

Throwing Stones Study Guide

Throwing Stones by Kristi Collier

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Plot Summary

Throwing Stones is a novel by Kristi Collier. Set during the prohibition era, Throwing Stones is about Andrew Soaring, a high school freshman whose brother died while fighting in World War I. Andrew wants to be a star basketball player in order to follow in the huge steps his brother left behind. However, when a new kid comes to town and begins to steal Andrew's star power, Andrew finds himself forced to choose between his own ambition and doing the right thing. Throwing Stones is a fascinating story of one boy's journey to maturity that will inspire readers of all ages.

Andrew Soaring cannot wait for school to start. This year Andrew will finally be in high school and eligible to play for the basketball team. Andrew hopes to be a starter so that he can repeat the wild success his brother, Pete, showed during his years with the basketball team. When Pete leaves to join the military during World War I, he gives Andrew his basketball and told him to practice hard. When Pete dies, Andrew promises himself he would be the best basketball player ever to make Pete proud.

Before school starts, Bennie Esposito comes to town. Bennie is the son of the owner of a carnival. Many people in town look down on Bennie because of his father's profession. Bennie tries to befriend Andrew, but when Bennie shows interest in AnnaLise, the girl Andrew likes, Andrew begins to dislike Bennie. When Andrew breaks his arm and Bennie takes his place on the basketball team, Andrew really begins to dislike Bennie.

Andrew begins to write for the local paper, covering the basketball games, but his stories are often slanted to reflect his annoyance with Bennie. When Andrew's arm mends and he is able to rejoin the team, he finds himself pushed to a more supportive role, unable to make the great plays he had made before. This increase Andrew's resentment towards Bennie.

One night Andrew sneaks up to Bennie's house in an attempt to prove that Bennie and his aunt are bootleggers. However, when he stumbles upon a still inside an abandoned shack on his father's property, Andrew realizes who the real bootlegger is. Andrew decides to get proof of the truth. Andrew borrows a camera from the newspaper publisher and sits in wait for the real owner of the still. When the man appears, Andrew discovers that his initial instinct was correct. The real bootlegger is the town sheriff.

When everything is said and done, Andrew realizes that Bennie is not the terrible person Andrew wanted to believe he was. Hence, Andrew swallows his pride and extends a peace offering to Bennie. They lead their basketball team to the sectionals.



Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 Summary

This novel is set in 1923, five years after the death of the main character's brother, Pete, of influenza in World War I.

In Chapter 1, Andrew's friend, Ham, asks him if he wants to see a naked girl. A carnival has come to town and Ham suggests they sneak in so that they can see the naked girls they have on display there. Andrew does not like the idea of sneaking out of his family's house to go somewhere he knows his parents would not approve of, but he caves under pressure from Ham.

In Chapter 2, it is Pete's birthday. Pete, Andrew's older brother, went to war when he was only seventeen and died of influenza on the day peace was declared. Every year on his birthday, Andrew's family shares a meal of Pete's favorite foods. Andrew still has a letter Pete left for him that promises Pete would return to watch Andrew take the local basketball team to the state tournament. For this reason, Andrew has worked hard for six years to become a better basketball player. This year Andrew will finally be in high school, old enough to play for the team.

In Chapter 3, several days later, Andrew is practicing his free throw when his father reminds him to complete his chores. George, Andrew's other brother, makes fun of him for getting into trouble and reminds him that the coach of the basketball team does not let freshmen players play in starting positions. Andrew accuses George of being threatened by Andrew's abilities. Andrew then goes inside to do his chores and learns that his friend, Ham, called. Andrew is not allowed to use the phone for unimportant calls and cannot call Ham back.

In Chapter 4, that night, Andrew sneaks out of the house despite his reluctance to go with Ham to the carnival. Andrew leads the way to the carnival. They slip in and are almost to the tent where the naked girls are when one of the carnival workers catches them. To hide the fact that they snuck in, Ham tells the man that Andrew is there to play in a basketball free throw competition. Ham pays the fee for Andrew to play. Andrew is confident, hoping to win the twenty-five dollar prize to help his father fix the tractor.

In Chapter 5, Andrew knows the ball they are using is weighted, but he is so used to using a multitude of objects to practice that he has no trouble. Andrew and the carnival boy, Bennie, are well matched and play for a long time. Suddenly a woman on a horse approaches the carnival. Andrew recognizes the woman as Ham's grandmother. The woman appears confused, talking to Andrew about her sons as though they are still children rather than grown men. Bennie calls the game a tie and sends Andrew and Ham on their way to care for Ham's grandma.



Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The main character, Andrew, is introduced in these chapters. Andrew is a young teen, just beginning to find himself interested in girls. Andrew's world revolves around his desire to be a star basketball player, his best friend Ham, and Ham's sister, AnnaLise. Although the novel is set in 1923, Andrew is a typical teenager that most modern teenagers can probably relate to. The difference between Andrew and a modern teen is the fact that he has lost a brother in World War I. Andrew loved his brother fiercely and Pete's death only causes Andrew to admire him even more, making it that much more important to Andrew to become the same sort of star athlete that Pete was in his day.

Ham is Andrew's best friend. Ham is the son of the local judge and nephew of the local sheriff. Ham is a spoiled young man who lives something of a charmed life because his father makes good money and because Ham is the only son in a family of six children. For this reason, Ham is often creating mischief and he often drags Andrew along with him. This foreshadows trouble for both boys as the novel continues to develop.

Bennie is the son of a carnival owner. Bennie is very good at basketball and he seems to have skills equal to Andrew's. This seems inconsequential at this point in the novel until the reader notes that Bennie's father has suggested that he stay in town with his aunt so that he might attend school. The reader must wonder then if this should happen, what it might mean about Andrew's ambitions.

Finally, the setting of this novel is very important to the overall plot of the novel. The setting is just five years after the conclusion of World War I, a time that was most notable because of prohibition. Prohibition gave birth to a new kind of criminal, the bootlegger. In this novel, the more civilized criminal could disappear in a community while producing and selling illegal alcohol without anyone being the wiser. This is an important element to the developing plot of this novel that the reader might want to keep in mind.



Chapters 6-10

Chapters 6-10 Summary

In Chapter 6, Andrew is exhausted the next day because of his lack of sleep. This becomes noticeable at breakfast the next day when he cannot keep up with the table conversation. Andrew's mother sends Andrew into town with his father so that he can help pick up supplies and drop off some baby blankets to Ham's mother for the orphanage where her eldest daughter works in Chicago. Andrew and his father stop at the gas station first. Andrew then goes off to the Stone Mason Lodge where he talks with some of the workers and shows a new carving he has completed to the local stone carver. Later, Andrew goes to Ham's.

In Chapter 7, when Andrew arrives at Ham's, he learns that Ham has convinced his mother that he is ill and is still in bed. While talking to Ham, AnnaLise comes into the room and yells at Ham because he was supposed to do some work at the local newspaper office that day to make up for a prank he pulled, but now AnnaLise has been ordered to take his place. To spare AnnaLise, Andrew volunteers to go instead.

In Chapter 8, at the newspaper office, Andrew is left in the hands of Mrs. Pickens, the woman who writes and publishes the local paper. Mrs. Pickens is an odd character who Andrew is mildly afraid of. Mrs. Pickens puts Andrew to work organizing some of the archives for the upcoming centennial edition. While going through the articles, Andrew finds a few on the basketball team that he finds dry and uninspiring. Then Andrew finds a wedding announcement for his parents. However, the announcement says their wedding took place in February, but the family Bible marks it in December. Andrew points this out to Mrs. Pickens and she simply slips the article in her pocket. Andrew then walks home, stopping at Pete's grave on the way.

In Chapter 9, Andrew works hard around the farm for the next two weeks. One afternoon while cultivating the western fields of the property, Andrew quits early and goes to his secret hideout, an abandoned quarryier's shack to play basketball. While there, Andrew hears a car drive up. Andrew hides and watches as his father shows the sheriff the building. The sheriff asks to buy the property from Mr. Soaring, suggesting that he wants the property for a retreat. As Andrew listens, he hears the sheriff tell Mr. Soaring that the basketball coach has taken a job in the city. Andrew runs to find George, telling him the news. George does not believe Andrew.

In Chapter 10, over dinner, Andrew and George try several times to get their father to announce the news that the coach is moving, but their father is distracted and it takes a while. Finally when the announcement is made, George and Andrew question him about a replacement. However, this information is not of great importance to their father and he misses the impact that it is having on his sons.



Chapters 6-10 Analysis

Andrew has a major crush on AnnaLise, but it appears that AnnaLise and Ham both are oblivious to it. AnnaLise is polite and kind to Andrew, perhaps fueling the fire of his crush, but does little to make him think he has any hope of winning her heart. The reader must suspect that this crush will play a major role in Andrew's life as the novel continues to develop.

Andrew works for Mrs. Pickens in the newspaper office in Ham's place. This introduces the odd character of Mrs. Pickens and the idea of a future for Andrew in the newspaper office. Andrew points out the dullness of the sports coverage in the newspaper, perhaps suggesting a future job for Andrew. At the same time, Andrew notices that a wedding announcement in the paper has his parents' wedding date wrong. This is significant because if the Soarings were married when the paper suggests, their first child was born six months later, suggesting he was conceived before the wedding day. This was a very scandalous thing in those days and could have caused trouble for the couple and their child, suggesting a motive for the parents to lie about their wedding day.

