

The War With Grandpa Study Guide

The War With Grandpa by Robert Kimmel Smith

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Plot Summary

Peter Stokes is a ten-year-old boy who loves his life and is happy until he finds out from his four-year-old sister that his grandfather is coming to stay with them. At first Peter is happy that his grandfather is coming, but that night at dinner, his parents tell him that he will have to give up his room to his grandfather.

They tell him that Grandpa is too old to climb up and down the stairs to use the bathroom if he were to live in the attic. They also tell him that he can't take Jenny's room because Jenny is still too young to be moved. Peter is upset most because he wasn't consulted at all in this and is summarily being removed from the room that he's lived in all of his life, the room he feels safe in.

The first night in the attic is scary for Peter and he hears every little noise that goes on in the room. He does not sleep well at all. The next day he speaks to his friends about what is happening, and they tell him that he should not go down without a fight. Peter decides that they are right.

Grandpa arrives and he looks very sad and forlorn. The reader learns that his wife has recently and her loss has impacted him gravely. He has sold his house in Florida and is moving in with Peter and his family because of his health. Jenny is excited to see him and have him live there, but Peter is furious.

Within the next day or two Peter writes a declaration of war in the form of a letter that his friends help him draft up. He signs it the Secret Warrior, because he doesn't want the letter traced back to him. The first night he sets his grandfather's alarm for 3 o'clock. However, the next morning he can't tell if his grandfather was wakened or not. The next prank he pulls is to take his grandfather's slippers.

Grandpa ignores the pranks at first but then becomes put out and upset when they continue. However, instead of telling Peter's parents, he decides to retaliate in kind. He takes Peter's toothbrush, hides some of his books, and then sets Peter's alarm clock back an hour so that Peter is almost late to school.

Grandpa, realizing that someone needs to make a gesture of goodwill, asks if Peter would like to go fishing. At first Peter does not want to go, but then agrees after all. They talk and Grandpa tells Peter about Pearl Harbor and about real war. During this time together Peter tells his grandfather that he loves him, but that the war is still on.

The next day Peter escalates the entire war by hiding his grandfather's dentures. However, since the alarm clock incident he wants to be there when his grandfather can't find his teeth. But, when he sees his grandfather without his teeth, and looking so humiliated, sad, and disappointed, Peter realizes that in the end, no one wins in a war. He apologizes, helps him find his dentures and they start to truly talk about the underlying problem.

Together they devise a plan that is a win/win situation for everyone. They present their proposal to Peter's parents that night after dinner and Peter's father agrees to renovate the basement into a small apartment for Grandpa Jack.



Chapters 1-8

Summary

In these early chapters the reader meets Peter and his sister Jennifer (whom he calls Jenny). She is four years old and wants to know what her brother is doing at the kitchen table. He tells her that he is writing a story about when Grandpa Jack came to live with them. She reminds Peter that he found out about Grandpa coming to live with them through her; that she was the first to know the secret and that she had shared it with him. He remembers and tells her that he will most definitely put that in his story. His teacher, Mrs. Klein has given the class an assignment to write a real life story about something special that happened to them. Pete has decided that he will put a lot of small chapters in his book about Grandpa because it always makes books seem as if they are going faster.

Peter begins at the beginning of the story with his learning about the event from his sister. The rest of the story is told in a flashback of events as he records his thoughts and memories in his story for his classroom assignment. He writes that he is excited to learn that his grandfather would be coming to live with them. He has sold his home in Florida and will be coming within the week. Then his parents break the news to him: he will have to leave his room and move into the attic to make room for Grandpa. Peter goes ballistic, calls his sister a "birdbrain" when she tries to interject, and screams at both of his parents. His parents try to appeal to him, stating that Grandpa is very sad since Grandmother's death and that he needs to be with them. Peter doesn't care. It is not fair. He jumps up from the table and runs from the room. Back in his bedroom he throws himself on the bed and cries.

Pete promises himself that when he is older and has children that he will never treat them as his parents are treating him. The next day his father starts moving his things from Pete's room up to the attic room. Eventually his old room is completely bare and he says that it doesn't even look like his room anymore. He guesses that now it isn't really his room anymore. That night he spends his first night in the attic room and is terrified at every little noise. He writes that he isn't proud about this part of the story, on account that it makes him sound like a total coward, but he also says that if a story is going to be good, it has to be honest. So, he spends the first night terrified and in the morning he wakes up very, very tired, and very, very grumpy.

