. She grew up in Beverly Hills, California. Her dad, Daddy, was a rich navy officer, but lost his money when the market crashed. When Toby's mom was little she rode in a parade float called the "End of the Rainbow." The name of the float suggests this is the last happy moment she'll have in her life. Toby's mother doesn't understand that the reason her life is hard is because she makes bad choices and lives in a fantasy world.



Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 8-22)

Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 8-22) Summary and Analysis

Toby wants to change his name to Jack like Jack London because a girl in his class in Florida was named Toby. Toby is scared of girls and believes changing his name will also change his identity and his life problems. His mother agrees to let him change his name to Jonathan if he agrees to complete catechism classes. After he is baptized as Jonathan, she says he can shorten his name to Jack.

The name change will also get rid of Toby's ties to his father. Toby's father calls from Connecticut. He lives there with Toby's older brother, Geoffrey, and a millionaire he started seeing while married to Toby's mother. He doesn't give Toby and his mother any money. Toby's dad tells Toby to keep his name as it's an old family name. He also tells him not to become a Catholic because his is from a family of Protestants. Neither of these things are true. Toby demonstrates that he doesn't have a relationship with his brother by saying his brother doesn't care what Toby calls himself.

In the fall, Toby starts taking a catechism class taught by Sister James. Sister James is very passionate and tries to keep the kids out of trouble by getting them to join clubs. Toby joins the Archery Club. At first, the boys shoot their arrows at neighborhood cats that wander into the churchyard. When the cats learn to stay out of the yard, the boys start shooting at each other. One day, as Toby is raising his bow to shoot one of his classmates, he hears a rustling in the bushes and turns around to see Sister James. She does not say anything, but he stops what he is doing. This embarrasses Toby, so he starts skipping archery and catechism classes. When he skips class, he watches families and people and pretends that they're going to adopt him.

He also writes to his pen pal, Alice, especially when he's upset. Rather than telling her what is bothering him, he tells her lies. He tells her that he has a palomino horse named Smiley, and his dad owns the Lazy B Ranch. Toby's mother's boyfriend, Roy, moves in with them. Roy has a tattoo, smokes, lives off disability checks from the VA and shoots cans. Toby likes when Roy takes him shooting. Toby ignores the way Roy treats his mother as he looks up to him. Every day, Roy and Toby hide near his mother's work and wait to follow her home. Roy did the same thing in Florida. Toby tries to ignore this and pretend like his trips with Roy are normal father-son outings.

One night around Christmas, Toby's mother doesn't show up. Roy starts talking to himself, drives around for a minute and then drives home. Toby's mother is cooking. Roy tells her he does not know who she's fooling, and they eat dinner in silence. After dinner, Toby's mother has to do work she brought home with her. She lied about her typing speed to get the job and has to make up for it at home. When Toby's in bed, he can hear Roy nagging his mom, but only slightly. He writes a letter to Abby and holds his teddy bear to comfort himself. He promises to stop holding the bear when he



changes his name. He's still under the impression that changing his name will somehow change his life for the better.

Toby prepares to get baptized at Easter, but before he can be baptized, he has to make a confession. He has an extremely difficult time doing this, because he cannot figure out what he does that makes him feel so bad all the time. He does not know how to express the angst he feels about his home situation. When he can't get the confession out, Sister James brings him cookies and tells him that getting sins out will make him feel better. Toby wants to find words for what he wants to say, but he can't. Sister James tells him three of her own childhood sins. She stole money from her dad's wallet, talked behind her friends' backs and wished the rest of her family would die in a car crash so it would just be her and her dad.

Toby adopts these sins as his and tells the priest modified versions of Sister James' sins. He says he steals money from his mother's wallet, talks behind his friends' backs and "has bad thoughts." When he's finished, the priest says he did well and tells Sister James that she has a fine boy. She agrees, and the reader gets the sense that Sister James and the priest are acting, at that moment, like the parents Toby does not have.



Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 23-28)

Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 23-28) Summary and Analysis

After Easter, Roy gives Toby a Winchester .22 rifle that Roy used when he was a kid. Toby says he had to work on Roy for months to get it as Roy is stingy. Toby believes the gun will give him the powerful, manly identity that he is searching for.

Toby's mother protests the gift until Roy follows her around the house nagging her to give it to Toby. Roy and Toby gang up on Toby's mother when either of them wants something. Roy takes advantage of Toby's relationship with his mother to get what he wants, and Toby takes advantage of Roy's relationship with his mother to get what he wants. Teaming up against Toby's mother makes the two feel like they have a bond outside of Toby's mother.

Before she says yes to the gun, Toby's mother makes him promise that he will never touch it when he is alone. Toby's mother and Roy are never around after school, prompting Toby to break his promise. First he cleans it, and then he starts marching around the apartment with it. Then, he starts wearing Roy's Army uniform or hunting gear and marching around the house with gun in hand. Toby likes dressing up, because it makes him feel like a different person. The costumes also make him feel powerful. Toby feels powerless in every other aspect of his life.

Toby eventually turns the apartment into a fort so he can follow people with his gun undetected. He makes gun noises, cocks the hammer and pretends to shoot people. Toby gets Roy's ammunition box, loads the gun and puts his finger lightly on the trigger when people walk by. Toby aims at innocent victims such as women and children. The more innocent they are, the more hysterical with laughter he becomes. He loves having this power over people, presumably because he's always been the victim. Toby recognizes this power again when he has to herd unarmed citizens during the Vietnam War.

One day, Toby shoots a squirrel. He tells his mother that he does not know how the squirrel died. Toby cries as they bury the squirrel, because he feels badly about what he's done. That night, he pretends to pray to make himself feel better. Toby decides to stay away from the gun for a few days. After school, he plays with his Mormon friends who he has been instructed to stay away from. He plays with his friend, Crockett. Mr. Crockett loves kids and takes them swimming.

Toby can't stay away from the gun for long as the only image he sees of himself is as a powerful manly man with a gun. One day, he walks a friend home, hustles back to his apartment and takes out the gun. He doesn't load it, but resumes his position in the fort. He does this for several days.



Several days later, a large blue car drives down the road. The car pulls in front of his house, and Sister James gets out. Toby hurries to the door to make sure it is locked. He always locks it when he plays with the gun. Sister James knocks several times. Toby just sits in the dark apartment in his camouflage wondering what Sister James would think of him if she could see him. He wonders if she would make fun of him or disapprove of him. She slips a note under the door and leaves. Toby tells the reader that he will never see her again. He reads the note, burns it to pieces and dumps the ashes in the drain. The note simply asks Toby's mother to call Sister James.



Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 29-33)

Chapter 1, Fortune (pgs. 29-33) Summary and Analysis

Roy asks Toby what he would think of having a little brother. The question shocks Toby, who doesn't like this idea at all. He doesn't say why, but it becomes clear it's the "starting a family" that throws Toby off. When Roy tells Toby that they already are a family as they have fun together, Toby relaxes a little. Roy suggests the kid be called Bill and tells Toby he can teach him all kinds of things.

The next morning, Roy leaves for a camping trip. When Toby gets home from school, his mother is packing their clothes. Toby does not need to see the suitcases to know they are moving again. His mother's movements and tone of voice give it away. Toby's mother believes Toby when he says that Archery Club has been canceled. He has been skipping it for months, but this is the first time she notices. She asks Toby where he wants to live. He says Phoenix. Toby gets excited when she agrees that Phoenix or Seattle would be a great place to live.

Toby's mother asks Toby what he thinks about leaving Roy. Toby doesn't want to say anything bad about Roy, because he's afraid his mother will use it against him if they get back together. However, he knows he will miss Roy so he asks to take Roy's gun. Toby's mother says he can't take the gun. First, she says she doesn't like guns. Then, she tells him it will not fit in the car. Toby breaks the gun down and shoves it in his suitcase, so she lets him take it.

His mother flirts with the cab driver taking them to the Greyhound station. When they get to the station, Toby's mother stays in the car. The reader gets the impression that Toby's mother has once again gotten herself in a bad situation. Toby's mother dismisses the incident and continues on her way.

The bus to Phoenix has left so, Toby and his mother have to settle for Seattle. Toby's disappointed, so his mother gives him money she can't afford so he can play video games and eat junk food until the bus arrives. Toby's mother is once again trying to buy Tony's affection. When she feels guilty about how he is treated, she buys him things. The two get on the bus at dusk and head for Portland, where they plan to catch a bus to Seattle.



Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 37-47)

Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 37-47) Summary and Analysis

Toby and his mother move into a converted attic in a small, musty boarding house in West Seattle. In the evenings, they go for walks and fantasize about buying the most beautiful houses on the block. They thumb their noses at rundown houses, even though living in a rundown house that they own would be better than where they live.

Phil owns the boarding house. Phil doesn't like kids and only allows Toby to live there, because Toby's mother promises that Toby won't bring other kids around. Phil is badly burned from a warehouse fire. Toby assumes Phil doesn't like him, but Phil makes a point of touching Toby every time he walks by. Toby believes Phil does this to make himself feel worse.

Toby's mother is one of three women in the house. Kathy is a shy, pregnant secretary who lives alone. Marian is the housekeeper who dates a marine sergeant and does not like Toby. Toby is fascinated with him and constantly asks to see war pictures. The man shows him pictures of his friends and corpses, hoping they'll keep Toby out of the military. Toby likes these pictures the best.

Toby hangs out with two other boys with absent fathers. Terry Taylor lives with his mother and sisters. His dad has not returned home from the Korean War, which has been over for two years. Terry Taylor's mom stares at a shrine she made for Terry's father, smokes cigarettes and cries. Toby and his other friend Terry make fun of Terry and his mom. Terry acts out by vandalizing stores and getting in trouble. The boys only go to Terry Taylor's house to steal cigarettes.

The three boys always go to Terry Silver's apartment, because there are never any adults around. Silver's dad lives in Tacoma with a new wife, and his mom works all day at Boeing. Silver is skinny and wears a homemade Nazi armband. The boys are obsessed with Nazis. After school they irritate girls, steal bikes, pedal down to Alkai Point and jump off near the edge so the bikes smash into cars. They also go to Pioneer Square pawnshops to stare at the Lugar, which is a gun they all want.

Silver is the leader of the group. He calls Jewish families and screams at them in German while the other two listen on an extension. He also calls the parents of kids they do not like and tells them their kid is doing poorly in school. The boys try to make themselves look cool by smoking cigarettes and greasing their hair back. Toby's mother hates his hair, which is half the reason he keeps it. The boys know they are not cool, but they want to be accepted and keep trying.

Every day, they watch the Mickey Mouse Club. They pretend they watch it, because they have a crush on a Mouseketeer named Annette. When the show starts, they make lewd comments about her and kiss the screen. They really watch it because it makes

them feel good and gives them some sense of a normal childhood. Silver and Toby ignore the fact that Taylor sucks his thumb during the show.

Toby starts writing Annette letters. Alice no longer writes to him and he thinks his letters will make Annette fall in love with him. Toby fantasizes about being nursed to recovery by Annette after having a terrible accident in front of her house. The Mickey Mouse Club eventually blocks his letters because they are too graphic.

When the show is over, the boys have to act cool to atone for their childlike pleasure, so they go on the roof and throw things at people. One day they hit a 1955 Thunderbird driven by a successful man who is on his way to a date. All three boys resent his maleness, his success and his decency, so they launch eggs at him. The man, who is now covered in eggs, drives around the block trying to figure out where the eggs are coming from. Silver yells at him and calls him a "Yid."



Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 48-56)

Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 48-56) Summary and Analysis

Toby and his mother go to Alkai Point, which is a park that overlooks the harbor, to watch a mock naval battle between the Odd Fellows and the Lions Club. Two men holding beer bottles are watching them. The first one walks over to Toby and gives Toby his binoculars so Toby can see the battle more clearly. The other starts talking to Toby's mother.

At first, Toby's mother is hesitant to talk to the man, but after a while, she's comfortable enough with him to go to their house to watch the battle. Toby protests by saying he is hungry. The men promise to get him a hamburger, which is what he wants, and they head to their house. On the way, one of the men asks Toby detailed questions about his and his mother's life. Tony thinks nothing of it as the man is showing interest in him.

The house is old, and the coffee table is covered with beer bottles. However, it has a great view. This is what Toby's mother focuses on. Here the reader learns that Judd is the man who has been talking to Toby, and Gil is the man who has been talking to Toby's mother. Judd makes Toby a hamburger while Gil talks to Toby's mother who he calls by her first name. Her first name is Rosemary. This is the first time the reader learns Rosemary's name.

Gil calls Toby Jack and does everything he can to relate to "Jack." Gil tells Toby he looks like an athlete and asks him about sports. He tries to win Toby over, because he assumes Rosemary will leave if Toby is unhappy. Gil asks Toby if he has a bike, and Toby tells him no. This is clearly a sore spot for Rosemary who tells the men that Toby doesn't have a bike as she cannot afford it. Gil keeps asking Toby what kind of bike he wants until Toby tells him he wants a red Raleigh English racer. While this conversation is taking place, Judd brings Toby a glass of what is supposed to be Ginger Ale. Toby recognizes it as Collins mix. This mistake foreshadows lies and broken promises to come.

Rosemary says she cannot possibly let Gil buy Toby a bike. Finally, she agrees to the arrangement. Toby thinks this is because his mom wants him to have a bike. The reader is lead to believe this, because Rosemary knows she will not get any alone time with Gil unless Toby gets his way.

Rosemary and Toby go home, and Rosemary asks Toby if he would mind staying the night alone. He agrees, and Rosemary starts getting ready for dinner with Gil. Kathy and Marian come upstairs to help Rosemary get ready. When Gil arrives, he honks for Rosemary rather than coming to the door. This does not sit well with Marian, who knows that a real man would come to the door.

Toby doesn't sleep well and wakes up when Rosemary gets home. She's crying, and he comforts her. He holds her like a child. This is something he is used to doing. The next morning, he asks his mom about the new bike, but she will not answer him.



Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 57-64)

Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 57-64) Summary and Analysis

Rosemary, Toby, Karen and Marian all move into a house that Rosemary finds. The house is the most decrepit house on the block and was scheduled for demolition before Rosemary signed the papers. She signs the papers at night after the homeowner takes her through the house in the dark. When they move in, all of the neighbors stare at them. At first, Karen and Marian are really mad. Rosemary convinces herself that the house is full of possibilities. The other two women finally give in. Rosemary's attitude about the house is the same one she has about life. She continues to refuse to see things for what they are.

Kathy has a boy named Willy. Kathy and Rosemary continue to work in town. Marian keeps the house and tries to look after Toby. Toby never comes home after school. He lies to Marian about where he goes and, when she tries to put him in his place, he ignores her. Marian talks to Rosemary about this, but Rosemary brushes Toby's behavior off. Marian and Rosemary argue about how to raise Toby. Rosemary says he's a good kid, and she does not believe in discipline.

Rosemary paints her Daddy as a saint at the beginning of the book, but he is not. He slaps Rosemary for sucking her thumb when she's little and spanks her almost every night without reason. Daddy also tortures his wife, who he believes is faking a heart condition. He takes her on wild car rides. During one of these rides, he hits a man and yells at the man clinging to his car. Daddy makes Rosemary smoke to stay thin and tortures boys who like her. He shoots at and then stalks a boy who sings for Rosemary outside of their house. Rosemary leaves after her mom dies and starts having relationships with aggressive men.

On Halloween, Toby and his friends break windows at the school. The police go to school to find the "boys with bad reputations." The boys do not get caught. Instead, they start stealing things, releasing emergency brakes on cars so they slam into trees and vandalizing things. Toby steals more than his friends and does not get caught. He does not care about the stuff he steals, but gets great satisfaction from the act.

Kathy and Marian get engaged. Marian wants Rosemary to get engaged and tries to set her up with men Toby considers losers. Dwight is the one guy who sticks around. Dwight is short, ugly and very accommodating. Toby makes fun of him, because he is a pleaser. Dwight is divorced, has three kids and travels down the coast to see Rosemary on weekends. Toby suspects that his mother is smart enough not to get involved with a man with so much baggage. This is putting a lot of faith in his mother considering the litany of bad decisions she has made. Toby sees Dwight as competition for his mother's affection.



Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 65-75)

Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 65-75) Summary and Analysis

Toby and Rosemary visit Dwight and his family in Chinook over Thanksgiving. Toby does not like Pearl, who is the youngest, because she throws her arm around Rosemary. Toby doesn't want to have to compete with anyone for his mother's affection. Skipper and Norma are both older. Skipper is polite, but doesn't say much to Toby. Toby becomes infatuated with Norma. She's 17 and has very white skin and red hair, which he finds attractive. Dwight's family lives in an converted war barrack that housed German prisoners of war. Rosemary pretends that the house is lovely even though the rooms are small and dark. She offers some renovations that Dwight happily agrees to.

After dinner, the kids play Monopoly, and Pearl wins. Pearl makes it a point to win games as being a winner brings her attention from the adults. When asked, Toby says Dwight's family is okay. Rosemary tells Toby her reservations about Dwight, but then she reminds Toby that Marian thinks she needs to get married. Rosemary softens the blow by saying she's not sure she's ready for another marriage.

The next day, Dwight takes everyone on a road trip around Chinook. Chinook is another village of converted military barracks. The majority of the villagers work for Seattle City Light. Dwight tries his hardest to up play the village. He tells Toby and his mother it's free of crime, has great air and water and world-class fishing that's frequently enjoyed by baseball hero, Ted Williams.

Toby does not like that Pearl is wedged between Dwight and his mother in the front seat. Rosemary asks Norma and Skipper what they think of the place, and they both mutter "fine." Norma says it is hard to find things to do. Dwight gets flustered and says if they would make an effort, they would find things to do.

Skipper and Norma go to Concrete High School, which is 39 miles away. Dwight considers it "a few miles down river." Before they return home, they get out, and Rosemary takes a picture of everyone. She makes Pearl and Toby hold hands. They do, but they make their hands go limp to strip the action of affection. On the way home, Rosemary asks about Dwight's piano and alto sax playing abilities, which makes Norma and Skipper uncomfortable either because he is lying or they have negative associations with his musical talent.

Dwight convinces Toby to go to Chinook by telling him the rifle club is going to host a turkey shoot. When they arrive at the shoot, Dwight casually mentions that contestants will be shooting at paper targets rather than real turkeys. He also says he just learned that Toby couldn't enter, because he is a child. Toby knows he is lying, but has to surrender his gun to Dwight who struggles to put it together and blames his struggles on a poorly manufactured gun. Dwight fails miserably in the shoot. Rosemary gets in the contest by telling the guy collecting entry fees that she's a member of her local National



Rifle Association (NRA). This is a lie. Toby leaves before she shoots. Rosemary wins the contest. Several entrants, all male, are congratulating her, and she revels in their attention.

Dwight acts like a child, because he didn't win, and Rosemary did. He storms in the house and marches straight to his room where he pouts until Skipper convinces him to come out. The makeshift family sings songs during Thanksgiving dinner. Rosemary tells a story about a Thanksgiving she, Toby and Geoffrey spent on a Thanksgiving farm in Connecticut after the war. Toby's father left them in Connecticut while he went to find work in Peru. This story upsets Dwight, but he follows it with one of his own about starving Japanese soldiers who stole food from American soldiers one Christmas while he was serving in the Philippines.

The next morning, Dwight drives Toby and Rosemary home. He makes a point to stop at a place where salmon are spawning. He mentions that they want to get to Chinook so badly that they risk their lives getting there, spawn and then die. This foreshadows what will happen to Toby and his mother if they join him in Chinook.



Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 76-84)

Chapter 2, Uncool (pgs. 76-84) Summary and Analysis

Toby and his friends are smoking cigarettes in the bathroom during lunch. Toby says he shot and killed a turkey over Thanksgiving. Silver does not believe him. Soon, Taylor disbelieves him as do the two "weed fiends" who are also in the bathroom. Toby yells, "fuck you" at all of them and then carves it into the fresh paint on the bathroom wall.

The new Vice Principal, known for being a shrewd man, goes class to class to find who wrote, "fuck you" on the bathroom wall. Toby's fear of the Vice Principal manifests itself as stomach cramps, and he heads to the nurse. The Vice Principal finds Toby and accuses him of the crime. The nurse tries to defend him, but starts to believe the Principal, which makes Toby feel even worse as he lied to a nice lady. The Vice Principal drags Toby to his office. While they're waiting for Rosemary to arrive, Toby continues to stick to his plea of innocence until he literally believes he didn't commit the crime. This makes the Principal angry at Toby. Toby knows the Vice Principal wants to hit him.

When Rosemary arrives, she looks at Toby to see if he did it, and he shakes his head no. She believes him even after the Vice Principal makes her listen to witness testimony from the two "weed fiends." She tells the man that her son doesn't lie and demands to see the Principal. The Principal is weak and stays away from the kids as they pounce on his weakness. He notices what he believes to be nicotine on Toby's fingers. Rather than accusing Toby of smoking, he tells him a story about how he used to smoke, but when he was in college, he woke up in the middle of the night and didn't have any cigarettes so he dug through trashcans to find one. At that point, he decided to quite smoking, saved all of his cigarette money and bought a Nash Rambler, which is a result Rosemary finds hilarious.

The Principal tells Rosemary and Toby he wants the Vice Principal to make the decision. Rosemary refuses and says Toby does not lie to her. The Principal recommends that, even if Toby did not commit the crime, he should get two weeks suspension. He knocks this down to one week and then lets it go.

When Rosemary and Toby get home, Marian sits Rosemary down and lists the bad things Toby does hoping it will make Rosemary get him in line. Toby sits in his room and thinks of a zillion lies to tell her. Instead of confronting Toby, Rosemary takes a bath, reads a book and goes to bed early.

Rosemary spends the weekend with Dwight and, when Dwight leaves, she tells Toby he has made a marriage proposal. Rosemary suggests that Toby move up to Chinook after Christmas to see if he likes living with Dwight. Toby cannot refuse this offer, because he is indebted to his mother for not bringing up his infractions.



Chapter 3, A Whole New Deal (pgs. 87-91)

Chapter 3, A Whole New Deal (pgs. 87-91) Summary and Analysis

Dwight and Toby do not interact during the drive from Toby's house to Chinook until Dwight swerves to hit a beaver meandering across the road. Dwight tells Toby he was trying to miss the beaver, but Toby knows he's lying. When they get out of the car to look at the beaver, Dwight starts taunting Toby, saying he is too scared to pick it up. Dwight tells Toby the pellet is worth at least \$50 and throws the beaver in the trunk.

Dwight stops at a tavern in Marblemount, which is the last town before Chinook. He brings a hamburger to Toby, who is sitting in the car. He tells Toby to stay put and warns him not to listen to the radio, because it might wear out the battery. Dwight stays in the tavern for a long time. Toby gets out several times and walks around. He also turns the radio on softly, hoping that by keeping it low, Dwight will not find out. Toby has decided that he does not want to get in any more trouble. He sees moving to Chinook as a new opportunity to create a new identity for himself. He thinks of becoming a brain or a jock. He believes the people he meets will just trust that he is who he says he is, thereby allowing him to become that person. Toby fantasizes that moving in with Dwight's family will finally give him the conventional family life he has been dreaming of. Toby notes that his mother is not the conventional type, but he is.