The local sheriff, Felix Mortimer, is Ham's uncle. The sheriff also holds the mortgage on the Soaring farm. The sheriff goes to Mr. Soaring and asks to buy a section of his land to use as a retreat. This seems insignificant at this point in the plot, just a source of money for the struggling family, but it will become very significant as the plot continues to develop.



Chapters 11-15

Chapters 11-15 Summary

In Chapter 11, Andrew and his family attend the centennial celebration downtown. When Andrew learns that AnnaLise has made a box lunch to be auctioned off later, he plays marbles with Ham and some other kids to make some money. Andrew is shocked to discover that Bennie Esposito has moved to town and even more annoyed when Bennie out bids him for AnnaLise's lunch.

In Chapter 12, Mrs. Mortimer, Ham's grandmother, approaches Andrew and confuses him with his brother Pete. She tells Andrew that Claudia still loves him. Claudia is Ham's older sister, the girl who was supposed to marry Pete one day. After the sheriff takes his mother home, Andrew turns his attention to the free throw contest. Andrew is confident that he will win the contest this year, but is a little unhappy when he sees that Bennie has decided to compete as well. While in line for his turn at the basket, Andrew lets slip to other contestants that Bennie is from the carnival and that he uses a weighted ball in the free throw contest at the carnival. When the contest is down to the final round, with only George, Andrew, and Bennie left, the sheriff comes up and accuses Bennie of using a weighted ball. Angry, Bennie drops out of the contest. Distracted by the whole commotion, Andrew misses his next throw and loses the contest to George.

In Chapter 13, school starts two weeks later. Andrew is excited to finally be a high schooler. At school, Andrew is disappointed to learn that AnnaLise and her friends are enamored by Bennie.

In Chapter 14, after school, Andrew talks Ham into rebounding for him in the gym. As they play, Ham mentions that Claudia might be coming back from Chicago. Ham then asks Andrew if he ever considered that maybe Claudia might have been pregnant when she ran off to Chicago and that maybe that was why Andrew joined the military. Andrew becomes angry and attacks Ham. They are pulled apart by Mr. Runyon, the new basketball coach. Andrew apologizes for his behavior. The coach then tells Andrew that Bennie is interested in joining the team, a fact that leaves Andrew uneasy.

In Chapter 15, Bennie does not go out for the team after all and another freshman who tried, quit immediately. This leaves Andrew as the only freshman. The coach gives Andrew a starting position as forward. The night of the first game, Andrew plays well, making twenty points on his own. The team wins. George, however, is unhappy with Andrew's refusal to follow the rules closely.

Chapters 11-15 Analysis

Bennie has come to live in town. At first Andrew is just surprised, not happy or unhappy. However, when Bennie shows interest in AnnaLise, Andrew begins to feel uneasy. Andrew tells people about Bennie's past. The carnival is something that the locals do



not really like because of the perceived lack of morals among the carnies, therefore Bennie is immediately distrusted. This suggests to the reader that Bennie will have a hard time getting along in this town, in thanks to Andrew's jealousy and his loose lips.

When school starts, Andrew finds all his dreams coming true as far as the basketball team is concerned. Andrew proves himself to be a gifted player and he is given a starting position. Andrew then plays so well that everyone in town treats him like a minor celebrity. It is a huge thing to Andrew and leaves him with a great amount of confidence and maybe even some arrogance.



Chapters 16-20

Chapters 16-20 Summary

In Chapter 16, Andrew makes a stone carving of a horse and leaves it anonymously for AnnaLise, confident she will be able to guess who it is from. However, a few days later Andrew learns that AnnaLise believes the carving was from Bennie. Then, when some kids tease Bennie for walking to school everyday, AnnaLise suggests he ride her wild thoroughbred, Jalahar. Ham tells Andrew that he has made a bet that Andrew can ride Jalahar longer than Bennie. Filled with jealousy, Andrew agrees to ride the wild horse despite his inexperience in riding such untrained horses. Andrew lasts only six seconds and breaks his arm in two places and his collar bone.

In Chapter 17, Andrew's arm is placed in a cast and he is told he will have to wear it two months. Andrew's first thought is that he will miss half of the basketball season. Andrew is stuck in bed for the next week. Then Mrs. Pickens stops by the house and offers Andrew a job writing articles about the basketball games. Before Andrew can answer, his father comes into the house and claims that their tractor has been stolen.

