

What's Eating Gilbert Grape? Study Guide

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Plot Summary

What's Eating Gilbert Grape is a novel by author Peter Hedges, which also became a major motion picture by Paramount Pictures, starring Johnny Depp and Juliette Lewis. In this novel, Gilbert Grape, the fourth child of Albert and Bonnie Grape, narrates the story. Gilbert takes readers into the lives of his family and the other people living in the small town of Endora, Iowa.

As the story unfolds, the readers learn about the many secrets that the family has or "the skeletons that they have in their closet." Gilbert has an obese mother that is a recluse and a father that committed suicide in the basement of the house when Gilbert was seven years old. Gilbert has two older sisters, an older brother, a younger sister and a younger brother. His younger brother, Arnie, is also retarded. While all the children have the same mother and father, each of the Grape children has their own personality and plays their own role in the family.

Gilbert takes the readers through the lives and roles that the various members of the Grape family and the residences of Endora play. He also reveals how the "modern" ways clash with the old ways of the small town. Gilbert also tells the story of how he struggles with doing what is right for his family and living his own life.

The novel describes the trials and tribulations that Gilbert's family goes through, including the suicide of their father, the obesity, and reclusiveness of their mother and caring for their retarded brother and each other. As in the case with every family, Gilbert's family has a certain dynamic, secrets, a way of handling and not handling things, traditions, and rituals. All of these patterns unfold as Gilbert tells his story.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

In Chapter 1, Arnie and Gilbert, who is the narrator, are standing on the road for their annual tradition of watching the carnival roll into town. Arnie is Gilbert's younger brother and Arnie is retarded. Their sister Amy made a picnic lunch, which Arnie has eaten most of before it is even 7 a.m. on the first day of summer. After a long wait, the trucks and trailers for the carnival start rolling in to town.

In Chapter 2, while Gilbert is napping on the couch later the same morning, his little sister, Ellen, painting her nails wakes him up. When Gilbert asks Ellen to paint her toenails elsewhere, Ellen launches into a dramatic monologue about how unfair it is to be a girl and to be her age, and how Gilbert is taking away one of the only joys she has, which is trying out a new nail polish color on her toes. Ellen stomps out, Gilbert covers his face with the pillow and his sister Amy pokes him in the arm to get his attention and to tell him she needs to talk to him. Amy points out that the floor below the chair where their mother sleeps all day and watches TV and smokes cigarettes all night is bowing. Amy tells Gilbert that he needs to fix it without their mother knowing.

As Gilbert leaves the house for work, Arnie jumps in the bush to hide, which is his favorite game. Ellen opens the garage door, places a lawn chair in the driveway and sits in it to get some sun. As Gilbert leaves in his truck, he says goodbye to Ellen and she gives him the finger. Gilbert puts his truck in drive and honks the horn until Ellen jumps out of the chair and Gilbert runs the chair over. Gilbert then reverses and drives to work.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

Gilbert infers that he and the rest of the people that live in Endora are in search of their identities. They are also looking for the bright side or the good in the bad situations that surround them, including failing farms, war and disease. Arnie mentions that the carnival isn't coming because they all hung themselves. Gilbert says that not everyone hangs themselves, which foreshadows that their father may have hung himself. When Gilbert tells Arnie he is getting bigger, Arnie tells Gilbert that Gilbert is shrinking, which symbolizes the rut that Gilbert feels like he is in.

Now that Ellen is sixteen and has her braces off, she too is finding herself, looking for her identity. Gilbert says his sister Amy's normal face is one of worry and concern. Ironically, it is when she smiles that Gilbert knows something is wrong, which infers that as the eldest child, Amy takes on the responsibility of running and caring for the family. Amy tells Gilbert that she is beginning to look like their mother, which infers that their mother is obese. The Grape family seems to be dysfunctional. In addition, their mom is like a town legend, something that people talk about but never see.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

In Chapter 3, Gilbert works at Lamson Grocery, which is the smaller of the two grocery stores in town. Gilbert has been working at the grocery store since he was 14, but has been full-time since he was 17. When Gilbert goes into the store, he says good morning to his boss and his boss's wife, while he starts to sweep the aisles. Mr. Lamson asks if Gilbert is okay, and Gilbert says he just got up early to take Arnie to see the carnival rides some in. Mr. Lamson takes a five-dollar bill from the cash register drawer and gives it to Gilbert to take Arnie to the carnival. Betty Carver, the wife of the insurance agent in town, Ken Carver, asks Mr. Lamson if Gilbert is such a great employee, why he is always late with his insurance payment. After dropping some eggs on the floor, Gilbert deceives his boss into thinking he is having a bad day, so Mr. Lamson tells Gilbert to take the rest of the day off.

In Chapter 4, Gilbert drives to the insurance agency to pay his truck insurance. Instead of making his payment, Gilbert delays the process by saying he needs to make an appointment with Mr. Carver to discuss his insurance benefits. Melanie says he can see Mr. Carver now, but Gilbert says he has some errands to run and schedules the appointment for two in the afternoon.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Even Lamson Grocery store is having an identity crisis in Endora. While the Lamson Grocery store is the quintessential small town grocery store, the new Food Land on the edge of town is attracting the residents of town with its big selection and new technology. Even though Lamson Grocery is losing money and customers to the new Food Land, Mr. Lamson is compassionate enough to give Gilbert money to take Arnie on the carnival rides. While Mr. Lamson is the symbol of hope, Gilbert is the direct opposite. He has lost all of his hope and is just trying to get by with what he has and what he has to do.

While Gilbert is talking to Melanie, the insurance agent's secretary, she reveals they have closed the local high school. They are now busing the kids from Endora to the Motley high school. This too is a symbol of the withering of the town.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

In Chapter 5, Gilbert heads to the local gas station to put some gas in his empty tank. Gilbert says he goes to this station because the bell that rings when you drive over it is broken and the owner refuses to fix it because he too believes Endora is a lost cause. Gilbert drives to the cemetery to visit his father's grave to kill some time before his insurance appointment. Gilbert falls asleep and wakes to two men driving a truck with a hydraulic shovel who are about to dig a grave. Gilbert has overslept; it is now four and he missed his insurance appointment.

In Chapter 6, when Gilbert gets close to his house, he sees something lying in the middle of the street. He honks his horn, but the something doesn't move. Gilbert gets out of his truck and the something still doesn't move. Gilbert starts pretend screaming and wailing that Arnie is dead, and Arnie smirks. Gilbert picks Arnie up from the road and takes him into the house. When Gilbert gets in the house, Arnie is already lurking around their Momma's chair. Gilbert sees the floor is sagging even more than it was earlier.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

Even the clouds over Endora symbolize the lack of hope that most of the people in town have, especially Gilbert. Gilbert is very pessimistic on the inside, but portrays optimism outwardly to people like his boss and the secretary at the insurance agency. The carnival is a symbol of hope, not only for Arnie's enjoyment, but the gas station owner says it's good for his business because some of the rides require gas and they buy the gas from him. It is as if the Grape family is a legend because one of the men asks as Gilbert gets into his truck if he is one of the Grapes that they've heard about, but Gilbert does not answer and simply drives away.

Gilbert's acting with Arnie is the only way that Gilbert truly express life, joy or any kind of remote happiness. In a way, Arnie's innocence is what gives Gilbert hope, even though Gilbert doesn't feel hope inside of him. Gilbert imagining that his mother and Arnie fall through the floor and keep going represents Gilbert's longing for normalcy in his family. Since Arnie is retarded and his mother is obese, they do not represent the typical American family to Gilbert. Gilbert wants to be him but he wants to exchange his family for new members.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

In Chapter 7, Gilbert drives to his best friend's house, Tucker. Tucker tells Gilbert they are building a Burger Barn in town. Gilbert and Tucker drink some beer and then Gilbert tells Tucker about the floor and that his Momma needs Tucker's help tonight. Tucker goes to the house with Gilbert. They go downstairs to the basement and see that the floor looks even worse from this viewpoint. Tucker says he'll help Gilbert fix it, but suggests they ask Mrs. Grape to move to another part of the house while they do it. Gilbert says she won't move and then they leave the house.

In Chapter 8, Gilbert drops Tucker off at his house so Tucker can start working on the plans to fix the floor. Then, Gilbert drives to pick up his sister Ellen from work. When Gilbert arrives at the Dairy Dream to pick up Ellen, he sees a girl on a bike that he thinks is beautiful. She introduces herself as Becky and talks about how the female praying mantis rips off the mating males head but the male's instinct is to keep on mating. After Becky enters the Dairy Dream, Gilbert hears a chomping sounds, sees the female praying mantis has ripped off the male's head, jumps in his truck and drives off before realizing he has to go back to pick up Ellen.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

The building of a Burger Barn is also a sign of hope. Tucker believes that it is the first of many fast food places and restaurants that will follow the Burger Barn. Ironically, the spot where Mrs. Grape is about to fall through the floor is over the same spot in the basement where Mr. Garpe hung himself.

When Gilbert sees the beautiful girl, he feels as if he is in a dream. As he looks at his hands, his truck and the Dairy Dream, however, he realizes that it is real life. Becky takes Gilbert by surprise when she asks if he thinks she is beautiful and Gilbert agrees. Ironically, she tells Gilbert they can only hang out if he wants to hang out with her for reasons that go deeper than her beauty. Becky is another symbol of hope since she is in town to visit her grandmother from Ann Arbor.



Chapters 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

In Chapter 9, as Ellen and Gilbert are driving home, Gilbert tries to get information about Becky from Ellen. Ellen pretends she doesn't know who Gilbert is talking about to pay him back for running over the lawn chair this morning. When Gilbert goes in, he finds Amy and his mom watching TV and Arnie asleep in the closet. He carries Arnie upstairs to tuck him in and comes back downstairs to say goodnight to his mom and sisters. Mrs. Grape exclaims that she almost called Gilbert, Albert, and how Gilbert is the spitting image of his father. After his mother stomps her feet on the floor and Gilbert tells her not to do that, she chastises him as he goes up to bed.