On the drive home, Dwight is extremely intoxicated. The car fishtails, careening dangerously close to the gorge below. Toby reaches for the dashboard to keep from throwing up. Dwight asks Toby what he is scared of, and Toby says he is sick to his stomach. Dwight says he thought hot shots don't get scared. When Toby admits that he is not a hotshot, Dwight lays into him and asserts his dominance over Toby. He gets Toby to admit he is a liar. Incidentally, Dwight has done nothing but lie since Toby has met him. Dwight also proves to Toby that he is not a hotshot. He offers Toby a lighter so he can show Dwight his hotshot magic, but Toby will not take it. Dwight warns Toby that he is in for a change.

Dwight's cruelty foreshadows that Toby's dream of turning over a new leaf will never become a reality. Dwight does not like Toby, and the first thing he will do is tell everyone to dislike him. Toby will not have a chance to prove himself. At the end of the chapter, Toby braces himself "for the next curve." This could literally mean the next curve in the road that Dwight is having trouble navigating. This could also mean the next curve ball that Dwight will throw at him. It could also mean the next dangerous life curve his mother has so carelessly thrown at him.



Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 95-106)

Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 95-106) Summary and Analysis

Dwight points out all of Toby's flaws, especially when he is drinking Old Crow. Dwight tries to keep Toby busy and signs him up for an after school paper route and makes him husk horse chestnuts. This job turns Toby's fingers orange and stinky, which causes him to be made fun of at school. Dwight makes Toby do this in the entryway to the house so everyone sees him. Dwight does this to break Toby's pride. Skipper nods at Tony when he walks through, and Nora half heartedly offers to help. Dwight designates Pearl as Toby's keeper, and she checks in on Toby sometimes 20 times a night. Then, Dwight tells Toby what a good family they will be someday.

Dwight takes the \$50-\$60 a month Toby makes from his paper route and allegedly saves for when Toby's older. Toby dawdles on his paper routes to avoid going home. He's never out when the sun is, because he goes to school before the sun is up and returns when it's down. The darkness represents his life, which is absent of his brother, father, friends and mother. His mother keeps delaying her response to Dwight's marriage proposal and leaves Toby alone with Dwight until late March.

Toby only sees Rosemary when Dwight visits her. Dwight and Toby pretend like they have a normal family relationship when they see Rosemary. Toby says he does not know why he does this, but it is clear to the reader that he wants a family life even if it's not perfect. On the way home, Dwight berates Toby, a practice that is starting to hurt Toby.

Rosemary tells Toby she does not live with them as she doesn't know if she wants to marry Dwight. She confides in Toby like he is her friend rather than her son. She offers no apologies for keeping him with Dwight. Nor does she understand how abnormal it is to leave her son with this man, simply because her relationship is unsteady.

Dwight signs up as the assistant scoutmaster and makes Toby go to Scouts. He buys himself new gear and spends the meetings paling around with the older guys. Toby's outfit is handed down. After the meetings, Dwight criticizes Toby. Boy Scouts makes Toby feel like a soldier and a man. He even carries his gun around while dressed in his Boy Scout uniform. Toby religiously studies the Boy Scouts' handbook so he can move up in rank. He also fantasizes about doing heroic things. This is the first time in his life that he sees heroic deeds as something to be commended for.

In March, Rosemary accepts Dwight's offer. Dwight buys several gallons of white paint, and he and Toby start painting the house. They paint everything, including the piano and the furniture. Dwight tries to play the piano, but gets frustrated and blames it on the

piano. The two paint the entire piano except for the black keys. The contrast between the newly painted room and the keys, which are the one black spots in the room, represents the fact that this new beginning is tainted.



Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 107-116)

Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 107-116) Summary and Analysis

Toby is drawn to the biggest sissy in the sixth grade, Arthur Gayle. He is big and unpopular, but Toby likes him as he has a sharp wit. Toby wants to be friends with Arthur. However, doing so will ruin Toby's chance to be cool.

On the way home from school, Arthur makes a comment about Toby's hands, which are still orange from shucking the nuts. Toby wants to let the comment go, but there are other kids around so he starts making fun of Arthur's weight. Arthur doesn't do anything until Toby calls him a sissy. Arthur punches Toby on the ear, knocking him to the ground. When Toby gets up, he is ready to stop fighting, but Arthur comes at him again like a madman. Toby is scared.

The two roll around on the ground for a while, punching each other. Arthur's dog, Pepper, jumps in. This bothers Toby, because he likes animals. Finally, they get up. Toby grabs his papers, which are all destroyed. Arthur will not let Toby leave until he takes back the sissy comment. Toby takes it back. Pearl is waiting at home to tattle on him.

Rosemary dresses Toby's wounds and tries to be harsh with him, but she just cannot. To make his mother feel better, Tony acts remorseful. Rosemary and Dwight have not gotten along since their honeymoon in Vancouver. When they get home from the honeymoon, Dwight starts drinking and sleeps on the couch. Rosemary just goes to their room. Toby mentions that this is the first time in his life that he has almost seen his mother give up. Rosemary gets a part-time serving job and joins the PTA and the rifle club to keep herself busy.

Toby's role in the fight is a source of pride for Dwight. In fact, the news makes Dwight happy. Toby so craves Dwight's approval that he allows Dwight to think he won the fight. Dwight starts talking to Toby like a peer and tells him a story about a time he got into a fight and shoved "road apple," or frozen feces into a kid's mouth. Dwight gives Toby advice about fighting. He even shows Toby some moves and takes pride in the fact that the mock fighting makes Toby realize Dwight's strength. Dwight takes calls from angry customers who didn't get their papers. He proudly tells them that Toby was in a fight.

Arthur and Toby avoid each other even though Arthur knows Toby is spreading lies about the outcome of the fight by not refuting Dwight's belief that Toby won. One day, Toby passes Arthur and Pepper in the street. Arthur says "hi" first and then tells Toby silly jokes and asks if he wants to pet Pepper. Pepper is nice to Toby, which makes Toby

happy as he thinks she has forgiven him for hitting Arthur. Toby has an easier time relating to Pepper, but understands that Arthur has forgiven him, too.



Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs 117-125)

Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs 117-125) Summary and Analysis

Skipper works on a 1949 Ford that Dwight gave him all through high school. Six months after he graduates, the car is still in pieces. Toby likes talk to Skipper when he's working on the car. In the shop, Skipper is nice to Toby and doesn't ignore him like he usually does.

Skipper is supposed to leave for the University of Washington in the fall, but he is only interested in finishing his car. He and his friends finally put the car together. It has a new engine, racing carbs and bored-out cylinders. He also paints it several coats of cherry red and puts whitewashed tires on it. Except for the old, run down interior, it looks beautiful. Skipper tells Toby that he is going to Tijuana, Mexico to get white leather put in the interior. Toby asks if he can go, and Skipper says he will think about it. At this point, Toby is referring to Skipper as his brother. Toby tells kids at school that he is definitely going to Tijuana with Skipper. Dwight asks Toby about it at dinner one night, and Skipper says does not even remember telling Toby that he would think about it. Skipper sees Toby is crushed, and tells him there will not room for him as he and his friend Roy will sleep in the car to save money.

Skipper and Toby share a small room. When Skipper leaves, the emptiness in the room makes Toby think about his real brother, Gregory. He has not seen Gregory for four years. He fantasizes that when they meet, Gregory will treat him well, even though he did not treat him well before. Toby also misses his dad. Rosemary never talks about Arthur, but Dwight makes off comments about him, calling him "Daddy Warbucks" and "Lord-High-and-Mighty." Toby excuses his dad's abandonment and forgives him. Toby forgives him until he has his first child. The baby is born three weeks early when Toby is away from home. Toby watches a nurse repeatedly poke the baby, trying to find a nerve. It nearly kills him, because he hates to see his child in so much pain. At that point, Toby feels nothing but rage and hatred for his since-deceased father. He cannot understand how a parent could abandon a child.

When Skipper leaves, Toby reads everything he can about cars. He starts hitchhiking to nearby cities, going as far as Mount Vernon. He walks around the towns for a little while and then hitchhikes home. Sometimes, Arthur goes with him, but he prefers to be alone. Toby keeps hoping that someone will pick him up and offer to take him all the way to Wilton, Connecticut, which is where his father and brother live.

Skipper comes back from Tijuana, and the car is destroyed. After he got the car upholstered, they ran into a sandstorm that destroyed the car. When Skipper brings the car home, Toby sits in it and makes driving noises, but does it quietly enough so no one



can hear. This is one of only two times Toby sees Skipper near tears. The second is the night before Skipper's wedding. Toby watches Skipper as he listens to "The Everglades" by the Kingston Trio, over and over again. The song's about a man who goes to jail for killing another man over a woman. He does not stick around long enough to learn he is acquitted.



Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 126-130)

Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 126-130) Summary and Analysis

Toby is in seventh grade and growing so quickly he needs a third pair of shoes. Dwight blames him for growing and refuses to let Toby use his paper route money to buy sneakers. Instead, he buys Toby brown loafers that Toby has to use for everything, including basketball. Toby is on the team, because the team just needs bodies.

Rosemary takes Toby to the games at night if she's not working. Norma and Bobby Crow take Toby when Rosemary's working. Toby's games are a good excuse for them to be together. Toby likes going with them, because Bobby gives him advice about how to play basketball even though he was a football player. Toby also loves being with Norma.

Toby first plays in his loafers against Van Horn. Bobby and Norma are having problems and go for a drive during the game. During the warm-up, Toby can hear kids from the other team making fun of him. Not only do the shoes look bad, but they make Toby fall every time he tries to stop. He can hear people laughing at him, but one woman in particular stands out. She cannot stop laughing and screeches every time he falls. Toby sees her. She is wearing "curlers and toreador pants." As her laughter continues, the crowd stops laughing at Toby and is nearly silent. Her husband escorts her out of the gym. When she leaves Toby starts playing better, though his team still gets horribly beaten. After the game, the Van Horn coach immediately makes his players cheer for Toby's team.

The woman's magnified laughter makes everyone in the crowd realize how cruel they've been. When the crowd becomes aware of their cruelty, they compensate for it by being overly polite. The shrieking woman's dress is important, because it shows the woman is either crazy, or has been on the receiving end of cruelty.

Norma and Bobby are late picking Toby up. When Toby gets in, he realizes that they have been having sex while he is playing basketball. This crushes Toby, and he fantasizes about hitting Norma for betraying him. He ends his fantasy by forgiving her.



Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 131-136)

Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 131-136) Summary and Analysis

Rosemary recruits women and couples to the rifle club. She and Dwight participate in couple's night. Dwight is terrible, but blames his bad aim on the guns. Rosemary is good and has a vest full of badges. Dwight sets up a mock practice range in their house. He puts targets at the end of one hallway and shoots at them from the other end. If Toby walks by, Dwight aims the barrel at Toby until he leaves the room.

Dwight makes Pearl and Toby go with he and Rosemary to out of town matches. He always loses, and Rosemary does well. As soon as they all get in the car, Dwight pouts. Dwight mocks Rosemary when she tries to reassure him. Dwight is cruel to Rosemary. He tells her all the sacrifices he makes for her and talks about the terrible kid he has taken in. He calls Toby a liar, thief and sissy. He does this until they get to the Marblemount tavern. Rosemary follows him, leaving Pearl and Toby in the car.