In Chapter 18, as they go outside to chase down the thief, the sheriff and Ham arrive and announce that Mrs. Mortimer is missing again. When they catch up to the tractor, they find that it is Mrs. Mortimer driving it. Andrew talks to her as though he is Pete and calms her enough for Ham to direct her into the sheriff's car.

In Chapter 19, when Andrew goes back to school, he begins a rumor that Bennie did something to Jalahar to cause him to buck Andrew off. AnnaLise approaches Andrew and tells him the horse has been sold. The coach tells Andrew he heard about his job with the newspaper and offers to help. After school, Andrew goes to the Stone Mason's and ask them to cut off his cast, but his father has already warned them not to. Mrs. Pickens is impressed with Andrew's first article.

In Chapter 20, Bennie confronts Andrew about the rumor he did something to Jalahar. Bennie accuses Andrew of being scared. Andrew spends the holiday trying to eat enough to regain his strength. The day of the big game against the team's biggest rival, Mrs. Pickens accuses of Andrew failing to do his job properly by being unaware that Bennie has joined the team. Andrew is deeply unhappy when Bennie scores twenty points and takes the team to victory. Mrs. Pickens is unhappy with the jealous slant of Andrew's story about the game.

Chapters 16-20 Analysis

Andrew is still high off of his big victory on the basketball team when he learns that Bennie is taking credit for something Andrew gave to AnnaLise. For this reason, Andrew does not think too clearly when he decides to ride a horse he is afraid of in order to prove himself better than Bennie. As a result, Andrew breaks his arm and causes

himself to be unable to play basketball. To add insult to injury, Bennie takes his place on the basketball team and takes the team to victory.

Andrew is writing articles for the paper about the basketball team. Andrew is a good writer and enjoys the job well enough. However, Andrew is unhappy with being stuck just writing about the team when he would rather be playing with them. Then Andrew finds himself forced to have to write nice articles about Bennie, his main rival. This causes Andrew to be a little petty and write slanted articles that Mrs. Pickens must edit. It is clear that Andrew is very unhappy with his current circumstances and that he blames Bennie for all of it. This suggests that Andrew and Bennie will become even darker rivals as the plot continues to develop.



Chapters 21-25

Chapters 21-25 Summary

In Chapter 21, the doctor removes Andrew's cast and instructs him to use it often in order to rebuild his strength. Andrew quickly returns to the team, but finds himself banished to guard. The coach tells Andrew that he has to rebuild his strength in order to be returned to forward. When they play their next game, Andrew finds himself stuck on the bench and forced to watch Bennie take the team to victory. Again Andrew writes an article that downplays Bennie's effort. Over the next few weeks, Andrew again finds himself on the backburner. Mrs. Pickens tells Andrew he is a good writer, but that he needs to learn to be more accurate and less subjective.

In Chapter 22, one afternoon on the way home, the sheriff stops and offers Andrew a ride. On the way to his farm, the sheriff tells Andrew that he knows there is a bootlegger out past the Soaring farm and he asks Andrew to keep his eyes open and tell him if he sees anything strange. Andrew agrees. Later, on Valentine's Day, Andrew goes early to meet Ham at his house. AnnaLise gives Andrew a valentine that he treasures until he sees that AnnaLise gave Bennie a bigger, more personal valentine.

In Chapter 23, after another basketball game, Andrew drops off his story to the paper and then takes Ham out in search of proof against Bennie and his aunt. Andrew wants to prove that Bennie and his aunt are bootleggers so that Bennie will be forced to leave the team. However, when they arrive outside of Bennie's house, Andrew finds nothing in his car but potatoes. Bennie's aunt comes out on the porch and begins shooting at them. Andrew and Ham run into the woods and get lost.

In Chapter 24, when they come upon a shack, they go inside in an attempt to get warm. Inside, they find a still. Ham gives Andrew a bottle filled with whiskey. Andrew absentmindedly puts it in his coat pocket.

In Chapter 25, Andrew then realizes where he is and takes Ham on a roundabout way home so that he will not guess where the shack is located. Back home, Andrew is deeply confused and worried about what he has seen that night. The next day, George mentions to Andrew that the dance party Andrew is planning to attend is immoral. George then says that the sheriff told him that Pete got Claudia pregnant and that was why he left town when he did.

Chapters 21-25 Analysis

Andrew has grown tired of being left on the sidelines. Therefore, when the sheriff puts it into Andrew's head that the Italians, who live in a small community to the west of the Soaring farm, might be bootleggers, Andrew decides to go in search of proof. Andrew simply wants an excuse to make Bennie leave town. However, what Andrew finds is a shock to him.