In Chapter 10, Gilbert sits on the upstairs toilet with the lid down talking on the phone to Tucker to see how the floor plans are coming. Tucker says it's dismal, but he thinks he has a plan. They plan to get the wood to start on it the following day. Tucker hears Ellen screaming and banging on the bathroom door for a tampon and asks when Gilbert is going to fix him up on date with Ellen. Gilbert slides a tampon under the door, but Ellen's screaming also wakes Arnie. Arnie scratches at the door and Gilbert lets him in and locks it. Gilbert sends Arnie back to bed telling him he has to rest so they can ride the horsies tomorrow. Gilbert has a bad dream that makes him scream in his sleep, so Amy comes in to check on him.

Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Ellen insinuates an incestuous relationship between her and Gilbert. Ellen accuses Gilbert of staying in Endora because he wishes he could be in a sexual relationship with her, but Gilbert ignores this insinuation. Ellen and Gilbert's mom both infer that Gilbert is the man of the house and that it is his job to fix things. Ironically, Gilbert's mother keeps insisting that she can do what she wants, such as stomping her feet on the floor that is about to give out beneath her, but she doesn't do anything to bring money into the house or help run the household. Instead, Mrs. Grape has turned into the child and her children into her caretakers.

Gilbert insinuates that his entire life is a bad dream. Arnie mixing up the meaning of good night and goodbye foreshadows that in fact Gilbert may break free of Endora and leave one day. Arnie, however, is one of the things that anchors or ties down Gilbert.



Chapters 11 and 12

Chapters 11 and 12 Summary

In Chapter 11, Gilbert is watching Arnie ride the white horse on the merry-go-round for the twenty-second consecutive time. When the guy controlling the ride tells Gilbert Arnie has to give others a chance to ride the white horse, Gilbert lies to the carnie, telling him Arnie was kicked in the head repeatedly by a white horse last year and now Arnie is triumphing over his fears. The carnie believes him and says Arnie can ride always ride the white horse for free. Tucker tells Gilbert he got picked to be in the dunk tank. When Gilbert tries to get Arnie off the merry-go-round, Arnie refuses and the carnie says he'll watch Arnie for Gilbert. As Gilbert walks to the ferris wheel, he runs into Melanie, who scolds him for missing his appointment with the insurance agent and has Gilbert reschedule it for tomorrow at two o'clock. As Gilbert rides the ferris wheel, he pictures places far away from where he is now and thinks about sex. Tucker heckles Gilbert into buying some baseballs to try to dunk him, but Arnie ends up dunking Tucker by pushing the bulls-eye on the dunk tank. Gilbert and Arnie go home. Gilbert masturbates, thinking about Becky, and then cleans up with a sock.

In Chapter 12, Mrs. Carver is in the grocery store again. Gilbert tells her before she can yell at him again that he is going to take care of the insurance payment today and he's sorry he missed his appointment yesterday. He tells Mr. Lamson he's going to use his lunch hour to take care of.

Chapters 11 and 12 Analysis

Gilbert tells lies to create the life that he wants to have and to take control over situations that he does not have control over. While Gilbert is riding the ferris wheel, it is as if he conjures up Becky, as he sees her riding her bike through the carnival. She's gone, however by the time he gets off and gets Arnie off the white horse.

Ironically, Gilbert is having an affair with Betty Carver, the wife of the insurance agent. He drives past the insurance agency on his lunch, pulls into the garage at the Carver residence to hide his truck and starts to have sex with Betty while he calls the insurance agency to tell Melanie he'll be late for his appointment. While Betty Carver is pleasuring Gilbert, all he can think of is the new girl from Michigan, which represents his longing for a change in his daily routine and life.



Chapters 13 and 14

Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

In Chapter 13, Gilbert goes to the insurance agency for his appointment. While he is talking to Mr. Carver, the phone rings and it is Mrs. Carver. Mr. Carver tells Gilbert he has to go. But they'll talk again later.

In Chapter 14, Gilbert and Arnie are standing by the side of the road watching the carnival leave town. As they walk home, Arnie pokes his finger through Gilbert's belt loop and this makes Gilbert snap at Arnie. In response to Gilbert snapping at him, Arnie starts to throw a fit, but Gilbert distracts him by offering to race him home. After Gilbert enters the house, Amy asks where Arnie is. Amy calls Ellen downstairs, but Ellen protests saying she is watching a movie. When Ellen changes her shoes to go get Arnie herself, Ellen insists on doing what Amy is asking her to do and leaves. Ellen returns in a few moments and asks what it is Amy wants her to do.

Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Ironically, when Gilbert leaves the office, Mr. Carver is waiting by Gilbert's truck, asking Gilbert to drive him home. On the drive to the Carver residence, Gilbert is sure that Mr. Carver knows he is having an affair with his wife, but in the end, Mr. Carver simply says his wife is upset because she burned a batch of cookies she is making for their sons. In reality, Mrs. Carver knew that Gilbert was in her husband's office and called her husband home because she is upset about Gilbert leaving before she could finish having sex with him.

Gilbert tries to teach Arnie a lesson by not allowing Arnie to win the race. The plan backfires on Gilbert though because when Arnie sees Gilbert wins, Arnie starts to run back towards town, which means Gilbert has to run after him. Ironically, Gilbert does not go after Arnie, but instead goes inside of the house. The Grape life is so routine that Ellen stomps out of the house to do a favor for Amy when Ellen doesn't even know what it is that Amy wants her to do, which is to go find Arnie and bring him home.



Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

In Chapter 15, after breakfast, Tucker drives up with the support beams he and Gilbert have been assembling. Gilbert and Tucker go down to the basement to install it. A little while later, Amy flicks the basement light on and off as a signal to Gilbert that Momma is awake. As Momma crosses the floor, plaster from the basement ceiling falls on Gilbert and Tucker's heads. When Momma gets settled in the bathroom, Amy plays an Elvis song to signal to them that the coast is clear for them to come upstairs. After Gilbert and Tucker load their trucks with the leftover wood and drive out of the driveway, Gilbert sees Ellen hurting Arnie to try to get him to come home.

In Chapter 16, when Gilbert finds Tucker, he is eating breakfast with the son of the mortuary owner. Tucker and Bobby, the mortuary owner's son, are talking about the new girl in town. Bobby says he hasn't seen her yet but he's heard all about her. Tucker tells a funny story about one of their classmates that peed his pants in the teacher's class, Mrs. Brainer, that died recently. Gilbert gets up and leaves. When he gets home, Amy says Tucker is on the phone yelling about toast Gilbert didn't pay for. Gilbert drives to the cemetery and pees on Mrs. Brainer's grave. When he drives past the café again, Tucker is leaving the parking lot in his truck. Gilbert blocks him in and tells Tucker it was Gilbert that peed in his pants and that Mrs. Brainer embarrassed by making him clean it up in front of the class.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

Ironically, Amy thinks that installing the beams will make their mother's life better. This is ironic because helping her to learn better eating habits is what will make Bonnie's life better, not secretly installing support beams underneath her so she doesn't fall through the floor. In another twist of irony, Tucker tells Gilbert that when he was at the site of the future Burger Barn this morning, he saw a beautiful girl on a bike. Gilbert tries to get more information out of Tucker, but Tucker just cackles and drives away. This foreshadows that something will happen between Becky and Tucker or that Tucker is simply teasing Gilbert about his crush.

When the mortuary owner's son, Robert Jr., or Bobby to his friends, tells Gilbert and Tucker that he and his dead make fun of the grotesque bodies, it foreshadows that this is what will happen when Gilbert's mom dies. The cycle of life in Endora is the same for everyone who stays there. A symbol of this is the tag that marks the grave of the recently buried Mrs. Brainer, which is the same tag Gilbert's father's grave had seventeen years earlier. The closed down high school is another symbol of how nothing changes in Endora because even though it is closed, it is a building they will never tear down, because the building holds too many memories.



Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

In Chapter 17, Gilbert admits that he uses the time he is stocking the grocery store shelves to allow his mind to wander and take him wherever he really wants to be. Mrs. Lamson asks if something is going on at Food Land because the store is empty. When Mrs. Carver drives by and waves, Gilbert pretends not to notice her. He remembers back to how their affair first began when he was 17 and helped her fix her car that was broken down on the side of the road. As Gilbert heads toward the front of the store, he stands behind the chip rack noticing the Becky girl is talking to Mr. Lamson about a watermelon. When Mr. Lamson finds out Becky plans on taking the watermelon home by bike, he calls Gilbert to make a delivery.

In Chapter 18, Gilbert puts the watermelon in the cab of his truck and tells Becky she can ride in the back. Instead, she chooses to ride her bike. Gilbert follows her until she loses him. While Gilbert is at the convenient store, she whizzes by again and both Bobby and Tucker pull up in their respective vehicles, a hearse and a pickup truck, calling Gilbert's name. Gilbert convinces himself and the two other men that there has to be something wrong with her. While Gilbert is putting gas and checking his oil, Becky pulls up in the gas station parking lot.

Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

In an attempt to spare the feelings of the Lamsons, Gilbert doesn't tell them Food Land has installed tanks with live lobsters. For the first time, Gilbert also admits out loud that he would love to have a wife and normal life like the Lamsons have. Gilbert's affair with Mrs. Carver lasting for seven years, even as his classmates went off to college is also a symbol of how nothing in Gilbert's life changes, except his age. Since it next to impossible to tote a fifteen to twenty pound watermelon on a bike, it infers that Beck purposely came to the store where knew Gilbert works to get him to drive her, her bike and her watermelon home. If Gilbert and beck strike up a relationship, it may be the first normal relationship Gilbert has in his life.

Becky is taunting Gilbert. It seems as if she has an interest in him too, but she doesn't want to let him know it. Even though Gilbert is very interested in Becky, he has to keep her on her toes, so he pushes the watermelon out of the passenger side of his truck and it bounces across the gas station parking lot toward Becky, when Becky mentions Gilbert should express he is interested in getting to know her insides.



Chapters 19 and 20

Chapters 19 and 20 Summary

In Chapter 19, when Gilbert returns to the grocery store, Mr. Lamson tells Gilbert Amy came by and dropped off an envelope for him. He mentions that Arnie refused to come in the store, but instead stayed in the car. Amy writes Gilbert a note saying they only have \$30, along with the grocery list, and for Gilbert to ask Mr. Lamson if they can have the rest on credit. As Gilbert is loading the groceries into his truck, Betty Carver pulls up telling Gilbert that Thursday is their seven-year anniversary. When Gilbert asks why she picked him, Betty admits it's because she knew Gilbert would never leave Endora. Gilbert thinks about driving away out of town, but instead takes the groceries home and his siblings come out to unload. Gilbert admits that there are two more Grape siblings, an older sister and brother.