Toby admits to himself that he lies and steals. He steals money from people on his paper route. He wants to steal enough money to run away from home. In the meantime, he plots how he will kill Dwight. Toby even takes his gun out when Dwight is being mean to his mom. Toby says he wants to kill Dwight to shut him up, though he says it only bothers him when Dwight calls him a sissy. Toby makes fun of his best friend, Arthur, behind his back and calls him a sissy. He gets in fights, because he believes this will make Dwight like him.

While in the car, Toby and Pearl try to drive each other nuts. Pearl hums, and Toby cracks his knuckles. When Toby gets bored, he goes for walks, leaving Pearl's sight so she gets scared. When he gets back in the car, they sing the words to American Bandstand and Seattle Bandstand. They even get close to harmonizing.

They turn the radio off when they see Dwight. Rosemary always tries to get Dwight to surrender the keys, but he prefers to drive like a madman on the way home. Pearl always grabs Toby when Dwight goes around the sharp curves. Pearl and Toby act as support systems for each other when it really matters.



Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 137-144)

Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 137-144) Summary and Analysis

Toby snoops through his family's belongings when they're gone. He finds a letter from Rosemary's brother, Stephen, who lives in Paris and decides to send him a letter. Toby begs Stephen to send for them and save them from their life.

Stephen writes to Rosemary and suggests that Toby live with his family in Paris until Rosemary can get away from Dwight and start over. Rosemary confronts Toby about the letter. She asks him if he would like to live in Paris. Then, she tells Toby not to tell Dwight about the check Stephen has sent to send Toby to Paris.

Dwight is thrilled to hear that Toby could be moving to Paris. He tells Toby positive things about the French, following each comment with an ignorant insult. Pearl is jealous that Toby might go to Paris. Toby sees how people react to the situation, so he starts telling all of his schoolmates that he will be going to Paris. His teachers let him do an independent study on France rather than completing his normal assignments. This makes Toby excited to leave.

Toby is supposed to leave for Paris after seventh grade, leaving him the summer to study the language and culture. He and Rosemary are about to go to Mount Vernon to get Toby a passport when they get a letter from Stephen. Stephen says Toby has to stay until the end of high school, which is five years away. He also wants to adopt Toby to ensure that he and his family will not endure any of Toby's "discipline problems." If Toby does not agree to these conditions, he is not welcome.

Toby does not understand why his mom told them about his discipline problems. She says it is because it would be unfair not to. She either does not want Toby to leave or she wants her brother to take him off her hands for good. Rosemary gives Toby no guidance and tells him the decision is up to him. Dwight tells Toby he has to move to Paris. However, Toby cannot picture his life without his mom. It is difficult for Toby to convince himself that his mom wants him to stay. Rosemary tells him she wants to make her marriage work. Toby knows she may want to be alone.

Toby tells his family that he will not be moving to Paris. He says it is because he does not want to change his name, which was one of Stephen's conditions. Dwight is furious and tells Toby changing his last name is just like changing his first. Dwight asks Toby if he thinks anyone cares what he calls himself. Toby just shrugs. When people at school find out that Toby is not going to Paris, they do not say much. Toby assumes it is because they think the whole thing was a lie.



Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 145-154)

Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 145-154) Summary and Analysis

Dwight makes the entire family watch TV when the composer Lawrence Welk and his Champagne Orchestra are on. Dwight loves Welk and, when Welk makes fun of his members, specifically the Irish tenor, Joe Feeny, Dwight laughs out loud. Welk has fired several members. Toby says Feeny is singing for his life, which is how Toby feels about his interactions with Dwight. During the shows, Dwight fingers his sax. When he blows on it, it sounds terrible.

Norma moves to Seattle after high school and starts dating Kenneth. She loves Bobby Crow, but will not date him as he is Indian and will stick around the camp. Kenneth is an ambitious Seventh-Day Adventist, but he is also a mean spirited jerk. He loves to pick fights just so he can fight. Norma asks Rosemary's advice about marrying Kenneth before agreeing to marry him. The reader does not know what Rosemary says.

Norma decides to take Kenneth home for Christmas. Dwight gets so excited that he is civil to Toby when they go chop down a Christmas tree. Dwight puts three coats of white spray paint on the tree so nearly all of the needles fall off before Norma arrives with Skipper. Bobby comes to dinner and he and Norma go for a drive after they eat. They spend hours parked in front of Norma's house. Finally, she runs inside crying and goes to her room.

Kenneth arrives the next day. Kenneth loves that they hate him by dinnertime. He insults all of them and tries to push their buttons. When Dwight offers him a drink, he insults Dwight, and they get into a fight. When Skipper tries to intervene, Kenneth tells the family that they are "a very frightened people."

Soon, the entire family is insulting Kenneth, but they can tell he loves it. He loves to face adversity. He even sucks on an empty Yellow-Bole pipe as it tempts him to smoke. Norma gets Kenneth out of the house, but at dinner, the same thing happens. Years later, Rosemary tells Toby that Kenneth hit on her.

Dwight drives to Seattle every weekend to stop Norma from marrying Kenneth, but she marries him anyway. They have a baby and move to a duplex near Bothell. Norma starts chain smoking, but she hides it from Kenneth. The next time Toby sees Bobby, he is with a bunch of other Indians. Toby calls him by his nickname "Bobo," and Bobby asks him who he thinks he is talking to. Toby notes that Bobby has murder in his eyes.

The family spends most of Christmas Eve watching TV. When the Champagne Orchestra starts singing "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire," Dwight takes Toby



upstairs as he wants to bring the chestnuts Toby peeled two years ago downstairs. The chestnuts are covered in mold, and the beaver pelt/road kill Dwight kept is nearly petrified. Dwight does not say anything. They go back downstairs, and Dwight pretends to play his saxophone.



Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 155-168)

Chapter 4, Citizenship in the Home (pgs. 155-168) Summary and Analysis

When Toby starts Concrete High, he has saved \$80 in tips or stolen cash. Every November, his Scout troop goes to The Gathering of the Tribes in Seattle to compete with other troops. They compete in the morning and go to the Glenvale amusement park in the evening. Dwight spends the days drinking and picks Toby up at the end of the day.

This year, Toby plans on taking his \$80 and running away to Alaska while Dwight is drinking. Toby lets Arthur be his accomplice, because he is scared to live in Alaska by himself. Toby likes Arthur's dad, Cal, but Arthur and his mom, Mrs. Gayle, are mean to Cal. They think he is simple. Mrs. Gayle has the air of one who believes they deserve a better life. She is aloof to other camp mothers as she was one of the first to arrive. She and another "Founding Family" member, Liz Dempsey, go to Mount Vernon to shop. Toby likes to go along, because he relates to Mrs. Gayle. She likes that his older brother goes to Princeton.

Arthur wishes he had different parents. He tells outlandish stories about where he came from. Toby never calls Arthur a liar, because he tells many of his own. They tell lies as a way to escape their lives. Mrs. Gayle lets the boys watch old movies all night long. One night, Arthur and Toby kiss. From then on, every time they feel they are getting close to one another, they make fun of each other. Everything's fair, except using the word sissy.

Toby loses his swim meet at The Gathering of the Tribes, because he races in too high a heat. Everyone at the Gathering is in awe of the Ballard troop. The kids dress in military style and win everything. The judge disqualifies them as they are dressed improperly. This sets off the Ballard leader as well as the other kids and parents who are also in awe of the troop. Later, Toby befriends three of the Ballard boys and arranges to meet up with them at the amusement park.

Toby excludes Arthur and ignores his plans to runaway with Arthur. Arthur follows Toby from a distance, occasionally asking when they are going to leave. Toby says "soon" while rapidly spending his \$80 on food and games. Toby starts playing a game called Blackout, because the men working the stand let him play the first game for free. They pretend to let him win, but they're really taking him for all he's worth. When Toby spends all of his money, he realizes he has been had. The men give Toby a pink stuffed pig and move on to the next customer.

Arthur is mad at Toby, because he wanted to go to Alaska. However, he forgives Toby. The troop members have driven up in large caravans, but Toby and Dwight always drive



alone. Toby is scared to drive home alone with a drunk Dwight so Arthur agrees to go along. Arthur prances to the car while holding the pig. He knows acting like a sissy will bother Dwight, and he cannot stand Dwight.



Chapter 4, Citizenship at Home (pgs. 169-178)

Chapter 4, Citizenship at Home (pgs. 169-178) Summary and Analysis

Toby comes home from school to find a scraggly dog, named Champion, in the utility room, growling at him. Dwight introduces Toby to the dog and tells him Champion is his. Dwight has traded Toby's Winchester for the dog. Toby does not like the dog and tells Dwight he wants his gun back. Toby tells Rosemary about the incident the next day after she has returned from a Democratic political conference. She says she knew Dwight would do something, because they had gotten in a big fight the night before. She gets Dwight to agree to call the guy who bought the gun and tell him he wants it back. The guy lives in Seattle and is supposed to send papers that show the dog is a full-bred Weimaraner. He never sends the papers, and Toby never gets his gun back.

Dwight and Toby take Champion merganser hunting. These ducks are considered bad eating, but Dwight likes them as they are slow and easy to hit. Dwight never hits anything, so he kills little critters such as blue jays and robins on the way back to the car. Dwight really acquired Champion to help him hunt. Champion does not like water and, instead of retrieving a duck from the lake, he runs back to the car. Rosemary and Dwight take Champion goose hunting, but come back early as Champion relieved himself all over the car after hearing the gunshots.

One night, Champion scares Toby when he gets home. Toby picks up a mop and starts beating the dog. When he stops, he is ashamed. He says he can forgive himself for a lot of things, but not cruelty. Toby makes amends with Champion and from then on, Champion does not leave his side.

Toby likes to take the car for joyrides at night. Dwight will not teach him to drive, so he takes the task upon himself. He takes Champion with him so Champion will not wake the family up when he sneaks in. Toby gets the car stuck in a ditch. He and Champion get out and start walking home. Toby starts cursing, but decides to sing instead, because it makes him feel better than cursing. It is around 3 a.m. A man sees them, takes them back to the car and helps them get the car out.

Toby stays home from school the next day, because he is exhausted from his adventure. He wants to tell his mom what happened, but he cannot. Dwight visits Toby around lunchtime. Toby knows Dwight knows something, because he is being nice. Dwight knows what happened because, while he was with Champion, he ran into the man who helped Toby. The man recognized Champion and told Dwight the story. Dwight attacks Toby and starts beating him. Toby hits Dwight in the neck, which leads Dwight to hit Toby in the back of the neck. This makes Toby go into shock, and Dwight leaves.



Dwight ends up shooting Champion as the dog is a cat killer. After he kills a cat in front of a little girl, Dwight takes him for a ride, kills him and then returns to the house. From here on out, this is all Toby can think of when his mother suggests that he go for a ride with Dwight. She only makes this suggestion when Toby is in trouble.



Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 181-191)

Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 181-191) Summary and Analysis

Concrete is named after the Lone Star Cement Company, which is where most of the adults work. The kids are working class and do not value education. Many get married in high school and drop out. None think of going to college.

Toby's civics teacher, Mr. Mitchell, is also an army recruiter. He tells the kids about taking personal belongings like pictures and letters off dead bodies in World War II. He also tells the kids the Americans were on the wrong side of the war. If Hitler had not killed the Jews, they would have made the atomic bomb before the Americans did. Mr. Mitchell fails a girl for saying Freedom of Speech is her favorite amendment, even though the test question asked the kids their opinion. The only correct answer is the Right to Bare Arms, he says. He also organizes boxing matches that are well-attended by the community. Miss Houlihan is a speech teacher. She teaches the kids to reach down for their words and takes them to a speech contest in Mount Vernon. Horseface Greeley teaches shop and drops a 50-pound iron block on his foot at the beginning of the year to convince the kids that they should buy Tuff-Top shoes.