Andrew and Ham stumble accidentally upon a still inside an abandoned shack. When they go to leave, Andrew realizes it is the abandoned quarryier's shack that he once used as his own playhouse. The shack belongs to the Soarings and Andrew has no idea if the still is some strangers or if it belongs to his own father. This puts Andrew in a difficult position and forces him to do some intense thinking before he can act on what he knows.



Chapters 26-30

Chapters 26-30 Summary

In Chapter 26, the next day, Andrew attends the dance party, but is immediately annoyed when Bennie dances with AnnaLise. As Andrew is preparing to leave, he accidentally drops the flask of whiskey on the floor. Before he can pick it up, the principal spots it and confiscates it.

In Chapter 27, Andrew worries all weekend about the still. Tangled in his mind with the quandary of the still are his brother's questioned morals. Andrew asks his father why Pete left for the war and learns that it was because he wanted to fight, but had nothing to do with Claudia. This makes Andrew feel somewhat better. Early the next morning, Andrew goes to the newspaper office and asks to borrow the camera. At school, Andrew discovers that the principal is questioning everyone about the flask. Bennie is called in as Andrew arrives. Andrew knows that Bennie will take the blame even though it was not his. For this reason, Andrew breaks into the meeting and announces that the flask is his.

In Chapter 28, Andrew is sent home. However, he goes to the quarryier's shack to wait for the owner of the still to appear. Andrew waits until the man turns toward him and takes a drink out of his flask before Andrew takes a picture. Andrew then hides the camera and confronts the still's owner, the sheriff. As the sheriff and Andrew argue, a fire accidentally starts in the shack. The judge, Ham, and Andrew's father show up. Andrew tells them what he knows.

In Chapter 29, the next day, Andrew delivers the camera and an article about the sheriff to the newspaper. First, however, he goes to see Bennie. Andrew apologizes for his past behavior toward Bennie and asks him to stay in Pierre. Then Andrew gives Bennie a carving of a basketball he made months before. On the way to school after the newspaper office, Andrew stops at the Stone Mason's and learns they have found limestone in his grandfather's abandoned quarry.

In Chapter 30, the basketball team goes to sectionals in Indianapolis. The entire school goes to the tournament. In the parking lot, Andrew is approached by a college recruiter who wants him to go to his school for journalism. Then AnnaLise comes up and Bennie tells her that Andrew carved the horse for her. She gives him a kiss. The team then goes on to win their first game, but fails to win the all-important quarterfinal match. Despite this, the town is happy with their team.

Chapters 26-30 Analysis

Andrew realizes that the grownups at the school intend to frame Bennie for the flask at the dance. Andrew would be happy to have Bennie disappear from the school, particularly from the basketball team, but he knows that the flask is not Bennie's and it is



not right for him to take the fall. For this reason, Andrew confesses and then sets out to find the real owner of the still. Andrew is not surprised to discover it is the sheriff. Andrew recalls how the sheriff talked about the bootleggers and asked to buy the shack on his father's land.

Andrew is very brave in finding proof against the sheriff. Soon after the sheriff disappears, taking with him the mortgage on the Soaring farm. This leaves Andrew's family in a much better position, as does the discover of limestone in their abandoned quarry. Things will be really good for the Soarings in the future.

Andrew accepts Bennie as a member of his basketball team and begins to play the role that he is supposed to play on the team as a supporting player. This shows Andrew's maturity and his ability to adjust to the frustrations of life.



Characters

Alexander Soaring

Andrew Soaring is a freshman in high school when the novel begins. Andrew has a brother who died in the war and now he wants to be a star basketball player to honor his brother's memory. However, after one amazing game, Andrew breaks his arm and finds himself replaced as the star player by the child of a carnival owner.

Andrew is terribly jealous of Bennie Esposito before he breaks his arm. Bennie has a crush on the same girl Andrew likes and this causes a great deal of tension. For this reason, Andrew tries to find a way to get rid of Bennie. However, when a method appears, Andrew knows it is wrong and he decides to do the right thing instead. Andrew and Bennie actually become friends, working together to take their basketball team to sectionals.

George Soaring

George is Andrew's older brother. George also plays basketball, but George is a boy who likes to follow the rules. For this reason, George is not a standout player despite being very good. George is more concerned with being a moral person and doing the right thing than in becoming a star. This keeps Andrew grounded.

Pete Soaring

Pete is Andrew's older brother who died while at war. Pete was a stellar basketball player and now Andrew wants to be one to make Pete proud. As Andrew struggles to do this, he learns secrets about his family that he never knew before, such as the fact that Pete was conceived before his parents married. This calls Pete's morals into question in the minds of some of the townspeople, but Andrew finally realizes that Pete was the good, moral person he always thought he was.

