

When Zachary Beaver Came to Town Study Guide

**When Zachary Beaver Came to Town by Kimberly
Willis Holt**

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Overview

Stuck in Antler, Texas, where "nothing ever happens," life to Toby Wilson is dull and going nowhere. Besides that, his mother leaves home to become a country music singer; his best friend's brother is sent to fight in Vietnam, and the girl of his dreams loves someone else. But when the fattest boy in the world parks his trailer in the Dairy Maid parking lot, Toby discovers he has a lot to learn about his town and about life. The summer of 1971 holds a series of discoveries that change Toby's life forever and getting to know Zachary leads the way.

It is a summer of firsts and lasts, a summer of meetings and goodbyes, and a summer of joys and sorrows. When Zachary Beaver Came to Town peels back the layers of smalltown life to reveal lessons in loving and losing, while it teaches Toby to look beyond the obvious and to take a broader view of life to discover the hidden dreams and treasures that it offers.

About the Author

Kimberly Willis Holt was born during a hurricane in Pensacola, Florida. While growing up, she lived in Paris, Guam, and several other U.S. states because her father was a navy chief. Today, she lives in Amarillo, Texas, with her husband and daughter, but seven generations of her family have lived in Louisiana. She still calls Forest Hill, Louisiana, home because that is where her parents were from and that was the place to which they always returned during her childhood.

When she was twelve, Holt read Carson McCullers's book *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, and as she explained in an interview for Kathleen Horning's online article for *School Library Journal*, "It was life-changing because of the characters. That was the first time I read a book where the characters seemed like real people to me." Other books she read as a child were the *Little House on the Prairie* books, *Little Women*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and many biographies.

She admits to being a shy, quiet child and an average student because her family was always moving around, which always made her the new girl at school. Holt credits her seventh-grade science teacher with encouraging her love of writing. He read a poem she wrote about a Vietnam soldier and insisted she show it to the creative writing teacher. But a few years later, another teacher discouraged her. "She was a great teacher, but she would praise other people's writing, but not mine. I was very shy and insecure and I took it as though I really wasn't meant to be a writer. That kept me from writing for a long time." In the *School Library Journal* interview, Holt further explains that this experience is the reason she always encourages students to believe in themselves. "Don't let one person stop you," she advises.

College was a disappointment for Holt.

She majored in broadcast journalism but never completed her degree. Instead, as a senior, she quit school to work full-time in the news department at a radio station. She then worked as an interior decorator before moving to Amarillo. It was there that Holt decided to treat her writing as a real job.

She published some articles, essays, and short stories before turning to her young adult novels.

The inspiration for *My Louisiana Sky* occurred when Holt was nine years old. She and her mother passed a woman on a Louisiana back road. Holt's mother told her that the woman was mentally retarded and that she had a lot of children. The memory stayed with Holt, until the voice of twelve-year-old Tiger, the main character in her book, came to her in Amarillo. Having never written for children, Holt reacquainted herself with the middle grade and young adult literature available at the library. Pam Conrad's *Prairie Songs* was among the books she read, and Holt considers Conrad a mentor. "Conrad taught me that you can write about anything for children. There are no limits."

The path to publication was not easy.

Holt received rejections from agents and editors, but she never lost hope. She estimates that she did approximately twenty revisions, writing off and on for three years, before an editor at Henry Holt offered to buy *My Louisiana Sky*, and still there was revision to be done. But Holt claims to love rewriting, and it obviously pays off. *My Louisiana Sky* received numerous awards, including the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Honor for Fiction. It was also selected as one of the American Library Association's Best Ten Books for Young Adults and an ALA Notable Book for Children.

Bank Street College also honored it with the Josette Frank Award, and the book was chosen as a Booklist Editor's Choice.

G. P. Putnam's Sons published *Mister and Me* in 1998. This book took approximately four months to write and was inspired by stories Holt heard from her father about her great grandfathers who worked in a small Louisiana sawmill town. In an interview on CNN's chat page about books, Holt reveals, "even though they're not true stories, there are many truths in them," and like *My Louisiana Sky*, *Mister and Me* garnered high praises. It was a Junior Library Guild Selection and was included on the Louisiana Young Reader's Choice Master List as well as the New York Library's Top 100 Books for Reading and Sharing.