At first, Toby brings home good grades as he copies his work from other kids. Then, he starts changing his report card and ditching class. Every morning, he smokes cigarettes with five older boys. The boys want to get Toby drunk and help him lose his virginity. The only one Toby looks up to is Chuck, because he sees some humanity in Chuck. Psycho is stupid and insane. He has already been to jail for kidnapping a widow's cat. Jerry Huff is a handsome bully. He stands around the bathroom and makes fun of other kids' genitals. He loves to pick fights. Arch Cook is a "simpleton" who was run over by a car when he was a baby. He is Huff's cousin.

The boys drive Chuck's '53 Chevy around all morning, fueling the car with stolen gas. In the afternoon, they go to Arch's sister Veronica's house. Veronica graduated with Norma. She was the homecoming queen, but is losing her beauty as she drinks too much. She ignores her two young daughters and has sex with Chuck while her husband is gone on business. Toby says the kids are too "morose" to play.

Toby only wants to have sex with a girl he loves so he does not engage the easy girls his friends find for him. Toby likes Rhea Clark. Rhea is older than Toby and moves to Concrete from North Carolina in the middle of the school year. Toby dances with her at a dance, but does not have the nerve to pursue her. She starts dating Lloyd Sly. Toby writes Rhea letters and then destroys them.



The guys keep trying to get Toby drunk, but Toby does not really like drinking. One day, they pass him Hawaiian Punch and vodka. Toby cannot taste the vodka and gets really drunk. When he and Chuck, who he calls Chuckles, are laying on the roof, Chuck shows Toby his hands, which are all bloody and tells Toby not to hit trees.

Toby starts walking on a tree branch that overlooks a concrete hill. The branch breaks, and Toby flies down the concrete. His hands are in his pockets, demonstrating that he really is not too interested in saving his own life. When he lands, he cannot feel anything. Instead of crying for help, he keeps quiet and listens to his friends try to find him. He spends the night hidden in the brush and then goes home.

Toby tells Dwight he got drunk and fell down the mountain. Dwight smiles, gives him a small lecture and some advice about hangovers. Rosemary tells Toby he is no longer helping her. He understands this, but can only think about how good it felt to have friends looking for him and calling his name.



Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 192-199)

Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 192-199) Summary and Analysis

After six years of no contact, Toby's brother writes him a letter from Princeton and sends him a Princeton sweatshirt. Toby wears the sweatshirt everywhere and tries to adopt the phrases used in the letter. His mother is always campaigning for Senator Jackson and John F. Kennedy, because they are hopeful. Dwight hates Kennedy and hates that Rosemary is always gone. He takes this out on Toby, so Toby is constantly looking over his shoulder.

Toby decides to steel checks from a bank and run away to Princeton. He plans to do this at the annual Order of the Arrow Scout honor society meeting in Bellingham. As soon as Toby gets to Bellingham, he leaves the other Scouts, changes his clothes, puts on his horn-rimmed glasses and assumes the name Thomas Findon. Findon is a Scout Toby knows that has all of the qualities he thinks a man ought to have.

Toby gets a check from the bank, goes to the library, gives the librarian a fake address and gets a card in Findon's name. Toby walks around town, looking for a shopkeeper that has a friendly face and will not doubt what he is about to do. He finds an older woman in a drugstore that fits this description.

He chooses to buy adult items like pipe tobacco and Old Spice. At the counter, he pretends that he has forgotten his wallet and asks if they accept checks. Toby writes a \$50 check, and the clerk asks for identification. When Toby cannot recite the address on the library card, the clerk realizes he is scamming her. When the manager takes the check to the back to have a closer look, Toby knows the woman knows. This fact kills him.

Toby leaves. The woman runs out, calling after him. Toby runs slowly, because he knows she cannot catch him, and he wants to hear her. No one stops Toby as her cries sound like that of a mother running after a son. When Toby turns the corner, he breaks away, goes into a diner bathroom, changes his cloths and returns to the Scouts.

Toby and a couple of other Scouts are told to stand at the door and welcome guests. Toby sees the clerk in line. When she gets to him, he pretends like he has never seen her. She looks at his name tag, is satisfied it is not him and looks around the room to find her sons.



Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 200-214)

Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 200-214) Summary and Analysis

Toby decides not to submit Geoffrey's story about an American who murders a prostitute to his English teacher as his own story. He knows she will not believe him. Geoffrey writes regularly, but his letters are no longer stiff. He is honest with Toby and writes to him like a brother. Geoffrey tells Toby his dad has moved to California, is getting divorced and is working as an engineer, the first real job he has had in years. For the first time in six years, Toby understands that Geoffrey really wants to see him.

One afternoon, while Pearl and Toby are eating sandwiches, Dwight comes in, takes a mustard bottle out of the trash and shoves it in Toby's face. Dwight is upset as there are a few specs of mustard left in the bottle. He says it is not empty and makes Toby pick out the last little bits. Then he slaps Toby. Pearl yells at Dwight, and Toby leaves the house.

Geoffrey accepts Toby's collect call, but it takes Toby a few minutes to calm down before he can talk. Toby is upset, but hearing Geoffrey call him Toby when everyone else has been calling him Jack for years, makes him choked up. Toby tells Geoffrey what happened, and Geoffrey tells Toby a plan he has been concocting for a while. Geoffrey wants Toby to go to a prep school, specifically Choate or Deerfield. Geoffrey thinks Toby can get a scholarship as Toby tells him he has straight As, is a swimmer and is an Eagle Boy Scout.

Rosemary is having a hard time. The election is over, and she is back to waiting tables. One of the people she campaigned with says he will try to pull some strings and get her a job out east. Dwight finds out, drives Rosemary to a secluded area, drinks a bottle of liquor and then holds a knife to her neck for several hours. Rosemary does not tell Toby what happened as she is afraid he will make it worse.

When Toby tells Rosemary he talked to Geoffrey, she gets teary-eyed, which is unusual for her. Toby tells her about the plan. Rosemary worries she did the wrong thing by separating the boys. She tells Toby his dad went to Deerfield, but was the only person who ever got expelled. She tells him not to get his hopes up about going to that school.

Toby gets *The Status Seekers* book and reads it like a Bible. Toby adopts the suggestions in the book and imagines the people at the prep schools just waiting for him to get in. Deerfield's Headmaster John Boyden writes to Toby to tell him they are full.

Toby realizes it will be difficult to get into these schools. They have lengthy letters of application, want letters of recommendations from teachers, community service history,

athletic history and travel and language experience. They also have to take the prep-school version of the Scholastic Aptitude Test in January at the Lakeside School in Seattle.

Arthur calls Toby to talk about the schools. He tells Toby the three men should spend the summer in La Jolla together. He tells Toby that if all goes well, Rosemary will join them, and they will all be a family again. Then he tells Toby to stop calling himself Jack as that is not the name of a prep school boy. Geoffrey tells Toby not to count on any promise his dad made.

Toby feels good about taking the prep test. After he takes it, he stands around watching every move the other kids make. He wants to look and be just like them. Toby convinces Arthur, who works in the office, to give him transcript cards and school letterhead. Arthur is jealous that Toby might be escaping, so it takes him a minute to agree. Toby spends the next few nights writing letters of recommendation and filling out transcripts. He does not make anything up that is too far-fetched. He feels like everything he is writing is the hidden truth, his real identity.



Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 215-221)

Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 215-221) Summary and Analysis

Arthur and Toby bicker with each other all the time. One day, they start shoving each other and get separated by Mr. Mitchell, who signs them up for a smoker. Smokers are the boxing fights that Mr. Mitchell oversees. He signs boys up when they get in a fight. He does not care if the boys are matched up well. Mismatched fights are livelier, and the crowd, who pays \$3 a head to watch the fights, loves them.

During the three weeks before the fight, the boys stay away from each other. They have been growing apart anyway. Arthur hangs out with good kids who Toby considers dull. Toby thinks Arthur has to hide his eccentricities with these kids. Arthur never talks to or looks at his girlfriend, Beth Mathis, which bothers Toby. Arthur marches her through the hallway and glares at people, as if daring them to question his sexuality. It bothers Toby that Arthur does not put his true self forward. Toby does not like that the one person who really knows him is out of his life.

Dwight takes interest in Toby again, because he is being primed for a fight. Dwight tells Toby to hit Arthur by using a sidestep and uppercut. Toby does not think he will beat Arthur. The fight includes three, one-minute rounds. All of the boys are put in the same locker room and called out when it is their turn. Toby dreads the fight until he walks out and hears the crowd chanting his name. Then, he gets excited.

Toby hits Arthur with Dwight's move three times. The first time Arthur's head snaps back. When this happens, Toby feels good, because Dwight's watching him. Toby knows Dwight is impressed with the hit, and he always wants to impress Dwight. This is the first time Toby feels that Dwight views him in a way that makes Toby feel loved. Arthur technically wins the fight, but Toby and Dwight both think Toby gets a close second. Rosemary will not talk to Toby on the way home. She is ashamed.



Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 222-228)

Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 222-228) Summary and Analysis

Toby does well on his prep-school entrance exams, but he gets rejection letters from Andover, St. Paul's and Exeter and does not hear from Choate. At first, the rejection does not bother him as he is counting on Deerfield. Then, he gets a rejection from Deerfield and realizes all hope is lost.

Mr. Howard, a Hill School alumnus who lives in the Seattle area, calls Toby at school and asks to meet with him. Mr. Howard picks Toby up in a blue Thunderbird. He is a sharp dresser who looks more natural in a suit than any of Toby's teachers. He is clearly of a different class. Toby has Mr. Howard pick him up in front of a crowded drugstore, because he wants the other kids to see a father-like figure with Toby.

Mr. Howard wants to give a scholarship to a boy who wants to go to Hill. Mr. Howard warns Toby that it can be difficult to adjust to a place like Hill. The Pennsylvania winters are cold, and the boys are different. They are much more concerned with social status and money than the boys in public school. However, Mr. Howard says that by the end of high school, the boys are like a second family.

Toby tells Mr. Howard he just wants to go wherever he will get the best education. Toby tells Mr. Howard he wants to go to Deerfield and Choate and that his dad went to Deerfield. He can tell Mr. Howard's opinion of him has changed. Toby thinks this change is for the better and continues to ramble on about his father's accomplishments. Toby believes that the information makes Mr. Howard view him as a peer, and they start having a casual conversation.

Toby hears Huff's voice and is horrified. Huff starts talking to another boy about a fight. Then, his conversation becomes sexually explicit. Toby makes a face to show Mr. Howard that he is disgusted with such lowlife conversation. Mr. Howard suggests they leave. To Toby's relief, Huff does not notice him or call out his name when he leaves.

When Mr. Howard drops Toby off at school, and he tells him that Hill can be rough on a kid who has lived a sheltered life. He thinks Toby is sheltered because of his dad's background and his reaction to Huff's talk. Toby sounds angry when he tells Mr. Howard that he has not lead a sheltered life. Toby reiterates that he would really like to go to Hill. Mr. Howard promises to call the next day. Toby watches Mr. Howard drive away, realizing he may never see him again.



Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 229-233)

Chapter 5, Citizenship in the School (pgs. 229-233) Summary and Analysis

Toby accidentally cuts off the ring finger on his left hand at the last joint while in shop. Horseface Greeley and another teacher take Toby to the doctor. On the way, Toby answers all of Greeley's answers, making sure his answers reassure Mr. Greeley that he will not be named in a lawsuit.