Analysis

In these first few chapters the reader is introduced to the Stokes family. There is a mother, father, Jenny, and Peter in the family. Peter is the older brother by a few years and has a couple of friends called Steve and Billy that live close by. He's been given the task by his teacher, Mrs. Klein, to write a story about something important that happened in his life.



Also in these early chapters there are several major themes that are introduced. First, there is the theme of Family. This is particularly evident in the scene at the dinner table where the reader learns that Grandpa is newly widowed and is also suffering from a bad leg and emphysema. He has sold his house and will be moving in with Pete's family. This illustrates the idea that family members take care of one another and extend sympathy, understanding, and help when it is needed. Additionally, the theme of Ageism is also introduced. In this section, in Chapter 3, Peter is told that he will be giving up his room, and there is no discussion involved. This lack of consideration for Peter and his feelings indicates that his parents disregarded his feelings in the matter because of his age. Likewise, Grandpa is also being treated differently because of his age.

Moving into the attic room, Peter is having to deal with change and all that brings with it. It also sets the stage for his resentment toward his Grandfather. This allows Peter to rationalize his "war" with his grandfather, and begins to also lay the foundation for him to truly bond with his grandfather, as well as realize that his grandfather has a lot to teach him about life and getting along with other people.

The reader is also offered insight into the grandfather's mental and emotional state when it is learned that his wife has just recently died, and that in an impetuous move has just up and sold the home that they shared for so many years, claiming that it was too painful to remain. This indicates that her death severely impacted him, and the fact that his health is not good also indicates that he would be better off living with family members rather than being alone.

Discussion Question 1

How did Peter react to the news about having to move out of his bedroom and into the attic?

Discussion Question 2

What reasons did Peter's parents give to him for moving him into the attic room?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Family in these chapters.

Vocabulary

billboard, rickety, ballet, ledger, Hank Aaron, advantage, flickered, respect, maniac, floorboards, attitude, taxes, Venetian blinds, intensity, solemn, John Paul Jones, fixture, accountant



Chapters 9-15

Summary

The reader learns in these chapters that once, a long time previously, Pete's grandparents lived closer. That was when he was very small. But, then Grandpa had retired and they had moved to Florida. Pete shares that his grandfather used to work in construction before he retired, and that he'd been very good at his job. The grandfather that he sees upon arrival, is so different from the last time he'd seen him. There are more wrinkles and his face seems to have dropped lower. He looks very sad.

However, that night, as Peter is lying in the attic room, still afraid of the various odd sounds up there, he declares that he will make his grandfather regret taking his room. The next day Peter tells his friends, Steve and Billy what is happening at home. They are very sympathetic and outraged on his behalf. They suggest that he do something about it. Like what? he asks. They suggest that he declare war on his grandfather. At first, Peter thinks that they are just being silly and joking, but then, as he thinks about it, he realizes that they have a point. They come up with the name, Secret Warrior, so that he when he writes a letter of war to his grandfather no one will know who it is.

His friends help him craft the letter. He says in the letter: "I will not be defeeted" (misspelled by Peter). The next day Peter begins to do things that he knows will bother Grandpa Jack. That night the attic is a little less creepy and Pete finds that if he turns on a light in the attic that he's not as afraid. The next day before Grandpa is awake, Pete takes his grandfather's slippers. At first, it seems that his grandfather hasn't even noticed that his slippers are missing. But later, when Pete goes to get out his game of Monopoly to play with his friends, when he opens the box, all of the pieces are gone! That is when Peter knows that his grandfather has not ignored him and is engaging in the war.

Analysis

In these chapters the reader learns that Grandpa Jack is a broken man, not only physically, but emotionally. Losing his wife has devastated him and by immediately selling the house and moving away it indicates his desire to avoid dealing with her death. Being around the children and his own child, helps. Though he does not mean it to be helpful, in the least, Peter's declaration of war is the thing that begins to snap Grandpa out of his lethargy. He is realizing that he has a chance to be of use, to be needed, and that he has something still to share with the world; his advice and wisdom.

Additionally, the theme of Peer Pressure is demonstrated in this chapter with Peter's friends Billy and Steve weighing in on the situation. They urge Peter to take action, to fight to get his room back. They support his feelings and even help to escalate them. It is their suggestion that Peter builds upon and sets the entire war into action. The author



seems to suggest that sometimes friends and allies don't always help a person (or a country) to see things clearly.

Though Pete doesn't understand it, he does notice that his grandfather starts to become more energized, talkative, and doesn't walk as if he's carrying a heavy weight any longer. This is because Grandpa Jack is involved in the "war" between them. The theme of War is touched upon in these chapters as it is shown that when two sides don't discuss what is really bothering them, problems compound and lead to terrible actions.