Ham Mortimer

Ham is the son of the local judge and Andrew's best friend. Ham is the only son in a family of five daughters, therefore he is very spoiled. For this reason, Ham is constantly planning mischief, dragging Andrew into it as well. Ham drags Andrew to the carnival where they meet Bennie. Later, Ham bets on Andrew in the free throw contest and convinces Andrew to ride Jahalah after Bennie, causing him to break his arm. However, in the end, Ham proves to be a good friend to Andrew.



Bennie Esposito

Bennie Esposito is the son of a carnival owner. Bennie is also a very good basketball player. When Bennie's father decides that he needs to stay in one place so he can go to school, Bennie moves in with his aunt in Pierre. Bennie's presence in Pierre causes Andrew a great deal of heartache. Andrew is upset that Bennie seems to have a crush on Andrew's own crush, AnnaLise. Then when Bennie takes Andrew's spot on the basketball team and takes them to victory, Andrew decides he hates Bennie. However, Andrew eventually grows up enough to realize that Bennie is not a bad guy. Andrew even befriends Bennie by the end of the novel.

AnnaLise Mortimer

AnnaLise is Ham's sister. Andrew has a crush on AnnaLise, but finds himself terribly jealous when Bennie moves in on AnnaLise and she seems to reciprocate. In the end, however, AnnaLise seems to come back to Andrew when the newness of Bennie's arrival in town wears off.

Mrs. Pickens

Mrs. Pickens is the publisher of the newspaper, is the town historian, and the town librarian. Mrs. Pickens is an odd character who dresses funny and often tells people the origins of the words she speaks. However, Mrs. Pickens is a kind woman who teaches Andrew how to be a good reporter.

Felix Mortimer

Felix Mortimer is the sheriff in Pierre. Felix has strong opinions about the Italians and gypsies and other people he sees as immoral. Therefore, when Bennie comes to town Felix immediately begins to pick on him. When Andrew finds the still on his father's land, he eventually realizes it is Felix's. Andrew catches him red handed and publishes a picture of it in the paper along with a well-written article on the incident.

Mr. and Mrs. Soaring

Mr. and Mrs. Soaring are Andrew's parents. Mr. and Mrs. Soaring are hardworking people who have fallen out with some of their good friends because of Felix Mortimer's handling of their mortgage and his opinions about their son, Pete. However, good things come to the Soarings at the end of the novel and they prove to Andrew that if you live a good life, good things will come.

Coach Runyan

Coach Runyan is the new basketball coach at the Pierre school. Andrew is unsure about the coach when he first comes and later becomes annoyed with him when he will not allow Andrew to play. However, Coach Runyan turns out to be a very good basketball coach who works hard to make sure the students get all they can out of the experience.



Objects/Places

Pete's Letter

Andrew has a letter that Pete left him the day he left for the war that tells him Pete will come back to watch him play in the basketball tournament.

Telegram

The Soaring family has a telegram that informs them of the death of Pete. The family reads this telegram every year on Pete's birthday.

Carvings

Andrew likes to make small carvings out of small limestone. Andrew gives one of these carvings to AnnaLise, but she thinks it is from Bennie. Later, Andrew gives another carving to Bennie.

Pete's Basketball

Andrew inherited Pete's basketball when he went to war. Andrew has taken careful care of the ball ever since and uses it often to practice his freethrow.

Carnival

The Carnival comes to Pierre every August. The people of Pierre disapprove of the carnival and those who run it, therefore when Bennie moves to town people tend to be suspicious of him.

Pierre Journal

The Pierre Journal is the twice weekly newspaper in Pierre. Andrew gets a job writing about the basketball program at the school while he is recovering from a broken arm.

Jalahar

Jalahar is AnnaLise's wild and untrained thoroughbred horse. Andrew breaks his arm and collar bone after attempting to ride this horse.



Abandoned Quarryier's Shack

There is an abandoned quarryier's shack on the Soaring farm that housed workers for their quarry once. Andrew makes this shack a playhouse until his father rents it to Sheriff Mortimer as a retreat. It is here that Andrew finds the illegal still.

Soaring Quarry

Andrew's grandfather bought the land where their farm now sits in order to quarry limestone. However, the land never produced limestone. It was Pete who suggested they farm the land instead. At the end of the novel, Andrew learns that limestone has been found in the quarry, something that will change his family's situation dramatically.

Pierre, Indiana

The novel is set in Pierre, Indiana in 1923. Pierre is a small community that consists mostly of corn farms and limestone quarries.