In Chapter 20, Amy, Gilbert, and Ellen have a meeting in Amy's room to discuss Arnie's birthday. After the meeting turns into a fight between Gilbert and Amy, Arnie meows at Amy's door like he is a cat. The phone rings and it's Tucker telling Gilbert he gave Becky a ride when he saw her struggling, walking with her bike and a watermelon. Gilbert's mom calls them downstairs to a special report on the news about a boy who shot his entire family

Chapters 19 and 20 Analysis

The fact that Mr. Lamson's business is dying doesn't hurt him, but the fact that Arnie won't come into the store hurts him. Again, instead of adjusting their mother's eating problem to fit their budget, Amy and Gilbert find a way to meet their mother's demand for food instead. Gilbert infers that he is breaking up with Betty as she drives away. Gilbert mentions an older brother, which has never come up before, but he doesn't elaborate on it either, he seems to be dead also. Amy mentions that "both of their checks are late," which infers their parents receive social security checks or some kind of financial assistance. It turns out that their two older siblings send checks once or twice a month.

The fact that Amy is thirty-four, but her room is still covered in Elvis memorabilia signifies that Amy is stuck in a rut, similar to the one that Gilbert is stuck in. Amy has taken on the motherly role of the family, but in another respect is still the teenager that is in love with Elvis. Gilbert relates to the boy that kills his entire family. He can understand why he would want to erase them from his life, but when his mom asks why he wouldn't just leave, Gilbert says because he might have felt like an integral part of keeping the family together. This is how Gilbert sees himself. Ironically, his mother doesn't see this and laughs when Gilbert says this.



Chapters 21 and 22

Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

In Chapter 21, while Arnie is in the bathtub, he tells Gilbert not to go downstairs to watch Elvis with the girls. Arnie says he hates Elvis. Amy and Larry were drinking beer upstairs in the attic while listening to Elvis songs. When Arnie went upstairs to get them, their brother Larry was throwing a dart at the same time Arnie opened the door and the dart took out Arnie's eye. Now Arnie has a glass eye. Gilbert puts Arnie to bed and then tries to go to sleep, but he is restless. When he looks out his bedroom window, Gilbert sees what looks like someone lighting a match, the match blowing out and someone relighting a match. He grabs a flashlight and heads out to the backyard. Finally, he hears a giggle and then sees a candle burning over a paper plate with a piece of watermelon covered with ants. In the sand, a girl has written, "It's the insides that count."

In Chapter 22, the next morning, Tucker and Gilbert continue installing the boards in the basement ceiling. Tucker finishes the story about Becky riding in his truck. Gilbert thinks about how he put the piece of watermelon under his bed in a Ziplock baggie and wrote in the sand, "Eat me" over and over again until Becky's message was erased. Ellen brings the boys lunch from Amy and tells them that Becky is not all that pretty and that there are pretty girls from Endora right under their noses. The phone rings and Amy shouts down to Gilbert that the Sheriff called and Arnie has climbed the water tower again. Gilbert goes to retrieve Arnie, like he always does.

Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

Arnie telling Gilbert not to go foreshadows Gilbert leaving Endora. Arnie pointing to his missing eye infers that Arnie remembers how he lost his eye and who is responsible for the injury. Arnie correlates Elvis with the loss of his eye because the day Elvis died is the same day Arnie lost his eye. Becky serves as a symbol of a lesson for Gilbert. She's trying to teach him that outward appearances are not as important as how a person is on the inside. It seems as if Becky may know about Gilbert's own insecurities or she may have had heard the rumors about Gilbert's mom being obese and not leaving the house for the last three years.

Ironically, Gilbert keeps it to himself that Becky was in his yard the night before, placing the watermelon and leaving her note in the sand. Arnie climbing the water tower and Gilbert going to get is a symbol of the monotony of the lives of the Grapes. It is as if nothing ever changes.



Chapters 23 and 24

Chapters 23 and 24 Summary

In Chapter 23, when Gilbert gets to the water tower, a crowd is standing at the bottom. Arnie is showing off and one of his shoes falls to the ground. Gilbert climbs up the water tower, gets Arnie and climbs back down. The Sheriff tells Gilbert that he is taking Arnie to jail because they warned Gilbert and Amy that the next time Arnie did this they would arrest him, and this is the next time. As Gilbert drives away, he sees Becky eating a peach and standing with an older woman, who must be her grandma, in the crowd. Gilbert, Amy and Momma drive in Amy's car to the jail to get Arnie. Momma insists that they pick up Ellen from work on their way through town. Ellen gets in the car and Amy and Gilbert fill her in on what's going on with Arnie. When they arrive in Motley, where the jail is, Momma gets out of the car and everyone stops to stare. When she goes into the jail, Momma refuses to fill out any paperwork and demands Arnie. They drive home with Arnie and everything returns to normal.

In Chapter 24, after the word spreads around town that Bonnie makes an appearance in town and how she looks, the townspeople are trying to help by sending her diet books and raising money to help her. Amy hides all of this from her mother, like she hides everything else. Gilbert dreams of turning his family into an attraction, with each family member filling their role. The finale, of course, is guessing Bonnie Grape's weight.

Chapters 23 and 24 Analysis

Ironically, when Gilbert returns home and Momma hears that Arnie is in jail, she tells Amy to get her coat. For the first time in three years, Momma stomps outside of the house and gets into Amy's car. Ironically, the Sheriff and Gilbert's father proposed to their mother the same summer. After Gilbert's dad killed himself, the Sheriff started to ride by their house and watch Larry at baseball games. When he sees Bonnie now, he is stunned, but his love for her is undying because he lets Arnie go without having Bonnie complete the paperwork.

Ironically, before Bonnie married Gilbert's father, many of the young men in town were in love with her. Bonnie was the town beauty and had a choice in which man she would marry. It's hard for the townspeople to believe that someone who once had so much is now obese and a shut in. In a twist of irony, Gilbert does start to become an attraction, drawing in customers to Lamson Grocery to see and talk to him.



Chapters 25 and 26

Chapters 25 and 26 Summary

In Chapter 25, when Gilbert arrives home, Arnie is crying because he stepped on a bee and Amy is applying a paste to stop the stinging. Gilbert meets Betty Carver at their special spot for their anniversary picnic. Betty pretends to drown in the river to get Gilbert to save her. Right before Gilbert jumps in to save her, Betty stands up. As Gilbert starts to redress and walk away, Betty threatens Gilbert that if he leaves, they are over. Gilbert leaves.

In Chapter 26, Gilbert is in the basement sorting laundry when he notices what a good job Tucker did on building the support to keep Momma from falling through the floor. When Gilbert answers the ringing phone, the woman caller asks for Amy. Gilbert calls to Amy in the backyard, but says he doesn't know who it is. The caller says she can't believe Gilbert doesn't know who it is because it is Betty Carver. Betty asks Gilbert if it is the new girl from Michigan. Betty gives Amy her fried chicken recipe, which is what Gilbert requested at their picnic. Amy then tells Gilbert that they're burning down the school in two days. Gilbert drives to Tucker's house and Tucker's mom tells Gilbert where to find Tucker. Tucker is across the street from the building of the new Burger Barn. Gilbert thanks Tucker for his good work on the support beam. Tucker admits he asked Becky out, but she turned him down.

Chapters 25 and 26 Analysis

Betty is a mother figure for Gilbert. The reason he was originally attracted to her was because she took care of him. Now, as an adult, Gilbert is starting to see that he doesn't need or want Betty anymore. Betty uses the clouds as a metaphor for the relationship between her and Gilbert, where the little cloud, Betty, is chasing the big cloud, Gilbert. Again, Gilbert foreshadows his leaving Endora. Gilbert drives past Becky's house three times. On the final time, Becky's grandma waves him down and invites him to breakfast the next morning.

Betty suggests that the reason Gilbert has lost interest in their relationship is because of Becky. In a way, Beck represents a real relationship to Gilbert with someone closer to his own age and who is not married. The town burning down the school shocks Gilbert because it is change in a town that typically does not experience change and it represents the destructions of years worth of history. Tucker sees the Burger Barn as the future direction of the town, while Gilbert is still looking at the past, which is why he is so emotional about the burning of the school and how the town is turning into a celebration. Tucker tells Gilbert where Becky lives so Gilbert can ask her out.



Chapters 27 and 28

Chapters 27 and 28 Summary

In Chapter 27, Gilbert gets up early and takes extra care in getting ready to go to breakfast at Becky's house. When Becky's grandma answers the door, Gilbert sits on a comfortable couch taking in his surroundings. Gilbert is about to take his first bite when Becky comes into the kitchen for breakfast, looking like she just woke up. She laughs when she sees how Gilbert looks, she drinks some coffee and then goes outside to smoke. While Beck is outside, her grandma tells Gilbert that Becky's parents are getting a divorce and that Becky is only fifteen. They talk about their age difference and Becky tells Gilbert that Tucker asked her out.

In Chapter 28, when Becky and Gilbert reach downtown, everyone in town is staring at them. Becky teases Gilbert that her grandmother likes Gilbert, but Becks isn't sure how she feels about him yet. Becky and Gilbert walk to the Dairy Dream, but when Gilbert knocks on the takeout window for Ellen to take their order, she ignores him. Becky goes in and placing their order and takes it back out to Gilbert. When Gilbert walks near the insurance agency to throw away his cup, he sees the closed sign is hanging in the window, but it is during normal business hours. When he peers inside the window, he sees Ken Carver and Melanie having sex on Melanie's desk. After walking for an hour, Gilbert has an erection and when Tucker drives by him and Becky, Gilbert waves but Tucker ignores them.

Chapters 27 and 28 Analysis

Gilbert realizes that it is not Becky that wants him at breakfast, but is Becky's grandmother that wants Gilbert there. It appears as if her grandmother is trying to fix Becky and Gilbert up. Becky's grandmother is suggesting that Gilbert not pressure Becky into having sex with him because he is much older than Becky. Even though Becky acts as if she is disinterested, she asks Gilbert to walk with her when he is leaving. Becky eludes to the fact that even though Gilbert is much older than her in numbers, he is emotionally younger than her.