Despite all of this, the theme of Love is also shown as well as Family as Grandpa interacts with the other family members, and in Peter when he is discussing his grandfather with his friends. His friends, who have no vested emotional connection with Grandpa, see this as a great game and they try to give Peter suggestions on what to do next to torment his grandfather. After listening to them, however, Peter realizes that some of their suggestions are just mean and that he wouldn't want to do some of those things to his grandfather. One of them suggests taking all of his grandfather's underwear and throwing them away. Peter thinks that is going a little overboard.

There is quite a bit of symbolism that emerges in these middle chapters. The Letter to his grandfather represents his unhappiness with the situation and the fact that he blames his grandfather for the changes in his life. Additionally, the fact that there is now a small light in the attic to keep him from being frightened indicates that he's beginning to adjust, to figuratively see the light, and that, though he is unaware of it, is beginning to adjust and to mature slightly.

The attic room itself represents a moving away from childhood and moving toward coming of age. This is indicated in his cataloging of all of the things that were in his room that belonged to him when he was a "baby" and that he didn't move those things with him into his new room. He also talks about the room being high in the trees, almost like a tree house, and that the view was better from up there. This indicates that he's not entirely unhappy with the move.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Peer Pressure in this section.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the symbolism of the attic room.

Discussion Question 3

What does the letter represent?



Vocabulary

pirouette, emphysema, arthritis, peppy, mope, depressed, conceal, peasants, wishy-washy, invading, Yankees, declaration, guerrilla warfare, tyranny, construction, warrior, revolution, identity, Minutemen, Redcoats



Chapters 16-27

Summary

These chapters initially see Peter continuing to escalate his pranks on his grandfather. Several times his grandfather has told him that war should only be entered into when one has been attacked. He shares his own history with Pearl Harbor and how the US was attacked and had to go to war. Peter is still very angry with the situation, however, and doesn't really stop to ponder what his grandfather is trying to tell him.

Later that night, after he's sure his grandfather has gone to bed, Pete sneaks down to his grandfather's room and sets the alarm clock to go off at three in the morning. As he goes back to sleep he wonders if he will get in trouble for the prank, since so far his grandfather hasn't said anything to his parents about the pranks. But this one is pretty bad, he figures. Maybe Grandpa will give up and give him his room back, he thinks.

The next morning, Grandpa simply ignores the fact that he was wakened, and Peter wonders if the alarm clock went off at all. It is quite the let down, he writes. He confers with his friends one more time and they suggest something more drastic, but at this point, Pete decides that, ironically, they don't care about grandpa's feelings like he does. Later that day Grandpa asks him if he would like to go fishing. Peter would like to go, but he's afraid to be alone with "the enemy." In the end, he decides that he should trust his grandpa and go fishing. What is the worst that could happen, he thinks.

Analysis

These chapters continue the themes of Family, War, Love, and Peer Pressure. Though he and Pete are "at war" Grandpa continues to attempt to reach out to Peter, who continues to resist most of Grandpa's overtures. Peter sets the alarm to go off at an early hour, but misses the alarm going off, so doesn't even know if it happened or not. He is realizing that after a while War is not any fun, is a lot of work, and in the end, makes everyone tired and grumpy.

The theme of Family is touched upon again, as Peter notices that his grandfather has begun to become involved in various projects around the house, has begun to take an interest in the community, and is looking happier. Pete's friends tell him that it is because Peter is losing the war and that Grandpa is winning, demonstrating the theme of Peer Pressure. Pete asks how they figure that, and they say that it is evident that Grandpa is winning because he is still in Pete's room. This continues to make Peter angry because he doesn't want Grandpa in his room, and secondly, he doesn't like to lose. This sets the stage for the last and final escalation on Peter's part.

The fishing trip represents Grandpa's desire to reach out to his grandson and to try and teach him about life and in particular about the nature of war. At one point he tells Peter about Pearl Harbor and to suggest that wars should not be entered into lightly. It



isn't until the entire war is over that Peter begins to understand what his grandfather is saying about war.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of War in these chapters.

Discussion Question 2

What does the fishing trip represent?

Discussion Question 3

How do Billy and Steve make things worse for Peter's situation?