Toby gets taken into surgery at the Mount Vernon hospital. Toby has to stay in the hospital for a week as the doctor is worried about infection. He is given morphine for the pain. Toby likes the way morphine keeps him from thinking and worrying. In fact, that is the main reason he takes it. He can handle the physical pain. He prefers temporary relief of the emotional pain. By the time Toby goes home, he is addicted to morphine. Toby goes through mild withdrawal and says if anyone at school did drugs, he would find them and do them, too.

Once Toby's on the mend, he starts to complain about everything. He complains about school, food, his medication and getting dressed. He talks bad about people and starts saying things to Dwight that he would never have said before. It is almost as if Toby's injury gives him the right to complain about everything that has always bothered him.

Toby steals some of Dwight's Old Crow. He hates it. Instead of drinking more, he adds water to the bottle and puts it back in the cabinet. Dwight finds it and asks Toby if he had some sips. Toby tells him that he is "not the drinker in this house." Dwight tells him not to say that and pushes Toby's chest with his fingertips. Toby falls over and lands on his arm. He starts howling in pain. At that moment, Rosemary declares that they are leaving.

Toby leaves first. He goes to live with Chuck. His mother plans to find a job in Seattle by the end of the year and then send for Toby. Mr. Bolger blames Toby for Chuck's wildness. He tells Toby he can stay if he doesn't drink, smoke, swear or challenge his authority. He also says Toby must help around the house and go to church. Toby agrees.

Dwight wants to make up with Toby as his leaving will make Dwight look even worse in the eyes of the camp. When Chuck goes to pick Toby up, Dwight tells Toby they should talk about things. Toby wants to say something mean, but all he can do is nod his head. They shake hands and wish each other luck, though neither of them means it. Dwight is Toby's least favorite part of Chinook, but his face is all Toby sees whenever he thinks of Chinook. The only piece of Dwight in Toby is anger, and Toby hears Dwight's voice

when he gets angry with his kids. As Chuck and Toby drive off, Chuck hands Toby a bottle of gorilla juice.



Chapter 6, The Amen Corner (pgs. 238-252)

Chapter 6, The Amen Corner (pgs. 238-252) Summary and Analysis

Chuck drinks every night and throws his body into objects to hurt himself, but never remembers what he does. Toby cannot drink as much as Chuck, which disappoints Chuck. The boys live in a converted shed near the main house. The Bolger's have a lot of property and lease their old dairy pasture and barn to a neighbor. Mr. Bolger thinks the arrangement will teach the boys responsibility. As soon as the family goes to sleep at 9:30 p.m., the boys steal the car, drive to Veronica's and get drunk. Chuck drives home recklessly and preaches to Toby about his fear of being condemned.

Toby knows Mr. Bolger wants to save him. Toby even considers going to church, but is afraid Chuck will ridicule him if he does. Toby also believes going to church will let Mr. Bolger see his insincerity. Chuck is generous, and the Bolger's cannot understand why Chuck gets out of control.

One night, Chuck, Toby, Psycho and Huff decide to drive to Bellingham. They walk a half a mile to the Welch farm to steal gas so they can go. The Welches are extremely poor. The three boys dress shabbily, barely talk and smell funny. The boys steal two cans of gas from the Welshes. They walk through thick mud to get back home. This exhausts them, so they can't make the trip to Bellingham.

The next morning, Mr. Bolger confronts Toby and Chuck. The mud trail gives away their crime. Mr. Bolger feels better when the boys admit they were drunk, because he believes alcohol transforms people. They agree not to drink again, but will not tell Mr. Bolger who else was with them. Mr. Bolger is happy that they are at least loyal.

The boys go to the Welsh farm to make amends. Toby has worked on farms and is horrified by the condition of the Welsh farm. It reminds Toby of his house in Seattle and feels ashamed immediately. He realizes the Welshes are barely making it. Stealing their gas and wrecking their property has pushed them that much closer. They've also been betrayed by people they trust. Mr. Welsh is watching his boys build a fence that serves no purpose. Toby realizes the busy work is something to occupy their time. Chuck and Toby watch them for a while. Chuck walks over to Mr. Welsh to apologize. Mr. Welsh has tears in his eyes and can barely look at the boys. Toby feels panicked and wants to leave.

Toby cannot apologize, because he is disgusted with the Welshes. Chuck is disgusted with Toby. When Toby tells Mr. Bolger he did not apologize, Mr. Bolger loses all hope in Toby. It is at this point Toby decides to join the Army. Rosemary drives down to talk to the Bolgers about keeping Toby on. She can barely look at Toby. She says either he



talks to Father Karl and obeys the Bolger's rules, or he can find a new home. Acting inhuman is the one offense his mother will not forgive him for.

Toby agrees to see Father Karl. Father Karl takes him for a walk by the river. He asks Toby who he thinks he is. Toby tells him he is screwing up. Father Karl gets mad and asks Toby he wants out of life, but Toby cannot bring himself to tell Father Karl he wants money, success and acceptance. Father Karl suggests that Toby's goal might be to make his mother happy. Toby agrees. Father Karl tells him to stop doing what he is doing. Toby makes a halfhearted promise to stop, but they both know he will not. Mr. Bolger tells Toby he has to work at the Welsh's farm to make things up to them. Toby agrees, but the Welshes refuse his help. This is the first time Toby feels disappointed in himself.



Chapter 6, The Amen Corner (pgs. 253-265)

Chapter 6, The Amen Corner (pgs. 253-265) Summary and Analysis

Fifteen-year-old Tina Flood, known as the "The Flood" threatens to charge Chuck with statutory rape unless he marries her. She's seven months pregnant, but doesn't know if Chuck, Huff, Psycho or someone else got her pregnant. She knows he is the best catch and is trying to trap him. Initially, Toby is happy Chuck is in trouble. He is still mad that Chuck abandoned him when he got in trouble, he also wants to play the role of loyal friend.

Mr. Bolger wants Chuck to marry Tina, because it is the right thing to do. The other two boys want Chuck to marry Tina, as well. If he does not, they will go to Walla Walla prison with Chuck. Chuck has no intentions of marrying Tina. He wants to marry what Toby refers to as a "TV wife," one that is happy and perfect. Chuck still has faith in his future, but Toby is losing faith in his. The sheriff keeps coming by the house to remind Chuck that if he does not decide to marry Tina, he will go to jail. Chuck cries in his bed at night, but he does not budge.

Mr. Howard tells Toby he got a \$2,300 scholarship to Hill to help with a \$2,800 a year tuition fee. The letter from the school says Toby will be held back a year. He does not have enough credits to be a fifth former, or junior. Toby does not act excited initially, perhaps because he is losing faith in his own future. On the information sheet, Toby includes his new name and identity, Tobias Jonathan von Ansell-Wolff III.

Rosemary gets a job as a secretary at Aetna Life Insurance in Seattle. Dwight knows she is trying to leave so he is trying to be nice to her. Rosemary tells Toby his dad is ready for him to visit La Jolla in June after school. Gregory will meet them. Toby asks if Rosemary will join them. She says she would be a fool to do so. Rosemary tells Toby that Dwight does not have any of the \$1,300 Toby earned covering his paper route for 2.5 years. He also does not have any money Rosemary earned from her witnessing job. Toby is upset. Rosemary promises to come up with \$500 to pay for Toby's remaining tuition. Toby notes that after they talk, Rosemary looks like she has dropped a burden. The reader does not know if she is talking about Dwight or Toby.

The sheriff comes for Chuck. However, after talking to the sheriff, Chuck walks back into his room, lays on the floor, pounds his fists and starts laughing. He also tells the "Wolfman" that he loves him. Huff agrees to marry Tina as he's scared to go to prison, which lets Chuck off the hook. Toby does not like Huff or Tina and thinks they deserve each other.



Chapter 6, The Amen Corner (pgs. 266-269)

Chapter 6, The Amen Corner (pgs. 266-269) Summary and Analysis

Toby tries to spend more time with Pearl, because she feels abandoned by Rosemary. While they are eating lunch on the bleachers by the football field, Pearl tells Toby that she will be going to Seattle that weekend with Dwight. Dwight says he wants to see Norma. Pearl knows he wants to see Rosemary and will use her as ammunition to get what he wants from Rosemary.

After midnight on the night that Dwight and Pearl leave, Toby and Chuck drive to Chinook. Chuck waits in the car while Toby goes inside. Toby goes to the refrigerator, pours himself some milk and makes a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Then he turns on all the lights and takes a look around. He reads Pearl's diary, which is the same as the last time he read it. He looks in his old room. A couple of Skipper's things remain. The only thing of Toby's is his Scout's uniform. It is hanging in the closet. Toby winces as he opens Dwight's door. He knows he is not there, but he is still afraid of Dwight. The room smells. Toby finds Scout paperwork that Dwight should have turned in so Toby could be an Eagle. Toby takes the forms with plans to fill them out himself.

Toby rinses his dishes, puts them back in the cupboard, turns off the lights and carries some target rifles out to Chuck. Chuck is mad that it is taking so long. Toby goes back for Dwight's two shotguns, the Marlin and the Garand, his Zeiss binoculars and his Puma hunting knife. Guns are Dwight's biggest source of pride. Toby is taking them, because Dwight took his rifle, his money, his mother, his dignity and his innocence. Toby knows taking these items will hurt Dwight the most.

The boys are scared, but they get home safely. Mr. Bolger outlines a map to Seattle for the boys, because Chuck has agreed to take Toby to Seattle. Mr. Bolger tells the boys they have to go straight to Seattle and come straight back.



Chapter 6, The Amen Corner (pgs. 270-276)

Chapter 6, The Amen Corner (pgs. 270-276) Summary and Analysis

Chuck drives Toby to Icar's Acres of Clams to meet Mr. Howard and his wife. Mrs. Howard makes him uncomfortable, because he thinks she can see right through him. She warms to him and helps him find something to order for lunch. Toby can tell that Mr. Howard admires his wife and expects him to do the same. Toby feels content, like he is with his family.

Mr. Howard is restless during lunch and tells Toby they need to talk. Toby gets nervous, but all Mr. Howard says is that he might have a rough time at Hill and can back out if he wants. Toby says he is dead set on going. Mrs. Howard asks how his mom is taking the news. Toby says it is hard for her, but she will do whatever will give him the best education. Mrs. Howard says she hopes she will be that brave when it is time for her sons to go to school. Mr. Howard is extremely excited about Toby.

The Howards take Toby to a tailor for clothes. Toby thinks it is funny that the tailor calls him Mr. Wolff with a straight face. Toby takes note of the vast array of clothing that Mr. Howard buys for him. Mr. Howard plans to have it shipped to Hill by the middle of August so it is there when Toby arrives. Toby gets outfitted for all seasons and occasions. He even gets a Cashmere overcoat and matching scarf.

When Toby sees himself in the mirror, he is surprised to see that he looks hopeful. In the back of his head, Toby issues a warning to the kid before him. He knows this kid will get in trouble, that he is not who he pretends to be and that the fancy clothes will do nothing to hide what he is. Toby adjusts his stance and starts walking like an aristocrat. However, he realizes that even if the world does not see the real Toby, Toby does. The old Toby will not go away.



Chapter 7, Amen (pgs. 283-288)

Chapter 7, Amen (pgs. 283-288) Summary and Analysis

The minute Toby arrives in California, Arthur leaves on vacation with his girlfriend. He leaves Toby his car and an expense account at the grocery store. Toby spends his time eating TV dinners, driving by the beach and going to movies. Sometimes, he hangs out with a guy that told Arthur he'd watch over him. One morning, Toby wakes up to the guy hugging him and telling him how much he loves him. Toby kicks him out and calls his dad, who tells him to kill the guy if he comes back. Over the phone, Arthur tells Toby how to work his .223 Air Force Survival Rifle. When the guy comes back, he just leans against the door and sobs while Toby cowers inside.