Holt explains that much of her writing is inspired by her own life and the family stories she was told as a child. "I come from a family of storytellers," she told CNN. She found the seed idea for *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town* when, at age thirteen, she visited the Louisiana State Fair and paid two dollars to see the fattest teenage boy in the world. A few years later, the same trailer and same young man appeared in the parking lot near a friend's office. The friend became acquainted with the young man and told Holt about him. This relationship contrasted sharply with the way Holt had interacted with him at the state fair. "I was very nosey and asked all sorts of questions," she explained to CNN. When the voice of character Toby Wilson finally came to her, Holt set her story in a small Texas town and towed in Zachary Beaver to be gawked and marveled at. "I just tried to be true to what a thirteen-year-old boy would do [in that situation]," she said.

In 1999, Holt published *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*, and it surpassed the praises of her two former books. A few of its many awards are: School Library Journal Best Book of the Year, American Bookseller Pick of the List, ALA Notable Book, one of ALA's Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults, Horn Book Fanfare, and, finally, the National Book Award for Young People's Literature.

Holt's latest release is *Dancing in Cadillac Light*, published by the Putnam Group in 2001. While it does draw from Holt's personal life, the characters are not Holt and her sister, although Holt admits that the sister relationship in the story is somewhat autobiographical. Furthermore, the grandfather is a composite of a fictional person and Holt's own grandfathers. The book actually began as a short story, but with each draft it came closer to the vision Holt had for it.



Holt continues to read the works of other writers. Some of her favorites include *Jacob Have I Loved*, *Sarah Plain and Tall*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Color of Water*, and works by Eudora Welty and Zora Neale Hurston. She also offers this advice to aspiring authors, "Keep reading good books. Keep writing a part of your daily life, and live your life."



Plot Summary

When Zachary Beaver Came to Town is a coming of age tale, centering around thirteen-year-old Toby Wilson and his best friend, Cal. When a sideshow act comes to town featuring the reported fattest boy in the world, Zachary Beaver, it is the beginning of major changes for the unsuspecting boys. The next few weeks will test Toby and Cal's friendship in ways neither ever imagined. However, helping Zachary will bring them back together, stronger than ever. Kimberly Willis Holt, an award-winning author, has once again brought memorable characters and a heartwarming story to life for young adult readers everywhere.

Toby Wilson wants to have the best summer ever. However, when you live in a small town like Antler, Texas, there just is not much to do that you have not done a million times before. This year is different, though. Today, a trailer rolled into town carrying the world's fattest boy.

Toby and Cal pay their two dollars to see Zachary Beaver, the fattest boy, expecting he will be long gone by morning. However, when Zachary's trailer is still parked in front of the Dairy Maid three days later, the boys cannot help their curiosity. It seems his partner, Paulie Rankin, has abandoned Zachary. At first, they deliver groceries to the boy, leaving them on the doorstep and then hiding to catch a glimpse of Zachary. Then, when the sheriff asks for their help, the boys find themselves back in the trailer attempting to forge some sort of friendship with Zachary. It is not an easy task.

While Zachary fights Cal and Toby's overtures at friendship, Toby is steeped in other dramas in his life. Toby's Mom has left her family to follow her dreams in Nashville where she is participating in a contest to be the next big country music star. When the contest ends, however, Toby's Mom decides she does not want to come back to Antler. Toby is also having trouble with the fact that Cal's brother, Wayne, is in Vietnam. Toby looks up to Wayne and cannot understand why Cal does not write Wayne every time Wayne writes to him. Toby takes it upon himself to write his own letter to Wayne, signing Cal's name, without telling Cal.

During all of this, Toby is also dealing with a crush on the most beautiful girl in Antler, at least in his opinion. Scarlett has never noticed Toby beyond the normal bounds of classmate. Scarlett is in love with Juan, the son of local farm hands. However, when Scarlett breaks up with Juan for not attending a family party with her, Toby finds an opening into her life. Toby even goes as far as giving Scarlett his Mom's pearls to prove his love. Unfortunately, Scarlett is still in love with Juan.

To add to all his other problems, Toby also has a summer job mowing the lawn for the local librarian and historian, Miss Myrtie Mae. Miss Myrtie Mae's brother, the Judge, is senile. He scares Toby. Once, when Toby goes to care for the lawn, the Judge throws apples at him. Eventually, however, Toby realizes that the Judge has mistaken him for his granddad. Toby takes the time one afternoon to play baseball with the Judge, ending the Judge's obsessive behavior.