Vocabulary

meander, annoy, revealing, surrenders, monkeyshine, kin, Pearl Harbor, protests, index cards, mussed, dispute, digital, unnatural, truce, underestimate, chuckling, single-minded



Chapter 28-33

Summary

These chapters form the climactic section of the book. Whipped into an angry and vengeful state of mind from his friends, Peter has decided that he will pull one last prank that will once and for all drive Grandpa from his room. Late at night Peter sneaks into his grandfather's bathroom and takes his dentures from their container and hides them. However, once he goes back to his room he makes sure to set his own alarm so that he can see his grandfather realize that his teeth have been taken.

Peter enlists the help of his sister, Jenny, as a spy. He wants her to act as a lookout, as well as find out where grandpa keeps his teeth when he takes them out. She doesn't understand why he would want to know that, but she goes along with it. By the end of the day, she had happily reported back to her brother.

The alarm goes off and Peter goes down to his old room to observe his grandfather's reaction and to accept his grandfather's surrender. However, when he goes into the room and sees his grandfather sitting on the edge of the bed, without dentures in, Peter realizes that he's gone too far. His grandfather just looks at him with sorrowful eyes, as if he's both sad and disappointed in him. Peter realizes that the entire operation has been a stupid thing to have engage in from the beginning. He says that standing there looking at his grandfather, all shrunken and caved in, broke something inside of him and suddenly he didn't see himself as a warrior at all, but a horrible, terrible monster.

Analysis

All of these chapters lead up to Peter's ultimate discovery of the nature of War. That it is ugly and even when a person "wins," they always lose something in the process. It is at the point of seeing his grandfather's disappointment and sadness that Peter realizes and begins to have empathy for his grandfather. He no longer sees him as the person who supposedly took his room, but as someone who has been a victim of a circumstance that he didn't have any control over. Peter is ashamed at himself and it is a turning point in the story for him. This is the climax of the novel.

Jenny is introduced into this section as a foil for Peter. She accepts Grandpa at face value, innocently even. She loves her grandfather, expects nothing from him, and does what she can to make him feel as if he's one of the family. Even at four years of age she grasps this concept.

After Peter pulls this last prank he is so shocked at the outcome and ashamed of himself that instead of reacting to each event and situation, he actually stops to think about his grandfather's perspective and is finally at a point where he will hear his grandfather and will enter into a dialogue. It is this ability to look beyond one's own



perspective and circumstances that allow both parties to realize that they need to stop reacting and start talking.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the important lesson that Peter realizes about War in these chapters.

Discussion Question 2

What role does Jenny play in this section?

Discussion Question 3

What has changed in Peter's thinking in this section?

Vocabulary

applauded, tantrum, tutu, obnoxious, grudge, sarcastic, olfactory, flounder, vinyl, asterisk, peculiar, re-peg, casual, diabolical, mystified, peculiar, succeed, encore, dominoes, tides, campaign



Chapters 34-37

Summary

In this last, short, section, the reader sees Peter apologizing to his grandfather. He goes and gets the dentures and returns them, and then they sit and think. The important thing to come from their discussion is that they both speak from the other's viewpoint. Grandpa tells Peter that he feels that it was unfair of his parents to just give him Peter's room without discussing it with either of them first. Peter tells Grandpa that he understands how hard it must have been to lose grandmother, and to move away from Florida. He apologizes for making his grandfather feel unwelcome.

They both decide that they need to work together to fix the situation, demonstrating the theme of Peace. All along this theme has been hinted at as a direct opposite to the warring events taking place. But, in this section it is illustrated fully and prominently. When both sides decide to sit and talk, to identify the underlying problem, and to see it from the other's viewpoint, only then can peace have a chance.

Grandfather and Peter decide that there is space in the basement and that it could easily be converted from Mr. Stokes' home office to an apartment for Grandpa Jack. That way no one has to give up their bedroom. They both try to figure out how they will present this to Mr. Stokes and the following day after breakfast they speak to Pete's mother and father about it. At first Mr. Stokes is angry with Peter for suggesting it and feels that he's made Grandpa feel unwelcome. However, Mrs. Stokes intervenes and suggests that it is a better solution for everyone, giving Grandpa additional privacy should he want to get away from the family craziness. For the first time, both Grandpa and Peter are united for a common cause and Peter feels great about that. In the end, everyone agrees to the request and a month later, Grandpa moves into his own basement apartment and Pete moves back into his old room.

Pete says that they both won the war and that even when he moved back into his room, it didn't feel as it used to. He attributes it to looking at the room in a different way. Peter states that living with his grandfather is the best thing that ever happened to him, and that from that day onward they were best buddies forever.

Analysis

In this section the themes of Family, War, Love, and especially Peace are demonstrated. The underlying love that Peter feels for his grandfather has been fairly dormant throughout the war but once they begin talking, it becomes evident that they both care deeply for one another. This provides a common ground for peace talks to begin.