Ellen and Cindy, the other girl that works at the Dairy Dream, are jealous of Becky. They see her as an outside and a threat to the girls that live in and are from Endora. Gilbert leaves his Dairy Dream cup on the hood of Mr. Carver's car to signal to Mr. Carver that someone was there and possibly saw what was going on. Tucker is hurt that Becky would not date him, especially because Tucker knows it is because Becky likes Gilbert and Gilbert likes Becky.



Chapters 29 and 30

Chapters 29 and 30 Summary

In Chapter 29, when Gilbert and Becky reach the boarded up school, Becky climbs in a window and tells Gilbert he has to say goodbye to the building. Becky tells Gilbert to write something on the chalkboard of each room. Gilbert writes on all of the boards, except for his second grade room. Becky tells Gilbert he skipped the room and encourages him to face it. Gilbert write what happened the day he peed in his chair, which is the same time that his father hung himself. Gilbert runs away from Becky after she reads it and locks himself in his room for the rest of the night.

In Chapter 30, Gilbert is driving to Des Moines to pick up Janice when he decides to drive past the school building for one final goodbye. When he sees the crowd has already started to form, he makes another U-turn and heads to the airport. Gilbert stops at a Burger Barn in Ames, but doesn't order anything. When Gilbert arrives at the airport to pick up Janice, she assume he came in Amy's place because he wants money from her. Gilbert pulls in a gas station to put gas and Janice goes to the bathroom to change out of her stewardess uniform. As Gilbert and Janice continue the drive to Endora, Janice psychoanalyzes each family member. In the end, she says she's not sure if Gilbert is scared or lazy to experience more in his life. Gilbert responds by scaring Janine as he drives 110 MPH.

Chapters 29 and 30 Analysis

The burning of the school represents a fresh beginning in Gilbert's life. He spent the majority of his life and all 13 years of his schooling in the building. Now that Gilbert is moving on, the town of Endora is moving on too by burning down the building that has been vacant for the last seven years. Gilbert's graduating class was the last to graduate from the school. Becky insinuates that Gilbert stopped learning when he graduated, but does think this is a good thing. Gilbert skipping his second grade room indicates that something traumatic happened to Gilbert in second grade, which is why he peed in his seat.

To Gilbert, the school building represents positivity while the Burger Barn represents everything wrong in the world. While the school building represents individuality, the Burger Barn represents copies or replicas of the same thing, or the lack of innovativeness. Janice tries to overcompensate for her lack of beauty and kindness that her sisters have with flashy clothes and by wearing a lot of perfume.



Chapters 31 and 32

Chapters 31 and 32 Summary

In Chapter 31, Gilbert and Janice arrive home in time for dinner. When Ellen comes home from work, she and Janice go upstairs together. While Amy and Gilbert are sitting in the front yard discussing how much Arnie loved watching the school burn down, Ellen emerges wearing one of Janice's uniforms. Becky calls to tell Gilbert she is meeting her parents in Minneapolis in case he looks for her, which Gilbert says he wasn't planning on looking for her. Finally, Gilbert walks over to where the school used to be to see its charred remains.

In Chapter 32, while Becky has gone for three days, Gilbert has been sitting in on planning meetings with his sisters for Arnie's birthday. Gilbert mostly dreams about what his life looks like after Endora. Endora is having the first Fourth of July parade since 1959 because one of Gilbert's old classmates, Lance Doge, who has become a famous reporter in one of the big cities is returning to visit his mother. The kids have a costume contest for representing America, so Amy makes Arnie a costume of George Washington crossing the Delaware. After the winners are announced, some of the parents shout that it isn't fair because one of the judges is Mr. Carver's secretary, Melanie, and the Carver boys take first place.

Chapters 31 and 32 Analysis

Amy and Gilbert are parallels in the Grap household. The other two siblings that are parallel are Janice and Ellen. Ellen and Larry too share a parallel because they are the two Grape children that left the town but are still primary breadwinners for the Grape family. Arnie's love for the fire and his obsession with looking for matches foreshadows Arnie trying to set something on fire.

Gilbert is foreshadowing his leaving Endora. Even though Arnie's costumer is the best, he doesn't win. Arnie is a metaphor for what America stands for because as he turns in his costume, the boat knocks some of the other costumed kids to the ground, but Arnie says he's sorry and helps them back up. Lance Dodge surprises everyone by giving Arnie an award he makes up after losing the costume contest.



Chapters 33 and 34

Chapters 33 and 34 Summary

In Chapter 33, Janice and Ellen take Arnie to the Dairy Dream after the parade, while Gilbert and Amy walk home. Amy tells Gilbert that she is stressed out about how to make Arnie's birthday stand out from today. Amy tells Gilbert he is a good brother and person, and with all of his sacrifices, that he deserves someone special. Gilbert remembers that Amy had a trucker boyfriend last summer, but broke up with him when he caught him kissing Janice behind the Grape house. Ellen goes to the bible study party with her co-worker, Amy and Arnie drive Janice to the airport and Gilbert stays home with Momma. When Amy returns with Arnie, Arnie is wearing a Burger Barn paper hat.

In Chapter 34, Tucker and Bobby are on the phone telling Gilbert they are on their way to pick him up. Tucker and Bobby arrive in the funeral home hearse to pick Gilbert up. The boys tell Gilbert they need advice from him about girls because of his success with them. As the boys tell Gilbert their schemes for getting girls, they drive to Tucker's apartment drinking beer. Tucker and Bobby assume Gilbert is having sex with Becky but Gilbert says he wouldn't touch that creature. They drive him home and only Ellen is awake in the house.

Chapters 33 and 34 Analysis

When the Grape children tell Momma about the parade and Arnie's reward, she's very happy. Again, Momma turns into a child by throwing a temper tantrum when they tell her they forgot to bring the camera. Gilbert comes to the conclusion his mother has more of a connection with the TV than with him because every time he turns the TV off, his mother starts to wake up but when he turns the TV back on, Momma falls back to sleep. When Gilbert mentions Janice and Amy's ex, Amy fills a big bowl with ice cream and goes to her room to play Elvis songs—indicating Amy resorts to eating for solace just as their mother does.

Gilbert has never had a girlfriend, yet his walking through town with Becky has created an illusion that he is a sexual God. Gilbert realizes that he is enabling his mother as much as Amy is as he watches her polish off a bag of chips and then a box of hostess cakes. In a twist of irony, Momma believes that she is keeping her family safe from criminals and intruders by sitting and sleeping in the chair all the time.



Chapters 35 and 36

Chapters 35 and 36 Summary

In Chapter 35, Gilbert wakes up the next morning and goes into the bathroom. When he hears splashing, he realizes that he forgot about Arnie in the bathtub the night before when Tucker called Gilbert on the phone. Arnie has spent the entire night in the tub. Arnie is so upset that he won't eat his breakfast and then runs away where nobody can find him. Gilbert looks for Arnie on his way to work but calls Amy to tell her that he can't find Arnie.

In Chapter 36, Gilbert is working when Lance Dodge comes into the store to see him. Suddenly, a pack of kids comes inside looking for Lance and Gilbert hides Lance in the storage room. When Gilbert lets the kids into the storage room, Lance runs out the back door, around the front of the store and begs Gilbert to get him out of there. When Gilbert drives Lance away in the bed of his truck, Lance offers to take Gilbert for a burger. Becky comes into the diner, pretending like she can't remember Lance's name and then tells the kids he's in the diner. Gilbert sees Arnie is with the kids chasing after Lance, so Gilbert grabs him. When Arnie sees Becky, he goes up to her and starts touching her. Gilbert honks his horn to get Arnie to go stop fondling Becky and go home.

Chapters 35 and 36 Analysis

Ironically, even though Arnie is retarded, he realizes that he could have drowned in the tub and shouts this at both Amy and Gilbert at the breakfast table before running out of the house. The picnic table is a metaphor for the family—it is decrepit and falling apart, just like the Grapes. Amy suggests that Arnie had a previous bad experience with water that made him refuse to bathe and that he is going to do the same thing again.

The pack of kids is a metaphor for the hunter and Lance is a metaphor of the hunter's prey. Even though Lance seems to run from the fame, he also glories in it because when they are in the diner, he asks for the center booth and gets irritated when Gilbert closes the curtain so the crowd forming can't see them. Lance, too, is entranced by Becky's beauty and taken by surprise when she throws him to the pack of wolves. Gilbert wishes he is Arnie so he could touch Becky all over like Arnie is touching her.



Chapters 37 and 38

Chapters 37 and 38 Summary

In Chapter 37, Arnie is refusing to bathe again, even though it has been two days since Arnie spent the night in the bathtub. Gilbert is trying to hook the house up to the sprinkler for Arnie to run through when Mr. Carver pulls up in his wife's station wagon and asks Gilbert to go with him. Gilbert leaves with Mr. Carver. Mr. Carver takes Gilbert to his house to show his sons how to jump on the trampoline. When the boys aren't watching Gilbert, Mr. Carver grabs and hits the boys, which sends them both in crying to their mother. As Gilbert walks the two miles home, he sees Betty Carver watching him leave from the window.

In Chapter 38, Chip, Gilbert's neighbor picks him up and gives him a ride home. When Gilbert arrives, Arnie is holding a package addressed to Gilbert. Arnie opens it and it's an autographed and framed picture of Lance thanking Gilbert for lunch. Ellen rushes into Gilbert's room to tell him something has happened to Mr. Carver. Gilbert drives by the house and sees a lot of cars out front. One of the twins Gilbert went to school with tells him Mr. Carver drowned in a kiddie pool. Tucker calls Gilbert to tell him Booby says they're doing an autopsy on Mr. Carver because they suspect foul play. Tucker also says he is the new assistant manager of the Burger Barn.

Chapters 37 and 38 Analysis

Gilbert believes that Mr. Carver knows Gilbert has been having an affair with his wife for the last seven years and is now there to confront him. In the end, Gilbert and Mr. Carver are the same because they are both having affairs—Gilbert with Mrs. Betty Carver and Mr. Ken Carver with Melanie, his secretary. It seems as if the boys were expecting a pool instead of a trampoline because when their father calls them outside to watch Gilbert as the symbol of fun jumping on the trampoline, both boys are wearing their swimsuits.

Mr. Carver's odd behavior when Gilbert was there and Ellen rushing in to say something happened to Mr. Carver foreshadows Mr. Carver killing himself or leaving his family. Gilbert fears that if there is a murder investigation that it will reveal Mr. Carver's affair with Melanie and Gilbert's affair with Mrs. Carver.