Cal is determined that he and Toby befriend Zachary. Cal devises a plan to take Zachary to the drive in movie, with Kate's help. Zachary only goes to the movies because of Kate, but he seems to truly enjoy himself. Cal also discovers in his snooping in Zachary's trailer that not all of Zachary's stories of having traveled around the world are true, that he learned all the facts he likes to tell them through dozens of books stacked in the back of his trailer. Cal also discovers that Zachary has a bible his Mom gave him for his baptism, except Zachary has never been baptized. During the course of the sheriff's check into Zachary's background, he tells the boys that Zachary's Mom was also big and her funeral was a media circus. The boys realize that this must be why Zachary never went through with his baptism, afraid it too would turn into a circus.

The summer is thrown into a dark abyss, when news comes that Wayne has died. Toby is so shocked by the news that he cannot bear to look at Cal or anyone else in his family. Toby refuses to go to the wake and the funeral. As a result, Cal is very angry with Toby and ends their friendship. However, with help from his Dad in understanding Cal's pain, Toby makes amends with Cal. It is then that Cal tells Toby they should continue with their plans to get Zachary baptized.

The boys' conspire to baptize Zachary in Gossimer Lake. They conspire with Kate, the local bully, Malcolm and Ferris. Zachary is reluctant at first. However, when the boys describe their plan and explain what they know about why Zachary has not been baptized before now, he relents. Kate drives Zachary to the lake in Wylie Womack's cart. Ferris, who was reluctant at first to perform the ceremony since he is not an ordained minister, meets them there. The baptism goes off without a problem. When they return to Zachary's trailer, the sheriff is there waiting. Sheriff Levi has heard from Paulie Rankin. Paulie has been in Paris and will be returning to reclaim custody of Zachary in a few days.

Toby has learned from all these events in such a way that he finds himself helping Juan and Scarlett get back together and has agreed to go visit his Mom in Nashville. Zachary rides off into the sunset with promises to write, though Toby knows he probably will not. However, this summer has taught Toby a lot, and he now looks at the little town where he lives and the people in it with new insight.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

When Zachary Beaver Came to Town is a coming of age tale centering on thirteen-year-old Toby Wilson and his best friend, Cal. When a sideshow act comes to town featuring the reported fattest boy in the world, Zachary Beaver, it is the beginning of major changes for the unsuspecting boys. The next few weeks will test Toby and Cal's friendship in ways neither ever imagined. However, helping Zachary will bring them back together, stronger than ever. Kimberly Willis Holt, an award-winning author, has once again brought memorable characters and a heartwarming story to life for young adult readers everywhere.

Toby Wilson thinks nothing happens in Antler Texas until the day an old blue Thunderbird pulls into the Dairy Maid parking lot pulling a trailer. The sign on the trailer announces that for two dollars visitors can see the fattest boy in the world. Within minutes, half the town is in line, including Toby and his best friend, Cal.

Miss Myrtie Mae, the town librarian and historian is in line with her camera. Miss Myrtie Mae asks Toby about his Mom, who is in Nashville taking part in a country music singing competition. Toby Mom won a local competition in order to go to the competition in Nashville. Everyone in town is happy and impressed by Toby's Mom. Toby just wishes she would come back so he did not have to eat his Dad's cooking anymore.

Toby becomes bored quickly when the line does not immediately begin to move. Toby wants to go get something to eat, but Cal is afraid if they do not see the fat boy today, they will never get to see him, because he will move on. No one ever stays in Antler, if they do not have to. Scarlett Stalling walks toward the line and Toby cannot take his eyes off her. Scarlett wants to know if Toby will take her sister to see the fat boy since she has to be home to meet her boyfriend, Juan. Toby agrees, because he has had a crush on Scarlett for a long time. Tara, the little sister, begins to make fun of the fat boy and Toby tells her to shut up, nearly getting himself in trouble with Miss Myrtie Mae.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The arrival of a sideshow trailer in a small town is a big event, as well as foreshadowing for this novel. The introduction of many major characters in this chapter also foreshadows their participation in the rest of the novel. When Scarlett is introduced, it is clear by Toby's reaction to her that she is very important to him whether she be a major or a minor character to the story. Toby has a crush on the beautiful preteen. However, even in his introduction of her, he also introduces conflict by stating that she has a boyfriend.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Toby is hot, and he would like to go get a snow cone but he has to watch Tara. The sheriff drives slowly by and takes a look at the commotion. The sheriff has a dog in the car with him, one of dozens someone in town has rescued and given to him. The sheriff has a soft spot in his heart for stray animals, especially dogs.