The author suggests through the theme of Peace, that a win/win situation must be engaged in if two warring parties are to end hostilities. In this case, both Peter and



Grandpa agree that the way in which the situation was handled from the beginning was misguided and not terribly well thought out. Then, they work together to find a solution that benefits both parties, and still allows Peter's parents to get what they want out of the arrangement.

When Peter returns to his room after moving out of the attic it is evident that he has changed. He says that the room "feels" differently, but in truth, it is not the room that has changed...it is him. He now sees the room for what it was, that a person makes a place what it is, not the four walls. He also has a deeply moving and profound realization of his love for his grandfather, a feeling that is established and paves the way for many years of a close relationship that will benefit the both of them.

It is clear that throughout the novel, the author is attempting to establish the nature of war, the nature of peace, and what it takes in order for peace to prevail when conflict arises. Using the vehicle of a familial struggle to illustrate the nature of war, and peace, the young reader is led to understand that in war everyone loses, and in peace finding common ground and viewing the situation through someone else's eyes is the first place to start when attempting to solve a conflict.

Discussion Question 1

What is the author's purpose in writing this novel?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Peace in this section.

Discussion Question 3

What was the solution to Peter and Grandpa's dilemma?

Vocabulary

massive, paneling, liverwurst, dingy, flannel, revenge, ducts, revenge, translated, retaliation, moonlighting, indubitably, enlarge, garment bag, panic



Characters

Peter Stokes

Peter "Pete" Stokes is the main character in the novel. The story is told from his point of view as he is writing about the series of circumstances that brought his grandfather to live with them one year. It also describes the war that Pete declared on his grandfather when he was forced to give up his room to his grandfather.

Peter is shown to basically be a very kind and loving kid, but also very immature. Though he is told that his grandfather is sad and lonely, all Pete can focus on is himself and the fact that he is losing his room to someone else. When he is told that his grandfather can't climb stairs to go to the bathroom and that Pete's room is the logical choice, Pete won't listen. Pete suggests that they take Jennifer's room instead, but his parents tell him that Jenny is too young to move to the attic. Pete doesn't hear any of these reasons and can only focus on the fact that something is being taken away from him.

Throughout the book Pete begins to change and to realize what a true relationship can be with someone. He comes to admire and like his grandfather and to appreciate what his grandfather has to share with him about the nature of conflict resolution.

Grandpa Jack

Grandpa Jack comes to live with Pete and his family after the death of his wife. Many years prior he and Grandma used to live closer to Pete and his family, but when Grandma developed emphysema they moved to Florida to get away from the cold winters. Grandpa used to be employed in the construction industry but was injured on the job when a large log fell on his leg. He walks with a permanent limp.

He impetuously sells his house in Florida and is invited to live with Pete and his family up North. Grandpa agrees and within a week has moved in. At first he is unaware of the circumstances that have placed him in Pete's room, but once he learns of it he feels guilty for putting his grandson out of his room. However, he also doesn't appreciate the way his grandson is acting out against him and decides to fight fire with fire for a while.

Later, through Jack's constant suggestions and overtures, eventually Pete hears what Jack is saying. They both begin to look at the situation from the other's viewpoint and a reconciliation takes place.

Jennifer

Jennifer or "Jenny" is Pete's younger sister. She is four years old and still views life in absolutes. She acts as a foil to Peter in many ways. She immediately embraces



grandpa's entry into the family home, does her best to make him feel at home, and gives him unconditional love. This is in direct contrast to the way that Peter treats his grandfather.

Billy

Billy is a friend of Peter's. Peter confides in Billy, and Steve...another friend, when he learns about his grandfather and being moved into the attic. It is Billy's suggestion to take grandpa's slippers. Later, he suggests that they take grandpa's other things and Pete decides he doesn't want to cross that line.

Mrs. Stokes

Pete's mother is instrumental toward the end, as she stops to listen to what Jack and Pete are saying about the living arrangements. Mr. Stokes is less willing at first, as he believes that Peter should "man up" and stay in the attic.

Mr. Stokes

Mr. Stokes is a tax preparer, so during tax season he uses the downstairs basement as an office. Other than that, this room is never used, which makes it the ideal solution for grandpa and Pete.

However, Mr. Stokes does not necessarily view Pete as needing to have a say in what happens in the home, even if it directly affects him. This sets up the grounds for the resentment that happens between Pete and Jack.