Indianapolis, Indiana

Indianapolis, Indiana is a large city not far from Pierre. This is where the basketball tournament is held.

Chicago, Illinois

Claudia, Pete's former girlfriend, moves to Chicago when he leaves to go to war.



Themes

Grief

When the novel begins, Andrew talks about his brother, Pete. Pete was only seventeen when he enlisted in the military and went to war. On the day the war ended, Andrew and his family got a telegram informing them that Pete died of influenza in Europe. This news changed Andrew's family. George became more concerned with rules and morality, Mr. Soaring became quieter, less apt to laugh, and Mrs. Soaring began doing charity works rather than spending time playing cards with her friends.

Andrew remembers Pete fondly as a spectacular basketball player. As a way of making his brother proud, Andrew has decided that he wants to be an even better basketball player than his brother. Hence, Andrew has spent the last five years practicing basketball daily, making him one of the best free throw shooters in town.

Grief is an important theme of this book because it is Pete's death and his memory that inspires many of the characters and motivates their actions. If not for Pete, Andrew might not be so interested in basketball and therefore might not care when Bennie comes to town, taking away his thunder. Also, if not for the sense that Pete is there watching over him, Andrew might not have strove to do the right thing for Bennie at the end of the novel.

Jealousy

Jealousy is a major theme of the novel because it is what motivates Andrew to battle against Bennie Esposito. Andrew has a crush on Ham's sister, AnnaLise. Andrew has yet to admit his crush to AnnaLise, but expects her to know. When Bennie comes to town, AnnaLise is instantly drawn to him because he is different and somewhat exotic. This causes Andrew to become very jealous.

As Andrew tries to compete with Bennie over AnnaLise, he finds himself on the losing end. Andrew falls from AnnaLise's horse and breaks his arm in several places as well as his collar bone. This forces Andrew to leave the basketball team for half the season. Bennie then joins the team and takes Andrew's place as the high scorer. This again causes Andrew to feel deeply jealous and to decide that he hates Bennie.

Andrew spends several months disliking Bennie and writing slanted articles about him in the newspaper. However, when Bennie is accused of doing something that Andrew knows that he actually did, Andrew steps up and does the right thing. This creates a new relationship between Andrew and Bennie, leading them to become friends despite everything that transpired between them previously.

Bias

The people of Pierre are strict, churchgoing people. These people do not approve of certain aspects of other people's lives, such as the behavior of the carnival people or the actions of drinkers. For this reason, many of the people of Pierre have preconceived opinions in regards to some others, particularly Bennie.

The sheriff particularly seems to have some strong opinions about the Italians, the gypsies, and the drinkers. The sheriff spreads his opinions often, telling others about the lack of morals in particular people in town. The sheriff even implies that Pete ran off to war for reasons other than the most honorable ones. This causes some distress in the Soaring family before they finally realize the truth.

In the end, the sheriff turns out to be worse than the people whom he claims to dislike. The people of Pierre soon realize this and begin to form their own opinions rather than let someone like the sheriff form them for them. Bias almost caused Bennie to be accused of something he did not do. If not for Andrew doing the right thing, the thing that the others should have done, Bennie would have been expelled from school. For this reason, bias is a theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is the first-person perspective. The narrating character is Andrew Soaring, a high school freshman who is out to prove himself to be a stellar basketball player. Andrew tells his story with the naivety and innocence of a child his age, a child who lives in a complicated world that is more morally judgmental than the modern world.

The first-person point of view is an intimate point of view. This point of view keeps the reader close to the narrating character, so close that the reader might not be aware of the motivations of other characters until the main character becomes aware of it. This builds such a relationship between the main character and the reader that the reader cannot help but root for the main character as the conflicts of the novel impact him. In this novel, the point of view keeps the plot very simple, but also allows the reader to care deeply what happens to Andrew. For this reason, the point of view of this novel works well with the plot.

Setting

The novel is set in Pierre, Indiana in 1923. The area is mostly corn farms and limestone quarries. Most of the people are hardworking farmers and stone masons. Andrew's family is both. Andrew's grandfather bought the land his family lives on to quarry limestone, but they were never successful in finding any. Andrew's older brother suggested that they might farm the land instead, so the family has grown corn on the land for more than ten years.

The setting of the novel is important to the plot because it creates a world that is simpler than the modern world, but is also a place where moral behavior was highly praised. For this reason, Andrew finds himself in a world where a young man who was raised in the carnival is immediately viewed as suspicious while a small town sheriff is beyond reproach even though he is biased and a drunk. It is also a world where war has ravished the population and alcohol is illegal. These things play an important role in the motivations of the main characters, making the setting of this novel very important to the overall plot.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is simple English. The main character of the novel is a teenage boy living in the 1920s, therefore the language is of a simpler nature that he might have used in his everyday life. At the same time, the intended of the novel is young adults, therefore the language is simple so that the youngest readers will be able to follow and understand the plot.