Finally, the skinny person selling the tickets moves to the steps of the trailer and begins his story about the boy everyone has come to see. The man, Paulie Rankin, claims the boy is six hundred and forty-three pounds, the fattest boy in the world. Tara wants to know if the boy is fatter than Santa. Cal kneels down to assure her that the boy is much fatter than Santa. Toby figures Cal is so good with kids, because he is the youngest of four kids, with two older brothers and a sister. Cal's oldest brother, Wayne, is in Vietnam. Wayne writes to Cal all the time, but Cal rarely writes back. Toby thinks Cal should write as often as possible.

When Toby, Cal and Tara reach the front of the line, Tara is bouncing as if she needs to go to the bathroom, although she swears that she does not. Paulie lets them inside. The trailer is dark except for a small amount of light coming in from between the slats in the blinds and it smells like Pine-Sol. The place is almost hospital sterile except for a dusty bookshelf full of encyclopedias and a gold box on the center shelf by itself. At the back is a curtained off area and in the middle is the biggest human being Toby has ever seen. The boy sits behind three Plexiglas walls that box him in, watching the television and drinking a chocolate shake.

Toby finds it strange to stare at someone just because he looks different. Miss Myrtle Mae asks if she can take a picture and the fat boy tells her no. Cal begins asking question after question, wanting to know how much Zachary eats, how old he is, where he goes to school, what is in the gold box. Zachary gives quiet, terse answers, obviously used to this sort of curiosity.

Toby glances down at Tara and realizes she is wetting her pants at the same time Zachary smells the urine. Zachary screams for them to leave and everyone stares, except Cal who takes the opportunity to snoop through the trailer. Toby quickly marches Tara across the street to her house and finds Scarlett there on the front porch with Juan. Toby is so upset by the sight he turns and rushes away before they can see him. Except Juan has seen him, and he yells at Toby, "didn't know you baby-sat." (16)

Chapter 2 Analysis

Again, there is the introduction of the stories characters, namely the sheriff and Zachary Beaver. This is foreshadowing. Toby's reactions to staring at Zachary simply because he is overweight outlines a part of Toby's character the reader might not have known if the

scene were observed from some other point of view, touching on the importance of the first person point of view. Toby's reaction is somewhat ironic, because he has waited in line for a substantial amount of time when, by his own admission he would rather be somewhere else, and yet he feels that what he is doing is wrong. Perhaps it is this feeling of wrongness that makes it so exciting. When Toby takes Tara home and finds Juan and Scarlett alone together, this too foreshadows conflict in the coming chapters.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Antler is a farming town in the heart of the Texas panhandle. The town's population has dwindled in the past few years because of farm foreclosures. There is the Dairy Maid, the Bowl-a-Rama, the real estate office, and the grocery store that make up the majority of downtown. A cotton gin sits on the outskirts of town and people can often see cotton blowing on the wind like snow. Antler is a very small town that tends to be boring for young boys on summer break from school.

Toby and Cal live next door to each other even though Cal's Dad has a farm on the outside of town. Toby's house is a small two-story that his Mom inherited from her parent and their parents before that. A flag waves outside the McKnight house in honor of Wayne's service. Cal's other brother, Billy, is outside when Toby gets home, working on Wayne's mustang so it will be running when he gets home next March, as well as Mrs. McKnight, who is pruning her prize roses.

After answering Mrs. McKnight's questions about his Mom's competition, Toby goes into the house and finds his Dad making a salad out of the vegetables from his garden. Toby's Dad, the town postmaster, raises worms. Toby's Dad also is not a very good cook, he is actually very awkward in the kitchen, and it seems all they eat anymore is vegetables. Toby misses his Mom even more when he sees his Dad in the kitchen.

Toby remembers the night his Mom packed. His Mom packed as though she were planning to be gone the whole summer rather than just a week, including every set of western clothes she ever bought, while singing "Hey, Good Looking," the whole time. Toby's Mom has dreamed of being a famous country singer since before he was born, but Toby had always thought it was just that, a dream. Now, as he and his Dad sit down to a silent supper, her absence is even more evident. Toby's Mom would normally talk so much, about her job at the diner in the Bowl-a-Rama and the people around town, that neither Toby nor his Dad was required to say a word. However, now that they could talk, they had nothing to say.