Arthur returns for a few days, but leaves again after they get Geoffrey from the bus station. Later that day, Geoffrey has to go down to the police station, because his dad is in police custody. Arthur has gone crazy. Geoffrey commits him to the Buena Vista Sanatorium, and Arthur's absent the rest of the summer. This series of events convinces Rosemary that she does not want to spend time with the family.

Geoffrey supports them by working at Convair Aeronautics. He tries to keep Toby out of trouble by giving him reading and essay assignments. The boys also sing songs. Toby especially likes to sing Geoffrey's Choate glee songs. When Toby goes to school, Rosemary moves to Washington D.C. She ends up getting a cease and desist order against Dwight after he tries to strangle her. Toby is in the other room while Dwight tried to strangle his mother. Toby chases him down the street. Dwight gets arrested, and Toby never sees him again.

Toby does not do well at Hill. He is behind academically and in over his head. He deals with it by getting in trouble. He can get by when he tries, but when he falls behind, he gets in even more trouble. During his last year, he is asked to leave. Rosemary picks him up. She tells him he lasted longer than she thought. They go to a bar, and Toby gets drunk. Toby tools around for a while and then joins the Army.

Toby ends the book by talking about how kids think they will be innocent forever. They do not think about long-term consequences and are happy in the moment. Chuck is happy to have escaped Tina Flood, and Toby is happy to have sold Dwight's guns. Even though they are not friends anymore, they sing the whole way home from Seattle. In that moment, they are carefree. Toby says Chuck and Chinook will always be what he considers home.



Characters

Toby, Jack, Tobias Jonathan von Ansell-Wolff III

Toby is the main character in the novel and his growth, development and desire to find himself is the premise behind the novel. The novel follows Toby through adulthood as he tries to discover who he is in the face of serious obstacles.

Toby wants to be a good person, but he doesn't always know how to act on this desire. Part of the reasons for this is that he has little adult guidance. He loves his mother, but as he gets older he realizes that she's treated him more like a friend than a son. She has not made his rearing her top priority, which has allowed him to run wild and fall under some negative influences.

Toby's lack of male role models also confuses his self-development. He wants to be a good man, but his father is out of the picture and his stepfather is abusive. Toby takes to watching men on the street. He tries to model their actions and the way they dress. He falsely believes that by dressing like them, he will become them.

Throughout the book Toby changes his first name. He does this when he wants to create a new identity for himself. He believes that a new identity will automatically be installed with the changing of his name. Of course this doesn't happen, it just prevents Toby from really examining himself.

Toby becomes Jack when he and Rosemary move to Utah. Toby wants a new name for their alleged new life. He also wants to be disassociated from his dad, though he's not ready to cut all ties because he doesn't even talk about changing his last name.

Toby goes by Jack until he gets ready to go to prep school. Then he gets a call from his father, who advises him on which schools to apply to. At the end of the conversation, Arthur tells Toby Jack is a terrible name for a prep school boy. Toby mulls this over and decides Toby is insufficient. He renames himself a distinguished sounding name he believes will make other kids think he is from the upper class.

Toby struggles throughout the book. At the end of the novel, when he is at the brink of getting in serious trouble, he joins the Army. He knows that strict rules, discipline and guidance are the only way he's going to find himself.

Mother/Rosemary

Rosemary is Toby's mother, but she does not get introduced as Rosemary for quite a while. At the beginning of the novel, the author only refers to her as mother. She is introduced as Rosemary when a man who is hitting on her calls her by her first name. The switch from mother to Rosemary in this instance suggests that she has two identities. One she shows for her son and the other she shows to men. Toby constantly



competes with other men for her attention and sees her as a different person when she's around men.

Men and fantasy are Rosemary's downfall. The reader is lead to believe that Rosemary came from an aristocratic family. However, he father was extremely abusive, which leads her to hook up with abusive men when she is older. Rosemary's first husband, Arthur, leaves her for another woman. After he leaves, she dates a succession of men who are essentially worthless.

Roy, though nice to Toby, is a complete mess. He is a Vietnam Vet, doesn't work and is mentally unstable. She leaves Florida to get away from him and then invites him to move to Utah. Rosemary constantly flirts with men and gets herself in bad situations. When she meets Dwight she has serious reservations about him, but marries him anyway. The reader never knows what's going on in Rosemary's world, but it's clear that she's a woman that can't be alone. Unfortunately, the men she chooses are abusive.

Rosemary copes with her life by living in a fantasy world. She only sees the good in people until it's too late. She also believes that moving locations will change her taste in men and bring her better fortune. Of course it never does.

Rosemary treats Toby like a friend, not a child. She confides in him and tells him about her relationships. She also asks for his advice about where to live and who to marry, decisions that most certainly shouldn't be made by a child. Rosemary frequently leaves Toby with other people when she needs a little freedom or he gets too difficult to handle. She is constantly conflicted about Toby and it's difficult to tell if she even wants to have him in her life.

Dwight

Dwight is Toby's stepfather and is unfortunately the most prominent male influence in Toby's life. Dwight is an unattractive, working class man. He meets Rosemary through a mutual friend who believes they should get married. While pursuing Rosemary, he comes across as a meek character.

Dwight lets his true colors shine as soon as he's alone with Toby. On the way to Concrete, which is where Dwight lives with his three kids, Dwight intentionally runs over a beaver and throws it in the trunk. He makes fun of Toby for being upset about the beaver. Dwight's goal is to break Toby down and assert his dominance over Toby. He does this by berating Toby all the way to Concrete and treating Toby like a second-class citizen while he lives in his home. Dwight is also a drunk and loves his Old Crow.

Dwight is inhuman and cruel. Nothing he does or says to anyone he's supposed to love is loving or kind. He acts normal in front of other people because he wants to keep up his image, but he's a monster behind doors. Though he does hit Toby, the emotional abuse he inflicts is much more damaging.



Dwight strips Toby of everything Toby cares about. He takes away Toby's few sentimental objects and forces Toby to do things that make other children ridicule him. Dwight does not care about anyone but himself. He doesn't even care enough about his youngest daughter to take her to the doctor to get her bald spot covered.

To keep his power position, Dwight pits his family members against each other. He forces Pearl to spy on Toby and encourages the kids to ignore Toby. This is how Dwight keeps control over his household.

Geoffrey

Geoffrey is Toby's older brother. At the beginning of the book, Geoffrey lives on the east coast with his father and his father's new wife. He doesn't have any contact with Toby until he goes to Princeton and starts sending Toby letters and stories. Initially it seems like Geoffrey's got it pretty easy, but it becomes clear that he's gone through some difficult times with his father.

Chuck Bolger

Chuck is Toby's best friend. They meet at Concrete High School when Toby starts hanging around the older crowd. Chuck is kind hearted, but he hurts himself when he drinks, which is often. Toby likes Chuck better than the other boys in the crowd he hangs with because he sees some humanity in Chuck. Toby lives with Chuck after he leaves Dwight's house.

Mr. Howard

Mr. Howard is Toby's benefactor. Mr. Howard is a Hill prep school alumni and ends up giving Toby a scholarship to Hill. Mr. Howard is everything Toby wants to be. He is wealthy, dresses well, has a nice wife and most of all, has a close family. Mr. Howard takes Toby under his wing because he believes he is helping a poor kid advance his life. Mr. Howard even buys Toby brand new clothes for prep school.

Arthur Gayle

Arthur is Toby's best friend in Chinook, however, Toby ditches him for the cool crowd. Arthur is fat and nerdy and struggles with his sexuality. Arthur and Toby get along well because they both live in fantasy worlds and tell lies about their real lives. Arthur is the only person in the book who really knows Toby.



Arthur/Toby's Father

Toby's father's name is Arthur. Arthur leaves Toby and his mother for a very wealthy woman who lives on the east coast. He very infrequently contacts Toby or his mother and never gives them any aid despite the fact that they are broke.

Skipper

Skipper is Dwight's son and middle child. Skipper is quiet and shares a room with Toby. Skipper is a gear head and spends his high school career reconstructing a 1949 Ford. Skipper is friendly with Toby when Toby's in his shop. He is not cruel like his father and doesn't want to hurt Toby. Skipper never says much about his dad, but he moves away from home after high school to get away from the family.

Pearl

Pearl is Dwight's youngest daughter. She is unattractive and has a bald spot in the middle of her head. Pearl is a tattletale who constantly looks over Toby's shoulder. Pearl is desperate for attention and loves Rosemary because she pays attention to her and treats her kindly. Pearl is extremely competitive and strives to win games because people pay attention to her when she wins.

Norma

Norma is Dwight oldest daughter. She's seventeen when Toby meets her. Toby falls in love with Norma immediately. He thinks she is beautiful and kind and fantasizes that she's his girlfriend. Norma is nice, but she has Rosemary's taste in men. Norma has a nice high school boyfriend, but ditches him for a jerk that she falsely believes will be more successful. By the end of the novel, Norma is smoking cigarettes and is living a depressed life away from her family. Whenever her family visits, she pretends everything is okay.

Uncle Stephen

Uncle Stephen is Rosemary's brother who lives in Paris with his family. Stephen offers to adopt Toby, but will only do so if Rosemary allows him to adopt Toby. The reader gets the impression that Stephen doesn't think highly of his sister and the life she's created for herself, but feels obligated to help her out.



Objects/Places

Utah appears in non-fiction

Utah is Toby and Rosemary's destination when they leave Florida. They do not end up living here.

Connecticut appears in non-fiction

Connecticut is where Arthur, Geoffrey and Arthur's new wife live at the beginning of the novel.

Winchester .22 Rifle appears in non-fiction

The Winchester .22 rifle is the rifle Roy gives to Toby and Dwight takes away.

West Seattle appears in non-fiction

West Seattle is where Toby and Rosemary live after leaving Utah. First they live in a boarding house and then they rent a house with Kathy and Marion.

The Mickey Mouse Club appears in non-fiction

The Mickey Mouse Club is the show Toby and the two Terry's watch every day at five.

Chinook appears in non-fiction

Chinook is a barracks in Oregon near the Skagit River where German prisoners were housed. The barracks have been turned into duplexes and Dwight and his family live here.

Marblemount appears in non-fiction

Marblemount is the village before Chinook where Dwight always stops to drink.

The Handbook for Boys appears in non-fiction

The Handbook for Boys is a Boy Scout manual Toby loves to read.



France appears in non-fiction

France is where Rosemary's brother Stephen lives with his family.

Champion appears in non-fiction

Champion is a dog Dwight gives to Toby as restitution for selling Toby's rifle.

Champagne Orchestra appears in non-fiction

Dwight makes the whole family sit down and watch the Champagne Orchestra on TV. It is directed by Lawrence Welk.

The Gathering of the Tribes appears in non-fiction

The Gathering of the Tribes is a competition among different Scout troops in Seattle. Dwight and Toby go every year.

Concrete High School appears in non-fiction

Concrete High School is Toby's high school.

Deerfield appears in non-fiction

Deerfield is the prep school Arthur went to and Toby hopes to get into.

Hill appears in non-fiction

The Hill is the prep school Toby gets into.

Princeton appears in non-fiction

Geoffrey goes to Princeton.

Smokers appears in non-fiction

Smokers are fights that Mr. Mitchell puts together.



Mount Vernon appears in non-fiction

Mount Vernon hospital is where Toby is taken after cutting off his finger.