Chapters 39 and 40

Chapters 39 and 40 Summary

In Chapter 39, the medical examiner finishes the autopsy on Mr. Carver and writes the cause of death as undetermined. Many people in the town still believe that Betty killed Ken because he had a big life insurance policy. Betty comes into Lamson Grocery with her sons on the way to the funeral. She allows the boys to have whatever they want. Gilbert thinks she is wearing the sexiest funeral dress and gets an erection while ringing up her purchases. Betty says Ken was filling up a wading pool when he had a heart attack, fell into the pool and drowned before the boys came to get her.

In Chapter 40, when Gilbert and Amy return from the funeral, Gilbert puts the Coke can that Betty threw her cigarette in up in his room, next to the cup he transferred Melanie's watermelon seeds. Then Gilbert takes a shower and a bath and masturbates in the tub. While Gilbert is showering, he thinks how his family are the only Grapes left—that the family name dies with them, unless Gilbert, Arnie or Larry have little Grapes. After dinner, Gilbert is walking to his truck while Ellen is on the porch highlighting verses in the bible. Gilbert drives to the Carter house, where he tries to tell Betty he wants to go with her to St. Louis. Gilbert drives to Tucker's apartment to find Bobby is also there. Bobby and Tucker say they are disappointed in Gilbert as a friend because he hasn't offered them any girl advice. Then, Gilbert tells them about the bible study group of girls that Ellen joined and tells the boys they should join the group as a way to pick up girls. After leaving Tucker's, Gilbert drives past Becky's house, where Becky is pointing up at the moon. Gilbert drives off to the cemetery.

Chapters 39 and 40 Analysis

Betty inadvertently mentions that she didn't love her husband anymore and that they hadn't had sex since they conceived her youngest son, which is right before she started the affair with Gilbert seven years ago. She asks Gilbert what people in town are saying in town, which all indicates that she is guilty of killing her husband. Betty mentions that Ken couldn't swim, but in a wading pool, a big man like Ken Carver would simply have to stand up, so it does seem as if he was unconscious or immobile when he fell into the pool.

The cup with the watermelon seeds and the can with the cigarette symbolize trophies to Gilbert. Momma says the length of the funeral, short, is a metaphor for life. The shower and bath symbolizes a baptism or a cleansing of death to Gilbert. Ellen has turned to religion as an outlet ever since Becky came to town and took Ellen's place as the prettiest girl in town. Betty tells Gilbert in an indirect way that he cannot use her to escape Endora and that they have already said goodbye to each other, regardless of the fact that she is planning on moving out of Endora. Gilbert is seeking refuge as he drives to the Carver residence. When he doesn't find it there, he drives to Tucker's

home, then to Becky's and finally ends up at the cemetery. To Gilbert, the dead and death itself is the only thing in life that is reliable and always there staring him in the face.



Chapters 41 and 42

Chapters 41 and 42 Summary

In Chapter 41, it's five days before Arnie's birthday party and the Grapes are cleaning the house and getting ready for it. Arnie still has not bathed since Gilbert left him in the tub overnight. A delivery truck pulls out up front to deliver a trampoline as an early birthday present for Arnie from Betty Carver. While Gilbert is lying on the trampoline, he hears his sister scream Momma from inside and runs in to find his mother choking. They all try to save her, call the doctor, and finally Gilbert dislodges the food in Momma's throat by hitting her on the back of the head. When Bobby pulls up in the hearse, Gilbert attacks Booby, assuming Bobby is there to pick up their "dead" mother. Ellen screams at Gilbert that Bobby is her date.

In Chapter 42, Gilbert calls Becky over after they almost lose Momma in the middle of the night. Becky encourages Gilbert to do something that makes him feel alive, like dancing, which is what Becky does. While Becky is dancing, Gilbert starts throwing berries from the backyard tree at her, which makes Becky mad and she starts to leave. Gilbert apologizes and walks her home. When Gilbert gets back, he waits up with Amy for Ellen to come home. When Ellen comes home, she is drunk and vomits in the bathroom.

Chapters 41 and 42 Analysis

Gilbert thinks the trampoline is a symbolic gesture to get back at him more than it is a present for Arnie. Momma has always said she only wants to live long enough to see Arnie turn 18, but she almost dies from her gluttony, which is also a biblical reference as it is one of the seven sins.

Even though Gilbert has been fighting his feelings for Becky, she is the one he calls when he is scared about almost losing his mother. Instead of showing his emotions the proper way, Gilbert acts like a little kid and throws berries at the girl he likes. Ellen's religious beliefs do not seem to last long when she comes home from her date with Bobby drunk. The religious façade is just Ellen's way of getting attention, which she usually uses her beauty to do.



Chapters 43 and 44

Chapters 43 and 44 Summary

In Chapter 43, Gilbert wakes up the next morning to Amy telling him that he has to talk to Ellen about how guys are. Gilbert goes to Ellen's room and finds her reading National Geographic, which Ellen uses Gilbert to distract him from his purpose. When Gilbert starts to talk to Ellen about underage drinking, Ellen yells at Gilbert that he is not her father. Gilbert goes to put gas in his truck and Melanie drives by and waves for Gilbert to follow her to the cemetery. Melanie confesses about her affair with Ken and that she knows Gilbert was having an affair with Betty. Melanie suggests that they have an affair together to comfort each other, but Gilbert says no.

In Chapter 44, Gilbert goes to the Dairy Dream and finds three of the Burger Barn construction workers inside. When Gilbert walks up to the window, Ellen tries to take his order as if she doesn't know Gilbert. Ellen denies knowing Gilbert when the guys accuse them of knowing each other. When Gilbert gets home, Amy reminds him he only has a few days left to get Arnie to take a bath before his party. Mrs. Dodege calls the Grape house to tell them Lance is anchoring the evening news. As Gilbert looks around at his house and family, for the first time he sees it for what it is and admits that he is planning to leave it all behind after Arnie's birthday—even Becky.

Chapters 43 and 44 Analysis

Gilbert has taken on the role as the father of their house since their father died and their brother Larry left Endora. It's ironic for Ellen to yell that he isn't her father because Gilbert is the only father she knows, since her father hung himself while Bonnie was still pregnant with Ellen. Amy fills the mother role in the family, even though there mother is not dead, but does act as if she is a child instead of an adult. Bonnie also equates her children's love for her by the food that they bring her.

Ironically, Ellen's behavior is not like that of a Christian. She lies about knowing Gilbert. In addition, she tells Gilbert she is not interested in the guys, but acts as if she is interested in them. Even the church in Endora is star struck over Lance Dodge because they are putting the news on the bid screen at church for residents to come and watch. Ironically, Bonnie Grape pipes in from the living room to scold Gilbert and Ellen as they squabble at dinner in the kitchen. When Bonnie mentions something about them being a family it's ironic because the roles of each of the Grape children is not correlated with a normal family.



Chapters 45 and 46

Chapters 45 and 46 Summary

In Chapter 45, Gilbert starts to sort through his belongings and pack his suitcase when Amy comes into Gilbert's room to tell him Arnie decided he wants to watch the big screen at the church. In the middle of the night, Gilbert hears Arnie, as if Arnie has had a bad dream. When Gilbert goes into Arnie's room, Arnie tells Gilbert not to go. Gilbert catches his mother in a conversation with someone about Arnie being dirty and about her decision to not put Arnie in a home, but when Gilbert walks in nobody is in the room and she is not talking on the phone. As Gilbert goes to bed, he decides he's leaving. When Gilbert wakes up, he realizes he is leaving with nowhere to go.

In Chapter 46, Gilbert goes the people in town are talking about Lance Gilbert anchoring the evening news. While Gilbert is at work, he sees the Carver moving truck, followed by the Carver station wagon leaving town. When Gilbert is driving home from work, Becky flags him down. She starts talking about him leaving Endora, as if she knows of his plans. Becky kisses Gilbert through his truck window and drives off on her bicycle. Gilbert chases after her in his truck but then stops as the rain starts to fall.

Chapters 45 and 46 Analysis

Without saying the words, Amy knows that Gilbert is leaving Endora, but she asks him to wait until after Arnie's party. Bonnie's persistence is a metaphor for a dripping faucet because she will continue to call Gilbert to watch the news with her until he appears. Ironically, Bonnie only wants Gilbert to adjust the TV set for her, not to sit and watch the news with her. It's as if Gilbert's mom senses a change in him because she eventually turns off the TV and asks if Gilbert wants to talk, but instead of taking her up on the offer, Gilbert goes back to his room to sleep. It's as if Arnie senses the change in Gilbert too and Arnie knows that Gilbert is leaving Endora. It infers that Bonnie is having a conversation with her dead husband.

Gilbert thinks about chasing after the Carvers because at least then he will have a place to go when he leaves Endora. Becky represents something that Gilbert can never fully have, whether he wants her or not. She is the dream he is chasing, just like Gilbert is chasing the thought of leaving behind everything and everyone he knows to find a bigger and better life.



Chapters 47 and 48

Chapters 47 and 48 Summary

In Chapter 47, when Gilbert arrives home, Amy hands him a picture of their father as a going away gift. Amy says that Gilbert is a lot like their father and suggests that if he had gotten out of Endora that he might not have killed himself. After eating dinner, Gilbert drives to the convenience store to buy condoms. Gilbert drives to Becky's house, where she is standing out front in the rain, so Gilbert tells her to get in. When Gilbert suggests they pick up where they left off, Becky tells him to drive somewhere. Gilbert drops Becky off back at her house. Gilbert pleases himself at home and in the morning is awakened to Arnie chanting Burger Barn. Gilbert takes Arnie to watch the grand opening of the Burger Barn from the truck. Gilbert negotiates a deal with Arnie that if Arnie takes a bath, he'll bring Arnie back to eat at Burger Barn and Arnie finally agrees to bathe. Gilbert runs the bubble bath and puts Arnie's toys in the bath. Arnie tells Gilbert he wants Gilbert to get in the tub with him. Gilbert gets in the bath and then Arnie runs away.

In Chapter 48, Gilbert tells Amy how Arnie outsmarted her while Amy is working on Arnie's birthday cake, which is three layers. While Amy and Gilbert are talking, in walks their brother Larry, who starts making a sandwich without saying a word to either of his siblings that he hasn't seen in a year. After he makes a sandwich and asks if they want one, Larry walks back out the door. Bonnie mistakes Larry for Gilbert. Larry says he thought today was Arnie's birthday but they tell him it is two days away. When he hears this, Larry walks to his car and drives away. Larry calls to tell Amy he saw a filthy Arnie digging for worms when he was driving out of town and Amy screams back at him.