Mrs. Klein

Mrs. Klein is the teacher who has given the assignment to write a story about an important event in the student's life. Pete selects the incident with his grandfather to write about. He hopes that it is good enough to be published some day.

Steve

Steve is identified as being the "risk taker" of Peter's friends. He is the one who eggs on Peter when the war starts to heat up. It is also Steve's idea to create a declaration letter of war.

Grandma Stokes

Grandma Stokes lived with Grandpa in Florida. At the beginning of the novel she has recently died of lung cancer (brought on by long term emphysema) and Grandfather has



been devastated by her death. Though she is gone by the time the novel starts, she is still one of the inciting incidents that perpetuates Grandpa's decision to sell the house and move back North.

Principal

At the school the Principal calls the three boys in the hall way the Three Musketeers, giving Peter the idea to go to war.



Symbols and Symbolism

Attic Room

This is the room that Peter has to move into when his grandfather moves into his old room. It is a scary place to him and he feels as if he is being shuffled off like so much debris. However, as he begins to settle in to the new room he realizes that it is not that bad. He still wishes he had his old room, though.

This room represents Peter's coming of age, maturity. When he moves into the attic room he sorts through and leaves behind many of the older toys from when he was much younger, indicating that he is growing up.

Letter of Declaration

When Peter tells his friends about the situation with his grandfather, they tell him that he needs to fight to get his room back. They come up with a plan for Peter to wage war against his grandfather. The first step is writing a declaration of war letter.

This letter represents Peter's anger over the way the situation was handled by his parents. He is upset that no one considered his feelings in the matter, or even discussed possible alternatives or solutions. As a result, he feels that he has no other choice but to make his grandfather's life unpleasant.

Grandpa's Limp

Grandpa Jack has an old injury that prevents him from being able to go up and down stairs that well. This represents that he is not, himself, a whole or well individual. It is also one of the instigating factors because if Grandpa Jack could climb up to the attic, Pete would still be able to stay in his room.

Mrs. Klein's Assignment

The book that Peter writes allows him to reflect on the series of incidents that occurred and to gain even more insights into the lessons that he learned. He's hopeful that it is good enough to be published. He decides to write many short chapters to give the book a fast pace and have it be action-packed.

Baseball Cards

These are some of Peter's most treasured items that he moves from his room when he has to go to the attic room. Baseball is an interest of Pete's.



Crayons and Coloring Books

These are other items that were in his room, which he decides to leave behind. They represent the things from his younger childhood that he no longer wishes to keep. This indicates that he is maturing and beginning to leave behind some of his immaturity.

Attic Light

The attic is, initially, too dark for Pete and he is frightened. Later, after a small light is placed into the attic, the place seems more comfortable and safe. This light represents the faintest hint of maturity, of light shining into the situation between him and his grandfather.

Fishing Trip

Grandfather realizes that they have gotten off on the wrong foot and he wants to try and make amends with his grandson. He invites him to go with him on a fishing trip. At first Pete isn't going to go because he doesn't want to be alone with "the enemy." However, Peter does end up going and it allows him to view his grandfather in a different light.

Unicorns, Pac Man, and Fairies

These are all symbolic of Jennifer's mindset and innocence. When she learns that Pete is writing a book she tells him that he should put these characters in the story to make it a good one.

Dentures

Quite literally, when Pete steals his grandfather's dentures, he's taking the "bite" out of the old man. However, after viewing his grandfather impotent without them, Peter is ashamed of himself and it is the first step toward their reconciliation.



Settings

Stokes' Home

Most of the action takes place in the Stokes' home. This is where Grandpa comes to live and where the war between Peter and Grandpa Jack takes place.

Pete's School

Pete discusses his problem with his grandfather with his friends from school, Billy and Steve. This is also where Mrs. Klein gives him the writing assignment.

Attic Room

In the Stokes' house there is an attic room, which is where Pete ends up having to move into. At first he dislikes it intensely, but later begrudgingly accepts it. However, when he is given the opportunity, through a compromise with his grandfather, to move back to his old room, he jumps on it.

Outside

Pete meets with Billy and Steve to play basketball and hang out. This is where they do a lot of their strategic sessions about how to make war against grandpa.

Basement

The final solution to the problem involves the basement of the Stokes' house. This is what will be converted into a small apartment for Grandpa.



Themes and Motifs

Family

Perhaps one of the largest and most prominent themes in the novel is the theme of Family. From the beginning the reader learns that Grandpa has recently been widowed and feels the need to come back to live with family as he needs the support (both physically and emotionally).

It is also shown through the series of events that families can make war within their own ranks, even when they care for one another. And that at the root of all of the conflict was the lack of consideration for another member of the family.