The language of the novel works well with the plot because it makes the main character seem authentic. Although the language misses some of the more formal language that people from this time period might have used, it does remain simple but polite. This is appropriate to the main character and his family. Hence the language of the novel works well with the plot and characters.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirty chapters. Each chapter varies in length, some quite short while others are quite long. The novel is told in both narration and dialogue. The novel is showing a story, not simply telling one, making it a more interesting narration.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Andrew as he attempts to outshine his brother, Pete, as a basketball star. One subplot follows the exploits of Andrew's friend, Ham. Another subplot follows Andrew's infatuation with Ham's sister, AnnaLise. Finally, a subplot follows Andrew's growing jealousy of Bennie Esposito. All the plots come to a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"I wished my parents would let me get away with half the stuff the Judge let Ham get away with" (Chapter 1, p. 7).

"And next year, maybe, just maybe, our family could be happy again" (Chapter 2, p. 12).

"In the next month before school started I'd have to spend all of my time in those fields, raking in the last cuttings of hay and shucking bushel upon bushel of corn. I hoped that this year it would be worth it" (Chapter 4, p. 18).

"Admission to the game cost a nickel, and the gym, which seated at least three thousand people, was always full. I wondered how many of those nickels the players got to keep. One day I'd find out" (Chapter 6, p. 32).

"As I walked, I dribbled an imaginary basketball and wondered if I'd ever be able to take his place" (Chapter 8, p. 43).

"Some of the old-time farmers talked about their draft horses like they were children, but I thought that horses, all horses, were smelly, stupid, and mean-tempered" (Chapter 9, p. 44).

"If there was one place in my life where I knew what to expect, it was a basketball court" (Chapter 12, p. 59).

"The euphoria from our first win carried me through the weekend and into the following week's practice at school" (Chapter 16, p. 80).

"By Christmas, when the regular season was half over, our record was eight wins and two losses. Bennie continued to make impossible shots. I hadn't been able to send a basketball through a hoop since November" (Chapter 20, p. 105).

"Whenever a car sped too fast down Main Street Ham liked to be it was someone running moonshine" (Chapter 23, p. 118).

"You may make mistakes in your life, you may even do some things that are really wrong. That happens. But then I expect you to do whatever you have to do to fix those mistakes" (Chapter 27, p. 130).

"Pete had kept his promise after all. He had come—come to cheer me on at the state tournament. And now I knew he had been with me all along" (Chapter 30, p. 145).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Andrew Soaring? Why does he like basketball so much? Is he good at it? Why does he take such good care of his basketball? Why does Andrew have so much trouble finding time to practice basketball? Why does Andrew's father not encourage him to play basketball more?

Why did Andrew's family first buy the land on which their farm sits? Why do they not use it as originally intended? Why does Andrew's mother worry so much about an early freeze? What is their financial situation? For what reason? Who holds their mortgage? Why? Why do they struggle to keep up with the payments? What could happen if they fail to pay the mortgage?

What does Andrew like to carve? Who encourages him to do this? What does Andrew carve? To whom does Andrew give a carving of a horse? For what reason? Why does he not put his name to the carving? Who does the recipient think the carving came from? Why? When does this person finally learn the truth? Does the truth change anything?

Who is Ham? Why does Ham get away so many bad behaviors? What kind of things does Ham do that could potentially get Andrew into trouble? Why does Andrew decide to ride AnnaLise's horse? What is the result? What did Ham get out of it? How does Andrew feel about this? Why are Andrew and Ham such good friends? How does his friendship with Ham impact Andrew's daily life?

Who is Pete? How did he die? Why do people in town think he ran away? What do people think Pete did? How does Andrew learn that Pete was conceived before their parents married? How does he feel about this? Why is this such a big deal? How does this knowledge by the people in town impact their opinions of the Soarings and of Pete?

Who is Bennie? Where does he come from? Why does Andrew dislike him almost immediately? Why does Bennie decide to join the basketball team? How does Andrew feel about this? For what reason? Why do many people distrust Bennie? Is there good reason for this? Why does Andrew try to find evidence against Bennie? What does he find instead?

What is a bootlegger? Who was the bootlegger in this story? How did he try to hide the truth? Who finally learned the truth? How? What happened when the truth came out? How did this truth impact the Soaring family? How did it impact Andrew personally? What punishment did bootleggers get? Why?