Chapters 47 and 48 Analysis

Amy is indirectly telling Gilbert that he is slowly dying inside by staying in Endora. She also suggests that if Gilbert leaves, he will find his purpose in life so that can find the happiness that Gilbert deserves. Gilbert buying condoms foreshadows a sexual encounter between Gilbert and Becky before Gilbert leaves town. What Becky says do not match her actions when she tells Gilbert she only kissed him to give him hope because he looked down, but that Gilbert should not try to have sex with her.

While Larry's actions are unacceptable, Larry is obviously still suffering from the trauma of finding his father hanging in the basement. This is why Larry spends the minimal amount of time necessary at the Grape house, which is only on Arnie's birthday. Amy is finally starting to come out her shell by standing up to Larry on the phone.



Chapters 49 and 50

Chapters 49 and 50 Summary

In Chapter 49, Janice is on the phone and Gilbert tells her that Larry arrived two days early for Arnie's party. The conversation ends in a fight and with the phone dangling from its cord on the kitchen floor. Gilbert goes outside to pretend like he's playing in the sprinkler to try to get Arnie to play in the water too, but Ellen comes home and tells Arnie she has something for him and Arnie follows her inside. When Gilbert gets off work, Becky is sitting on the hood of his truck and he yells at her until she gets off. When Gilbert gets home, he finds his mother talking to herself again and she admits she is talking to his father, then she starts to cry. She tries to make Gilbert admit that he hates her and when Gilbert says it, he leaves and drives around for three hours.

In Chapter 50, it's the day before Arnie's birthday. Amy is putting the finishing touches on Arnie's cake. While Gilbert is trying to keep Arnie out of the kitchen because the cake is a surprise, Amy bumps the table where the cake is and it smashes to the floor. Without time to make a new cake, Amy orders one from Food Land.

Chapters 49 and 50 Analysis

Gilbert drives to the carwash to spray down the hood of the truck to erase Becky from sitting on it. For the first time, Bonnie shows emotions other than acting as a child. She shows her true emotions about what her husband did to her, which is sadness. Ironically, she is fully aware that she is causing the floor to cave in, even though her children try to hide it from her. Bonnie also knows that her children, especially Gilbert hate her.

Gilbert compares Amy to Judas when he betrays Jesus. As Amy kisses Gilbert on the cheek and thanks him for picking up the cake at the rival grocery store, Gilbert feels like Jesus.



Chapters 51 and 52

Chapters 51 and 52 Summary

In Chapter 51, on Gilbert's way to pick up the cake, Dave from the gas station is flagging him down. When Gilbert gets to Food Land he is mesmerized by the number of registers, the shiny floor, and the numerous products lining the shelves. While he is waiting for the bakery to put candles on the cake, he wanders the aisles. Amy calls from the beauty parlor, where she, Ellen and Momma are having their hair and makeup done for Arnie's party, which is the following day.

In Chapter 52, when Gilbert hears a knock at the front door, he finds Becky standing in his yard saying she has surprise for him. The surprise is a mirror so that Gilbert can see the hate that Becky says Gilbert has. Arnie shows up behind Gilbert with frosting all over his hands. Gilbert drags Arnie into the house and forces him to go upstairs to take a shower. While standing the shower dressed, Gilbert continues to beat Arnie up. Arnie goes to bed half clean and with some ice on his eye.

Chapters 51 and 52 Analysis

Dave has something to tell Gilbert about the regional manager recently visiting the station. He's tried to tell Gilbert twice now, but both time Gilbert has been distracted by something else going on in his life. It may foreshadow an opportunity to Gilbert to get a job or run a gas station in another city in the state. In a twist of irony, Gilbert runs into Mr. Lamson in the aisles of Food Land. Mr. Lamson seems defeated and it foreshadows the closing of Lamson Grocery, which may just be enough to push Gilbert out of town. Arnie mentions that Gilbert is shrinking again, which indicates that Gilbert is losing himself in Endora and it is time for Gilbert to move on.

Gilbert tries to take his anger out on the mirror, but the mirror is unbreakable, no matter what Gilbert does. Arnie has gotten into the cake in the fridge. Gilbert is so angry that he takes his anger out on Arnie. Gilbert has broken one of the rules of the Gilbert house, which is not to hurt Arnie. It's a biblical parallel to breaking one of the seven deadly sins.



Chapters 53 and 54

Chapters 53 and 54 Summary

In Chapter 53, Momma, Ellen, Amy and Janice come home from the beauty parlor. When Amy looks at the Food Land cake, Gilbert tells her that Arnie got into it so he had to fix it with some frosting the best he could. Gilbert is feeling so guilty that he can't sleep and gets up in the middle of the night to go apologize to Arnie. When he gets to Arnie's room, the window is open and Arnie isn't in his bed. Gilbert searches the town for Arnie and finds him at the public pool with Becky. Becky convinces Arnie to get in the pool to bathe by telling him that Gilbert will leave Endora if Arnie doesn't get clean. When Becky and Arnie finish bathing in the pool and climb over the fence, Gilbert offers them a ride home.

In Chapter 54, Gilbert takes Becky home as the sun rises. Gilbert comes back to the front porch and wakes up when his brother Larry starts poking him the forehead. Larry drops off about 18 gifts for Arnie and then leaves. Larry returns, making a grand entrance by shouting that Arnie's favorite brother has arrived. Gilbert's mom watches the party taking place outside in the yard from inside the house. Gilbert finds his mom in the bathroom crying when it's time to cut the cake.

Chapters 53 and 54 Analysis

When Ellen talks about opening a beauty parlor one day, Janice looks concerned because Janice relishes in the fact that Ellen emulates Janice. Momma is looking for approval from Gilbert about her new look. Gilbert's guilt over Arnie may be what anchors him to Endora and ever keeps him from leaving.

Gilbert's mom has prayed all her life for Arnie to reach 18. Now that he has, it indicates either a new beginning for the Grape family or resignation on Bonnie's part that she can die now. Even though Gilbert plays an integral role in the Grape family, he feels invisible. He verifies this by popping a few balloons while Larry and Arnie reunite, but nobody even notices.



Chapters 55 and 56

Chapters 55 and 56 Summary

In Chapter 55, Amy mentions to Gilbert that the kids left the party fast, before the ending time of the party. Amy also tells Gilbert that Arnie wants to eat at Burger Barn for his birthday dinner and that Gilbert has to go. When they arrive at Burger Barn, Tucker has reserved a special area for the Grape family and provides an employee to take their order so they don't have to wait in line. Tucker also announces the birthday over the loud speaker, brings out a cow-shaped cake and the whole place sings Happy Birthday to Arnie.

In Chapter 56, when the family returns from Burger Barn, Gilbert and Larry hang out by and on the trampoline. Arnie is smashing anthills with a croquet mallet. The Grape women are inside the house. As Gilbert talks to Larry about the swing Larry built and is still hanging in the yard, Larry denies remembering any of it. Amy calls the boys into the house, where they find their mother climbing the stairs to her room for the first time in years.

Chapters 55 and 56 Analysis

Amy is looking for approval about how great the party is from Gilbert. As is Gilbert's duty in the Grape family, he gives it to Amy. Ellen does not take one picture of Gilbert, except for the back of his head, which angers Gilbert, but like he always does, he keeps his emotions pent up inside of him. Gilbert shed some tears when he saw Arnie and Becky in the pool the night before and he starts to cry again after the cake, so Tucker pulls him into the kitchen so he can do it in private. Since Gilbert hasn't cried since second grade, it represents the chipping away of the wall Gilbert has built around his emotions. It's like a flood gate now because once Gilbert is open, it's hard for him to stop now.

Larry's denial of remembering his childhood is to keep the memories of finding his father hanging from the basement rafters at bay. Larry is a detached person because he doesn't want to deal with his emotions. In many ways, Larry and Gilbert are the same. The difference is that Larry deals with his feelings by running away and Gilbert deals with his feelings by staying.



Chapters 57 and 58

Chapters 57 and 58 Summary

In Chapter 57, Amy is in the kitchen with Larry, who is writing a check. Janice and Ellen are upstairs talking about sex. Gilbert finds Arnie threading a sheet through the trampoline springs. Arnie tells Gilbert he's building a rocket ship to find Albert, which is their father. Gilbert tells Arnie their father really missed out. The Grape children clean up from the party and hang out together, getting along for the first time ever. Larry doesn't rush off when the day ends, Gilbert pays Janice a compliment and Gilbert and Amy play around like when they were kids. When Gilbert goes into the kitchen to throw away the cake plates, he attempts to dial Becky when Amy calls him outside. Becky is riding up on her bike. Becky and Gilbert go for a walk and Gilbert tells her that his family is returning to normal. When Gilbert gets home, Becky calls him and invites him to watch the sunrise the following morning.

In Chapter 58, Amy and Gilbert go upstairs to Momma's room in response to ringing the little bell Amy left with her in case she needs something. When they get there, Arnie is still sleeping, but there is dying. Amy and Gilbert try to revive her, but she dies. They wake up Arnie to tell him their mom is gone. Janice and Larry come back from buying beer and Gilbert calls them upstairs to show them Momma. Amy decides they have to call the doctor or the hospital, but that Ellen, who is at bible study, has to see her first. Gilbert goes to get Ellen, first looking for her at the Burger Barn. Gilbert tells Tucker Momma died. Gilbert finds Ellen in Bobby's hearse under the bridge, which is lover's lane. Amy calls all of the Grape kids into Momma's room so they can spend a few hours together before they call the ambulance to pick up Momma's body.

Chapters 57 and 58 Analysis

Gilbert is realizing that his father leaving means pain for them, but it also means his father wasn't able to enjoy the finest things in life, such as getting to know your children. This realization may motivate Gilbert to leave and experience life, or it may have the opposite effect, causing him to stay so that he too does not miss out. The Grape family returning to normal signals a new beginning, which might be what Gilbert needs to stay in town. Becky also gives Gilbert hope when she invites him to watch the sunrise, which is another symbol of a new beginning.