A sub-theme of Ageism is shown through Family in that Mr. Stokes, in particular, assumes certain things about both Jack and Pete that are untrue and thoughtless. He assumes that his father won't be interested or able to help out around the house. Mr. Stokes also doesn't think that he needs to consider his son's feelings in the matter when he declares that his son will move into the attic room. Both of these assumptions on his part lead to the war in the first place.

Family is also illustrated, in its purest form, through the character of Jenny, whose true enthusiasm for her grandfather's arrival is supportive and welcoming. She acts as a foil to Peter's angry nature, and in the end, allows for Peter to see how terribly he's been judging and treating his grandfather.

Peer Pressure

Throughout a good deal of the chapter book, Peter talks with his buddies, Billy and Steve about the situation with his grandfather. They both support and inflame Peter's anger about being thrown out of his room. Billy and Steve suggest most of the actions that Peter later takes.

One of those suggestions was to write a letter of war, declaring that the Secret Warrior, was not going to be defeated. Later, it is the boys' suggestion that Peter take matters further and attempt something even bigger and bolder as a prank on the grandfather.

When this suggestion is made, Peter realizes that he should only take his friends' advice so far, especially since they didn't know his grandfather, nor cared for him. At this point in the story, Peter is beginning to realize that the pranks are not nice and in some respects could be humiliating or hurtful.



Ageism

There are many instances where the age of a character is grounds for prejudice or mistreatment in the book. The first incidence is perpetuated by Mr. Stokes when he decides to move his father into Peter's room because Jack is old and most likely won't want to do stairs. He didn't discuss the living arrangements with Jack any more than he did with Pete.

Not discussing the living arrangements with Pete is just another way of showing ageism. Because Pete is so young, Mr. Stokes assumes that he will not care, or that he should not be consulted. This ends up fanning the flames and laying the groundwork for the war to happen in the first place.

Lastly, ageism happens between both Grandpa and Pete as they begin to prank one another. Each prank that is played is done in a way that would affect only the age of a person. For example, when Pete takes grandpa's dentures, this is something that only someone could play on someone who much older. Likewise, hiding clothing and books so as to make Peter late for school is something that one could only do to someone who was much younger and still a student.

Love

Though the title of the novel has the word "war" in it, a great deal of the theme of Love is illustrated throughout the novel. Though Grandpa and Pete are at war it is not a war where regard is absent. There is resentment and hurt feelings, but deep down, there is love.

This love is shown through the family's reaction to asking Jack to come and live with them, their willingness to go along with the final solution to the living arrangement problems, and their attempts to make Jack comfortable in the attic.

The love that is most openly shown is through the character of Jenny, who openly says and does what the others may feel, but not show. She is the catalyst for getting everyone back together, for talking amongst themselves, and for reminding Peter, at the beginning of the novel, that it was she who first told him about Grandpa's move.

War

The theme of War is the second most prevalent theme in the novel. Words often associated with war and battles are used in the language of the book, such as guerrilla warfare, and references to the Minutemen and Redcoats.

In a more personal way, however, Jack, Peter's grandfather, shares his personal experience with true war, namely Pearl Harbor. He tries to tell his grandson about the

terrible nature of war, but at first makes no impact on Peter. His grandson is just too angry and too immature to understand what Jack is telling him.

Eventually, it would be through a desire for peace, that Jack's words come clear to Peter. When one wages a war, both sides lose more than they gain. This is something that Peter learns, and he also learns that the only way for peace to last is if a win/win situation can be figured out for both sides.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view in this story is first person, narrative style. It is written, initially in past tense, but switches to a present tense when the majority of the story unfolds about the war with grandpa. The narrator, himself, is unreliable, however, not because he is deceitful, but because of his age. His perspectives are that of a ten-year-old boy, whose immaturity and lack of life experiences does not allow him a full view of the situation. He lacks empathy, something that doesn't happen until the end of the story.

Language and Meaning

The language is very accessible for reluctant readers. The lexile is a 640 and very easy for grades 3-4th to grasp. The situation is realistic and one that younger readers can readily identify with. There is some pre-reading that will need to be done in order for readers to fully understand the inference with the Redcoats and the Minutemen, if this has not been studied previously. Likewise, other historical references to Pearl Harbor and guerrilla warfare may not be understood if these concepts and historical events have not be studied or discussed.

Structure

The structure is linear and is comprised of 37 chapters, with each chapter being no more than 4-5 pages in length. Each chapter speaks to one concept, and in general one or no themes. Sections reference symbolism, and characterization is straightforward and logical.