La Jolla appears in non-fiction

Arthur moves to La Jolla after divorcing his second wife. Toby goes here for the summer before he leaves for Hill to spend time with his dad and Geoffrey.

Bolger's House appears in non-fiction

The Bolger's house is where Toby lives after he leaves Dwight's house.

Walshes' Farm appears in non-fiction

The Walshes' farm is a run down farm Chuck and Toby steal gas from.

Washington, D.C. appears in non-fiction

Rosemary moves to Washington D.C. when Toby goes to Hill.



Themes

Identity

Identity is an issue that the majority of the characters in the novel struggle with. Toby is never given an opportunity to understand who is. His life is constantly in upheaval, making it extremely difficult for him to take a step back and examine himself. He and Rosemary are constantly on the move, which adds to this struggle. When they do settle down, they choose environments that are counterproductive to Toby's growth. Toby is placed with characters that work to break his self-confidence and pride, thereby making it impossible for Toby to really identify himself.

Toby constantly struggles between who he thinks he is and who he wants to be. Neither of these assessments are correct. Toby isn't as terrible as he thinks he is, nor is he as great as he wants to be. The most damaging blow to Toby's identity comes when Dwight takes him to Chinook. Toby is determined to start over. He doesn't even mention changing his name, which means he wants to give a real shot at changing his person. However, Dwight tells him that everybody knows he's trouble and he shouldn't pretend he's something he's not. This crushes Toby's idea of personal reform and forces him back to his old ways.

Even minor characters, such as Tina Flood and Psycho, can't define themselves. This is because the author has created an atmosphere of oppression. This oppressive atmosphere suffocates personal growth. The only characters that can clearly identify themselves are peripheral figures in Toby's life. Toby doesn't get to spend enough time with them to benefit from their influence.

Defining Family

Defining the role of family is a major theme in this novel. Most of Toby's strife derives from the fact that he does not have a stable family unit. At the beginning of the book, his family is divided. He stays with his mom and his older brother moves in with his dad. This destroys any stable familial foundation that Toby may have had. To make matters worse, Toby lives with an unstable woman. Rosemary focuses more on her own needs than creating stability and order for Toby. As a result, Toby spends his formative years looking for acceptance.

Toby tries to get Dwight to accept him. He withstands Dwight's emotional and physical abuse, hoping Dwight will treat him as a son. The only time Dwight recognizes Toby as a human is when Toby gets in a fight and when he drinks. By only paying attention to Toby when he exhibits bad behavior, Dwight reinforces this behavior.

Toby considers Dwight and his kids his family. He knows they're not a normal family, but they're all he has. Toby spends long hours watching strangers with their children,



imagining what his life would be like if he lived in their family. He also dreams of running away and finding a family that wants to be with him.

Since Toby does not feel accepted in his family, he looks for acceptance in a group of troublemakers. These kids are all left to fend for themselves so they form a family of their own. The fact that Toby considers Chinook "home" is disturbing. It indicates that he doesn't find a family until he created one of his own.

Denial

Denial is a prevalent theme for every main character in the novel. The three main characters, Rosemary, Toby and Dwight use denial as a coping mechanism. Rosemary denies her life's reality and personal responsibility. She refuses to take responsibility for the bad decisions she's made. These decisions have a negative impact on both her and Toby. Rosemary denies her reality by ignoring facts and living in a fantasy world. She refuses to see what's happening around her until it's too late.

Toby learns how to deny reality by watching his mother do it. Toby fantasizes about living a completely different life than the one he lives. He tells lies to people and even convinces himself that what he says is true. Toby uses fantasy as an escape mechanism. He uses it to survive.

Dwight's denial is less innocent and well intentioned than Toby's and Rosemary's. Dwight simply doesn't care about anyone but himself. While outside sources somewhat inhibit Toby and Rosemary from dealing with reality, Dwight has no interest in seeking the truth. Rather than admit that he is a worthless drunk, he blames anything that happens in his life on other people. Dwight needs a scapegoat in order to survive.



Style

Perspective

The novel is written in first person. The author is very forth coming and introspective. It's clear by the way he writes that he has had time to review the situations he's writing about. He evaluates each situation as an outsider, rather than someone who's lived through the experience. This prevents too much emotion from flooding the text. This allows the author to be very honest about himself. He understand his weakness and his naivety the way an adult would. It is important that the author can write honestly because it helps him track his growth as a person.

The author generally writes in short sentences, using the minimum amount of words to convey his point. This forces the reader to pay attention when he makes a point. This technique helps the reader really understand what's going on. The reader is not forced to read between the lines to discover what the author is saying.

The author uses the book as therapy, a way to comprehend what's happened in his life. He has experienced all of the event of the book and his writing is fairly simple, however, he is able to write this way because he has worked to break down the complexity of his young life. If he had written the book as a child, it would hold little value. The depth of this novel comes from reflective experience.

Tone

The bulk of the novel is set in a working class neighborhood in Chinook, Seattle. The kids Toby grows up with do not value education and resign themselves to the fact that they will follow in their parent's footsteps. They will not leave home and go to college and create better lives for themselves. This creates an atmosphere of hopelessness, which sets the tone for Toby's life.

Toby lives in a dismal house. All of the houses in his neighborhood are converted war barracks, creating a very depressing atmosphere. Toby goes to Concrete High School, which also creates a foreboding image. By creating this setting, the author gives the reader an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. Everything appears to be dark and gray.

Chinook is the most stable setting in the novel. Toby and his mother move around a lot, but the author has isolated the Chinook experience because it had the most influence on his childhood.

At the beginning of the novel, Toby and Rosemary move from Florida to Utah. They don't stay in Utah for long. After they live in Chinook, they move out east. Toby moves to Connecticut for school and Rosemary moves to Washington D.C. for a job.



The author doesn't spend much time describing the places that serve as temporary locations for Toby and Rosemary. While the main characters are in these places, the author focuses more on people, objects and situations than he does on scenery. People, objects and situations serve as Toby's life setting because he spends the majority of his formative years as a nomad.

The language in the novel is simple and easy to understand. The author doesn't bury meaning in his phrases. He wants the reader to see through Toby. Using short sentences and simple language allows for this.

The author doesn't waste words, which adds emotional impact to the writing. Rather than going on and on about a situation, he just states what happens and how the characters react. This type of delivery forces the reader to pay attention to Toby's emotional state.

The simplicity of the language gives the reader a sense that the author was emotionally detached from the story at the time he wrote the book. It's clear that the author is looking back, but the clarity and bluntness with which he writes indicates that he views the book as fact, rather than an emotional hardship.

Structure

The book is broken down into seven sections, each appropriately named to fit that particular phase in the main character's life. Each section is divided into short chapters. Most of the chapters are less than 10 pages. Each chapter discusses a particular event that shaped that time in the author's life.

The book opens with a section titled "Fortune." In this section, Toby and his mother are about to start a new life for themselves. The author creates an air of optimism that is quickly crushed. This is indicated in the next section title, "Uncool."

The shortest section in the novel is "A Whole New Deal." It includes one chapter about Toby's car ride with Dwight to Dwight's house. The length of this section has great significance. It's the shortest in the book because it has the most impact on Toby's life. The scene in the car is all that's needed to foreshadow the next five years of Toby's life.

The novel focuses on Toby and stays away from any subplots. Everything that happens in the novel, even if it's something that happens to someone else, is related to Toby and his life experience.

Several characters are mentioned throughout the book, but all of the relationships are conveyed to the reader through Toby's perspective. The reader only gets to know these characters through Toby, leaving a lot of room for interpretation as to what the other characters really think of Toby.

Understanding the characters through Toby is a great way to give the reader a full profile of Toby, but it hinders the reader's ability to form objective opinions of other

characters. Hearing from Rosemary would be especially helpful because it would give a more balanced perspective of Toby.



Quotes

"Roy's strangeness and the strangeness of our life with him had, over the years, become ordinary to me." Chapter 1, pg.14

"Power can be enjoyed only when it is recognized and feared. Fearlessness in those without power is maddening to those who have it." Chapter 1, pg. 25

"Because I did not know who I was, any image of myself, no matter how grotesque, had power over me." Chapter 1, pg. 27

"These shows instructed us further in the faith that we were already beginning to hold: that victims are contemptible no matter how much people pretend otherwise; that it is more fun to be inside than outside, to be arrogant than to be kind, to be with a crowd than to be alone." Chapter 2, pg. 42

"He tried too hard. No eye is quicker to detect that kind of effort than the eye of a competitor who also happens to be a child." Chapter 2, pg. 64

"It was like being lunged at by a dog on the end of its leash." Chapter 2, pg. 79

"I recognized no obstacle to miraculous change but the incredulity of others." Chapter 3, pg. 89

"The main purpose of scouting as I understood it was to accumulate symbols that would compel respect, or at least civility, from those who shared them and envy from those who did not." Chapter 3, pg.102

"But our failure was ordained, because the real family we set out to imitate does not exist in nature; a real family as troubled as ours would never dream of spending time together." Chapter 4, pg. 112

"All of Dwight's complaints against me had the aim of giving me a definition of myself." Chapter 4, pg. 134

"We both believed that the real lie was told by our present unworthy circumstances." Chapter 4, 158

"And I learned that it's a bad idea to curse when you're in trouble, but a good idea to sing if you can." Chapter 4, pg. 177

"It wasn't self-pity; it was hearing my brother's voice and, for the first time in all those years, the sound of my own name." Chapter 5, pg. 203

"Being realistic made me feel bitter." Chapter 5, pg. 209



"I was distinctly aware of Dwight in that bellowing mass all around me. I could feel his exultation at the blow I'd struck, feel his own pride in it, see him smiling down on me with recognition, and pleasure, and something like love." Chapter 5, pg. 221

"It takes a childish or corrupt imagination to make symbols of other people." Chapter 6, pg. 246

"To be looked at that way is unsettling when you feel in danger of being seen through and exposed." Chapter 6, pg. 271

"When we are green, still half-created, we believe that our dreams are right, that the world is disposed to act in our best interests, and that falling and dying are for quitters." Chapter 7, pg. 286

"It was a good night to sing and we sang for all we were worth, as if we had been saved." Chapter 7, pg. 288



Topics for Discussion

Describe Toby's relationship with his mother and how it impacts his life. Is it a normal mother/son relationship? Does Rosemary consider both of their best interests when she makes decisions? Is Rosemary the adult in the relationship?

Toby fantasizes about being a part of the upper class and looks down on those who are lower class. Why does he do this? What impact does the contrast between his mother and his father have on this behavior? Does this attitude help or hurt Toby?

Toby desperately wants a male role model, but the men in his life constantly shove him aside. What things do Dwight, Arthur and Roy do to push Toby away? How does Toby react to these situations? Is he too eager to forgive them for their wrongdoings? What impact do these behaviors have on Toby's obsessions with war and uniforms?

Dwight is physically, mentally and emotionally abusive to Toby. What effect does this have on Toby? How does Toby deal with this? Why doesn't Toby stand up for himself? Which abuse is most damaging to Toby and why?

Discuss how Toby uses fantasy and lies to cope with his daily life. Is there a point in the book when this stops working?

Toby changes his name twice during the book. Explain the significance of this. Explain how Dwight and Arthur use Toby's name change to control him.

Toby repeatedly talks about family and having a normal family life. What does that mean for Toby and why is it so important to him? What role does letter writing play in Toby's desire to have a normal family? Does Toby ever feel loved and if so, by who?

Explain the significance of the section titles. How do they explain what's happening in Toby's life?

Toby takes on a lot of identities. Does he know who he is? If so, when does he figure it out? If not, why is he having such a hard time finding himself? What helps/prevents him from accepting himself?