Bonnie Grape achieved a self-fulfilling prophecy by living long enough to see Arnie turn eighteen and then she gives up and dies. Gilbert blames himself for contributing to Momma's death by supplying her with the food that ultimately killed her. Ellen blames herself for their mother's death because she feels guilty for having sex with Bobby while their mother was dying. The Gilbert children memorialize their mother by remembering her the way she was and dancing around her. While Momma's death is an end of her life, it also is the starting point of a new life for all of the Grapes.



Chapters 59 and 60

Chapters 59 and 60 Summary

In Chapter 59, after the Grapes dance, they drink some beer and then call the ambulance. Janice insists on calling, but Gilbert insists on not allowing Janice to call. Gilbert even rips the phone cord from the wall and carries the phone into his room.

In Chapter 60, it takes three hours for the Grapes to move all of their belongings out of the house. Larry leaves and comes back with a gas can. They all say goodbye to Momma and then Larry pours gasoline around the house. The other Grapes are sitting on the couch in the yard facing the house. They hear the match light and Larry runs out of the house. They sit there and watch the house burn down as the police sirens show through the trees.

Chapters 59 and 60 Analysis

Gilbert knows that carrying their mother out of the house is going to draw a crowd and make her a spectacle. He refuses to allow that to happen. Instead he starts moving their belonging out into the front yard. Amy helps and even Ellen joins in. eventually, all of the Grape children are moving their belongings into the yard because they plan on knocking the house down instead of allowing their mother to become a point of ridicule. Setting the house on fire is a baptism and biblical symbol. It cleanses the Grape family from all of the mystery, guilt and death they have experienced in the house ever since their father hung himself in the basement. It marks a baptism and a fresh beginning for all of them.



Characters

Arnie Grape

Arnie is a seventeen-year-old boy who is about to turn eighteen. Arnie is also retarded. Arnie is very sensitive, but ironically makes a hobby out of killing grasshoppers by chopping off their heads with the mailbox flag.

Arnie is the next to the youngest of the Grape children. He is only older than his sister Ellen. Arnie was a baby, only 18 months old, when his father committed suicide. The same day that Arnie was undergoing tests and diagnosed as retarded at a hospital in Des Moines, Iowa is the same day that Arnie's father hung himself from the rafters of their basement in the Grape home. When Arnie is diagnosed by the doctors, he is also diagnosed not to live a long life. Arnie defies this diagnosis by making it to his eighteenth birthday, which is also Bonnie Grape, Arnie's mom, has always wished for him.

Arnie being retarded means that he constantly acts like a child even though he is seventeen and eighteen as the book unfolds. While Arnie lacks intellectual knowledge, it seems as if he does understand some of what is happening as the novel unfolds.

Gilbert Grape

Gilbert is the narrator and main character of the novel. He is 24-years old and works at the local grocery store. Other than working, Gilbert is also responsible for taking care of Arnie and buying cigarettes for their mother. Gilbert is the fourth born of the Grape children.

Gilbert is the type of person that keeps his feelings bottled up inside. Throughout the novel, Gilbert is in a constant inner struggle about whether he should stay in Endora or leave. Gilbert feels as if his family will fall apart if he leaves. At the same time, Gilbert also knows that there is a life waiting out there in the world for him to live and enjoy.

While Gilbert is mature for his age because he has been taking care of his family emotionally and financially since he was old enough to work. On the other hand, Gilbert is emotionally immature. The only relationship Gilbert has ever had with a woman is an affair with a married woman that started when Gilbert was only 17.

Amy Grape

Amy is the sister of Arnie and Gilbert. Amy is Gilbert's older sister and the eldest of the Grape children. Amy is 34 years old and so she is ten years older than Gilbert. Gilbert thinks of Amy more like a mother than a sister. Amy works as assistant manager in the elementary school cafeteria and as a teacher's aide during the school year.



Ellen Grape

Ellen Grape is Gilbert's little sister. Ellen just turned sixteen last month and recently had her braces removed from her teeth. Ever since Ellen has her braces removed, she is boy crazy and very sexual. Ellen's only interests are painting her fingernails, what she wears and how she looks. Ellen is also very hung up on what other people think of her. As the prettiest girl in town, Ellen is also the one most affected when Becky comes to town and takes over Ellen's place as the prettiest girl in town. Ellen has a part-time job working at the Dair Dream in town. Bonnie Grape was pregnant with Ellen when their father hung himself, so she never met their father.

Bonnie Grape

Bonnie Grape is the mother to Amy, Gilbert, Arnie, and Ellen. Bonnie started overeating seventeen years ago when she found her husband dead. Now Bonnie is so large that a household scale does not go high enough to weigh her.

Tucker

Tucker is Gilbert's best friend. Tucker lives in the converted garage behind his parent's house. He also collects beer bottles, of which he has more than 900 of now. Tucker is one of the few people that have seen Bonnie Grape since she stopped leaving the house threes ago earlier. Tucker loves Gilbert's mom, almost more than he loves his own.

Janice Grape

Janice Grape is three years older than Gilbert. Janice went away to college to study psychology, but works as an airline stewardess instead. Janice lives in Chicago and visits the Grape household on occasion. Janice sends two small checks per month to the Grapes.

Larry Grape

Larry Grape is Gilbert's brother. Larry is eight years older than Gilbert. Larry only visits one day the entire year, which is Arnie's birthday. Larry sends a big check to the Gilberts once a month, but the envelope doesn't have a note or return address on it. Larry is the one that found their father hanging in the basement.

Becky

Becky is a fifteen year-old girl visiting her grandmother in Endora for the summer. The first time Gilbert sees Becky is when he picks up Ellen one night from work at the Dairy



Dream. From that night on, Gilbert is obsessed with her beauty. Betty's parents are getting a divorce, which is why she is spending the summer with her grandmother.

Betty Carver

Betty Carver is the wife of the only insurance agent left in town. Betty has been having an affair with Gilbert since he was seventeen, so for the last seven years. The more Gilbert tries to pull away from Betty, the more Betty tries to keep Gilbert as her lover.

Ken Carver

Ken Carver is the only insurance agent left in Endora. He is the husband of Betty Carver. Ken is having an affair with his secretary, Melanie. Ken dies when he supposedly has a heart attack and drowns in a wading pool while filling it up with water for his sons to swim. Many of the residents of Endora, however, think Betty Carver killed Ken for the insurance money.



Objects/Places

Endora, Iowa

Endora, Iowa is the main setting of the novel. It is the city and state where the characters live and the novel unfolds. It's a small town. It's also a slow dying town as more businesses move out and new businesses are built on the outskirts of the town, or in the neighboring town of Motly. For example, the high school closed the year Gilbert graduated and now all of the kids are bused to the school in Motley.

Lamson Grocery

Lamson Grocery is one of the two grocery stores in town. The grocery store owner is Mr. Lamson. The store has four food aisles that contains the essential food products. Each item is priced by hand. The Food Land grocery store that was built the previous year has attracted away most of the Lamson Grocery customers.

Dairy Dream

The Dairy Dream is the local ice cream or malt shop in Endora. Ellen works at the Dairy Dream. Gilbert meets Becky for the first time at the Dairy Dream.

Food Land

Food Land is a chain grocery store. It is a new store to the area and is on the outskirts of Endora. Because the grocery store is new and modern, it is attracting a lot of the customers that once shopped at Lamson Grocery. One of the big attractions is the lobster tank filled with live lobsters. Gilbert refuses to step in the grocery store, except when he is forced to pick up Arnie's birthday cake from the store bakery.

Blue Chair

The blue chair is a chair that sits in the living room of the Grape household. Bonnie Grape, the mother of the Grape family, sits in the chair 24 hours a day, except when she gets up to use the bathroom. Bonnie eats, sleeps, and watches TV from the chair.

Burger Barn

The Burger Barn is a chain fast food burger place that is built on the outskirts of Endora. Everyone in town is happy to see the new place come to town, except Gilbert. To



Gilbert, the Burger Barn represents the cookie cutter design of chains rather than the personalized service of the rest of the family-owned businesses in town.

Banks of the River

The bank of the river is one of the secret meeting places of Gilbert and Betty Carver while they are having an affair. On the seventh year anniversary of their relationship starting, Betty hosts a picnic for her and Gilbert. It is also the place that marks the beginning of the end of their relationship.

Food

Food plays a starring role in the novel. Bonnie Grape is an overeater and Amy is following in her mother's footsteps. Arnie is obsessed with certain foods and constantly has remnants of his food and drinks on his face. Amy always seems to be in the kitchen fixing food for Bonnie, Arnie or someone in the family. In the end, it is Bonnie's overindulgence in food that kills her.

Gilbert's Truck

Gilbert spends a great deal of time in the novel driving around in his truck. The truck is one of the only possessions Gilbert owns on his own. He uses the truck to get back and forth from work and for his typical transportation needs. The truck is also Gilbert's refuge because he drives around town in it when he needs to get away from the chaos inside of the Grape house.

Bathroom

The one bathroom in the Grape household is also a place of refuge. At one point, almost every character that lives in the house has locked themselves in the bathroom to get away from something that is going on. It's also one of the rooms in the house where Gilbert and Arnie bond—when Gilbert is giving Arnie a bath.

Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes that runs throughout the novel is relationships. The novel reveals that even the individuals that make up a family have different relationships among the family members. For example, Gilbert and Amy work well together as a team in taking care of Arnie, Ellen and Momma. Janice and Larry, on the other hand, are rather detached from the family and only send money and showing up once or twice a year to visit.

There is a reference to the cliché that there is a fine line between love and hate when you evaluate the relationship between Gilbert and the relationships he has with his own family and other residents of the town. In reality, Gilbert holds a lot of contempt inside of him for each of his relatives. He feels as if he has sacrificed the most in his life in order to stay in Endora and take care of the rest of the family.

When you review the relationship between Gilbert and Amy, you can see both differences and parallels between their relationship. For example, Gilbert and Amy have taken on the parental roles in the family. The primary difference is that Gilbert tends to dream about getting out while it seems as if Amy is concerned with staying in Endora and taking care of her family.

Culture

Small town versus big city culture plays a pivotal role throughout the whole novel. The small town of Endora has been in existence and self-sufficient for many years. Now, the town is changing. Businesses are moving out and closing. Other businesses are losing out to the new businesses that are going up near town. The old timers, including Gilbert, seem to cling to the ways of their town. At the same time, the old timers expect the freedoms and promise of a better life, which some see from the new businesses in town, while others see that they have to leave Endora in order to find a better life.