Quotes

I am putting down this promise in black and white so I don't ever forget it. When I grow up and have a kid I will never make him do anything he really does not want to.

-- Peter (chapter 6)

Importance: Peter agrees with his Grandfather in that there should have been a family conference instead of just telling Peter that he had to give up his room. Peter vows that when he is older and has children that he won't do the same thing to his children because he knows what it feels like to have it done to him.

Listen, Pete,' Grandpa said slowly. 'The only time you have to fight a war is when someone attacks you. Then, and only then, you have a right to defend yourself...War is no game, Petey...only kids and fools and generals think that...War hurts...war wounds and kills and causes misery. Only a fool wants war.

-- Grandpa (chapter 22)

Importance: In this quote Grandpa is sharing some of his own personal real-life experience about war with his grandson. He's taken this opportunity of the so-called war between them to not only connect with his grandson, but to teach him something very important about war and peace.

Sneak in, grab all his underwear, and burn it. A man can't go anywhere without his underwear.' 'Not on your life.' I said... 'I'm a grandson...there are some things I'm not going to do, no matter how much my friends egg me on.

-- Steve/Peter (chapter 25)

Importance: Pete's friends are trying to get him to escalate the war with his grandfather. At this point, Pete realizes that he does truly love his grandfather and that this war of theirs is not of a serious nature. It is also a nod to one of the themes, which is peer pressure, and how Pete stands his ground and does not give in to his friends' pressure for him to take things to a more serious level.

Grandpa turned his face toward me then. And there was such a sad look in his eyes, it almost made me want to cry. Without his teeth his mouth looked all pushed in and wrinkled. He looked so old and helpless. Just seeing him standing there like that, a person I loved as much as anyone in the whole wide world, I felt about as low as a worm's bellybutton.

-- Peter (chapter 34)

Importance: Pete realizes that the prank he has pulled has gone too far and he realizes that he hasn't thought ahead to the ramifications or consequences of his actions. Seeing the effect on his grandfather, and knowing that he did this to his grandfather, whom he does truly love, devastates him and he is horribly sorry for what he's done.



All of us got off on the wrong foot...your parents took your room away and shut you up, Pete. That was mistake number one. Just because you shut someone up, it doesn't mean his hurt has gone away. There should have been a family conference, or something like that including me, and we could have figured out where I was to stay. That causes a lot of wars, too, Pete— not talking.
-- Grandpa (chapter 34)

Importance: Peter and Grandpa Jack finally start to talk about the situation, something that they both should have done from the beginning. Peter's grandfather is driving home the importance of communication and talking, and how this prevents misunderstandings that can escalate into full blown war.

For once you found out a good secret, Jenny."
-- Peter (chapter 1)

Importance: This is when Peter first learns, from his sister, that his grandfather is coming from Florida to live with them. This is important because the reader sees that Peter very much loves his grandfather and likes the idea that he's coming to stay with them. At this point Pete hasn't been told that he will be giving up his room.

There's no life left in him," Mom said. "No life."
-- Mrs. Stokes (chapter 9)

Importance: This was Grandpa Jack's condition when he first arrives to live with them. This serves to characterize Grandpa's mood and behavior and also serves to underscore how cruel Pete is being to him.

Isn't there something that you read lately that you want to talk about?" I asked.
-- Peter (chapter 15)

Importance: This is after Peter has delivered the declaration letter of war to his grandfather. But in the morning there is no response, so it is driving Peter crazy not knowing if his grandfather has read it or not.

Soft hands are the secret."
-- Grandpa (chapter 18)

Importance: In this quote they are fishing, but the deeper meaning is that soft hands are what eventually eases a situation instead of trying to strong arm someone into doing what one wants.

Nothing about my room is scary. When floorboards creak at night I know it's floorboards and not some monster."
-- Peter (chapter 3)

Importance: He is describing his room and how safe he feels there. This will be in direct contrast to how he views the new attic room.



"It's not fair that Grandma died," Dad said. "It's not fair that Grandpa is so sad and lonely. Life isn't always fair, Pete."

-- Dad (chapter 4)

Importance: This is Peter's father telling his son that he will be moving out of his room, and is his response when Peter says that the action is unfair.

"Now my room looked weird. It didn't look like my room anymore. Lying on my bed, I began to think it wasn't my room. Like I didn't belong there."

-- Peter (chapter 7)

Importance: He's cleared out his old room and because all of his familiar things are out of the room, it doesn't seem like his room anymore. This is the start of his realization that a room is what one makes of it.