Others, such as Ellen and Amy seem to struggle with holding on to old ways and traditions or adopting the ways and businesses that are coming to town.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family, the Grape family. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Gilbert's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families.

In the end though, bones are bones and blood is blood, which means that no matter what is happening, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.



Style

Point of View

The novel is in the first-person point of view. The novel is written from the viewpoint of Gilbert Grape. Gilbert is remembering back over all of the events that have taken place over his life, and how these events affected his family. The narration switches back and forth between the past and the present.

The point of view of this novel is an intimate point of view that allows a reader to connect closely with the main character, who also happens to be the narrator of the story. The point of view also allows the author to inject his own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place to her and the members of her family without having to move out of character or interrupt the flow of the narration. For these reasons, the point of view works well with this novel and the author's writing style.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in the small town of Endora, Iowa. The author never states the specific year or time period, but it seems as if it may be in the late '60s or early '70s. The setting of this novel is important because it is about the culture, rituals and the story of a family that lives in Endora. The main characters of the novel are a family that consists of an obese mother and her five children. Since the majority of the Grapes have lived in Endora all their lives, with the exception of Larry and Janice, the setting of the novel has a strong impact on the characters.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware of all of the family secrets that exist. However, as events unfold, one secret after the next unfolds.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is modern and informal. The language of the novel is not formal and appears to be set in modern times, such as the '60s or '70s. The language is educated, strong and descriptive enough that it creates a flow that leaves the reader impressed with the words as much as the plot when the novel ends

The language of the novel is appropriate to the plot because it is accurate to the characters in the novel and the education level of the writer. The novel is not in love with its own words, but it is descriptive enough that the reader finds enjoyment in the words as well as the plot. The language is not difficult to understand, however, and everything is clear in its context. For this reason, the language of the novel fits well with the plot of the novel.

Structure

The novel has 60 chapters. Each chapter is anywhere from 4 to 25 pages long. The chapters tell the story in exposition and dialogue. The author is the narrator and main character of the book, so it seems as if he is injecting her own voice throughout the novel as if he has become Gilbert. This allows the author to provide his own opinions of the events surrounding the setting of the novel, as well as the actions taking place within the plot, but from the eyes and words of Gilbert.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows the trials and tribulations of the family. The subplots involve how each member of the family manages the trials and tribulations that the family as a whole is going through.



Quotes

"Not everybody hangs himself, Arnie" (Chapter 1, p. 17).

"My skin is rolling over my clothes. I can't fit into chairs so well" (Chapter 2, p. 21).

"Because there will be wonderful surprises" (Chapter 3, p. 31).

"I've always thought it a shame that we're not the same age. You older or me younger. We'd have made a lovely couple, don't you think? Really, it's quite a shame" (Chapter 4, p. 33).

"He's wondering if you're one of the Grapes! We're from Motley, you know. And for a long time we've been hearing about this family" (Chapter 5, p. 38).

"I don't ask for much. Just let me see my boy turn eighteen. That's not too much to ask, is it?" (Chapter 6, p. 40).

"Right here, right here is where they found your dad?" (Chapter 7, p. 49).

"It will take great planning to save your mother. No floor is made to withstand such...such" (Chapter 8, p. 50).

"Women cook things. Men fix things" (Chapter 9, p. 54).

"Oh. Is that what I'm having?" (Chapter 10, p. 62).

"Yes. It's rude and unadultlike to miss an appointment. No call. No apology even" (Chapter 11, p. 67).

"I hope I make you happy. I want to make somebody happy. Just once. Somebody happy just once" (Chapter 12, p. 75).

"I think what you mean, Mr. Carver, is that sometimes she gets on your nerves" (Chapter 13 p. 79).



"What was it you wanted me to do?" (Chapter 14, p. 84).

" If you'd just tell her...If you'd just be honest with her" (Chapter 15, p. 87).

"It wasn't Lance Dodge who peed his pants" (Chapter 16, p. 96).

"Sir, it's just a fad. How long can lobsters in a tank be interesting? Flash and pizzazz and neon are but passing fancies. There will be a resurgence of simple dignity" (Chapter 17, p. 100).

"It's the insides of a watermelon that are best. Maybe if you expressed an interest in getting to know my insides" (Chapter 18, p. 106).

"Because I knew you'd never leave your family. I knew you'd never leave Endora" (Chapter 19, p. 111).

"Maybe he felt that they couldn't manage without him" (Chapter 20, p. 124).

"Gilbert, don't go" (Chapter 21, p. 124).

"I know. That's why you live as you do" (Chapter 22, p. 133).

"No, Jerry. Give me my boy" (Chapter 23, p. 139).

"we're all little broken eggs till we turn to Christ" (Chapter 24, p. 144).

"I admire her. She loves you kids" (Chapter 25, p. 147).

"I can't be expending energy for old, tired buildings. My focus is on the future. The Burger Barn future. Are you trying to upset me? Are you trying to ruin my day? 'Cause it won't work" (Chapter 26, p. 154).

"My grandmother likes you" (Chapter 27, p. 161).

"In terms of other things, you're not so old" (Chapter 28, p. 160).

"Nobody can remember the last time you cried" (Chapter 29, p. 171).

"You're the only one, Gilbert, who defies a kind of definition or comprehension. I mean, one doesn't know what you want. You don't travel, you don't read, you don't expand yourself...Quite simply - you don't know what you want and it shows. You're a scared little boy" (Chapter 30, p. 176).



"Matches are bad" (Chapter 31, p. 179).

"Rarely do I see such courage, such quality, such dignity as i have seen today. There is an award that I'd like to give. The Lance Dodge 'You'll be the next president of the United States' award and I am proud to give this award to the one, the only - Arnie Grape!" (Chapter 32, p. 191).

"That new girl has changed her. She's not the beauty queen anymore" (Chapter 33, p. 196).

"One day you might understand what it means to create. To know the feeling of looking into a person's eyes and know that you are the reason for those eyes. I'm going to say something I know I'm not supposed to say. I see you and I know that I'm a god. Or a goddess. Godlike! And this house is my kingdom. Yes, Gilbert. This chair is my throne. And you, Gilbert, are my knight in shimmering armor" (Chapter 34, p. 201).

"I coulda drowned! I coulda drowned!" (Chapter 35, p. 203).

"Funny—how two lives can be so different" (Chapter 36, p. 210).

"I love my boys. I work hard as I can. For my boys" (Chapter 37, p. 215).

"That's what this town needs. A good murder, you know?" (Chapter 38, p. 220).

"Ken hated St. Louis. I think it has a nice ring to it" (Chapter 39, p. 226).

"We've already said our good-bye" (Chapter 40, p. 230).

"Come on, Momma. Come on! Spit it out! Get it out!" (Chapter 41, p. 237).

"Feelings, Gilbert. That's what people are supposed to have" (Chapter 42, p. 241).

"Aw, Gilbert, since when did you start loving your mother?" (Chapter 43, p. 249).

"Yes! Enough of that! Let's be one big happy family. Is that too much to ask?" (Chapter 44, p. 254).

"Maybe I was sorting out thoughts, maybe I was thinking out loud" (Chapter 45, p. 260).

"Don't worry - one day you'll leave Endora" (Chapter 46, p. 263).

"The kiss was to give you hope. Nothing more" (Chapter 47, p. 267).

"No, you're not. You can't fool me. The son of mine who you refer to only comes back on my little boy's day" (Chapter 48, p. 273).

"Repeat after me - I hate my mother" (Chapter 49, p. 279).



"I can't do better than this" (Chapter 50, p. 282).

"it's like a real lesson in beauty happening here" (Chapter 51, p. 266).

"See. See what I mean. See the hate" (Chapter 52, p. 288).

"Of making the ugly beautiful" (Chapter 53, p. 292).

"I prayed to that bitter bastard of a God. I said 'Let me see my boy turn eighteen and I'll forgive you.' Now, I've done my forgiving. And now, I'm ready for some cake" (Chapter 54, p. 301).

"This started last night and I uhm can't seem to stop. I feel so stupid. So stupid" (Chapter 55, p. 309).

"Larry, my son. Lawrence Albert Grape spoke to his mother?" (Chapter 56, p. 312).

"Well, it's what it feels like. The party is over and it was a success and Momma's in her room and Arnie is clean and Larry is talking and it's all better here, all better" (Chapter 57, p. 317).

"I'm not ready for them to touch her, to take her away, ok?" (Chapter 58, p. 328).

"Don't call. Do not call. By the time they get her out, it'll be morning. And there'll be a crowd. And the McBurney hearse will show up. They'll put her in the hearse, Ellen. And the people will talk and talk. Whisper. They'll look at her and feel superior. And they will joke. They will make her a joke" (Chapter 59, p. 332).

"Yes, Arnie. Look at the lights" (Chapter 60, p. 335).



Topics for Discussion

Who is Gilbert Grape? Why does he feel like she is responsible for taking care of everything that pertains to his family? What does Gilbert recall about his childhood? What is Gilbert's biggest demon that haunts him throughout his life? Why is this important? How does it change his life?

Discuss the relationship between Gilbert and Amy. Are they taking care of their family for the same or for different reasons? Is there love, guilt or a sense of obligation in their relationship? How does Gilbert feel about Amy? How does Amy feel about Gilbert? Why does Amy think that Gilbert deserves better? What does she do about it?

How does Albert Grape die? How does this affect the future of the family? How does each family member react emotionally to Albert's suicide? Why does Gilbert decide his father killed himself? Does anyone in the family ever really determine why Albert killed himself?

Who is Amy? Why does she stay in the Grape household even though she is 34 years old? Why does there seem to be a strain in the relationship between Amy and Gilbert? Why does Amy continuously feed Bonnie Grape, even though Bonnie is obese? How does Amy feel about her family? How does the reader know this? Does Amy blame herself for Bonnie's condition?

Who is Ellen? Why does she continuously act as if everything her family asks of her is so traumatic? Why does she choose to dress provocatively? What happens when Ellen finds out Momma died? Why is Ellen continuously in search of something better? Why does Ellen hate Gilbert so much?

Discuss the culture of the Grape household. What impact does the culture have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them or hold them back? Why is the culture an issue to the characters? Does the culture have anything to do with way that the family relationships develop and evolve? What impact does it have on the overall desire to expose the truth?