After helping his Dad with the dishes, Toby rides his bike out to Gossimer Lake. Gossimer Lake is a man made lake. After an unusually rainy spring, a small puddle the size of a kiddie pool appeared on the property of Henrick Gossimer's land. Mr. Gossimer thought it was a sign from God that Antler needed a lake, so he bulldozed the land around it until it became a town project. A damn was built by the First Baptist men's group, a windmill raised by the Shriners club. No one was allowed to swim in it or fish, but it is a cool place to sit on a hot, summer evening.

Toby briefly thinks about wading into the water, but the thought of snakes warns him off. Then, across the lake, Toby sees two figures. When one of them moves and Toby



glimpses blond hair, he knows it is Juan and Scarlett. Suddenly Toby feels sick to his stomach.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The introduction of the McKnight, especially Mrs. McKnight, underlines the importance this family plays in Toby's life in order to explain Toby's emotional reaction to later events. In addition, the foreshadowing of the turmoil in Toby's family life is present here, as the reader watches Toby and his Dad share a meal but not conversation. More background on Toby's Mom is also presented here, and her departure the week before. The reader must begin to feel a sense that not all is right with this family while they read Toby's memories. Even Toby senses something must be amiss when he comments on how happy his Mom was to leave. Finally, the introduction of Gossimer Lake is important foreshadowing, as well as Toby's sighting of Scarlett and Juan just a few paragraphs after the writer discussed Toby's Mom's departure.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The next morning, Cal wakes Toby by throwing dirt clods against his window. Cal's family is always up at six every morning and normally finished with their chores by eight, which means Toby has a built in alarm clock. Toby does not mind, however. Today is Saturday anyway and even Cal is allowed Saturdays off.

On the way out, Toby and Cal watch Kate attempting to parallel park the family station wagon. Kate is the only high school junior in Antler, who does not have her driver's license, because she cannot parallel park. Even now, Kate knocks down one of the garbage cans she is using to practice.

Cal and Toby ride their bikes into town, yelling names at the town bully as he mows the school lawn. The boys discuss what they want to do and quickly realize they do not have enough money for the usual pastimes. Cal decides to go back to his house to ask Kate for money although she is probably still upset with him for teasing her about her driving skills. At the house, Kate is listening to the sound track to the *Sound of Music* and sewing at the kitchen table. Cal grabs a piece of material pinned to a pattern and begins to dance around the room, singing Sixteen Going on Seventeen. Kate demands he give it back, and the pattern is ripped as they struggle over it.

Cal and Toby race from the house and ride their bikes into town once more. Toby asks when the ladybugs Mr. McKnight uses on his fields to control pests are coming in. Every year Toby and his family are invited to help release the bugs in the fields. Cal says in a few weeks. Then he suggests they go to the bowling alley even though they did not get the money they needed. When they arrive, across the street they can see that Zachary Beaver's trailer is still parked in the Dairy Maid parking lot without Paulie Rankin's blue Thunderbird.

Ferris Kelly is at the desk where the rental shoes are kept. Ferris was once an alcoholic who has now found God. Toby's Mom once told him that Ferris considered being a preacher, although now he never goes to church. However, Toby's Mom swears that Ferris knows the bible from beginning to end. It is also rumored that Ferris shot himself in the foot so that he would not have to serve in the Korean War. Ferris swears it is just coincidence that his gun went off while he was cleaning it the day before he was do to report for duty. Ferris still has a limp from that wound.

Ferris tells the boys that Paulie Rankin went off and left Zachary Beaver alone. Cal drags Toby across the street to verify that Zachary is still in the trailer. They peek through a window and Zachary sees them. Zachary threatens to call the cops. Cal and Toby run to their bikes and race home, realizing only after they are safe that they grabbed each other's bikes on accident.



Chapter 4 Analysis

Kate's attempts to parallel park are important here, because they foreshadow Kate's driving skills, which will become important later in the novel. The story also touches on the theme of friendship here when Toby discusses Cal's attitude and the fact that he owes him more than forty dollars for all the times Toby has paid for their shared activities. It is clear that the boys' friendship runs deeply. However, Cal's feelings for his sister do not run so deep, as shown by Cal's disregard for his sister's sewing project. This scene is also important as it not only shows the depth of Cal's immaturity at this point in the story, but it also foreshadows the growth and change that both Cal and his relationship with Kate will undergo throughout the novel.

Ferris is an interesting person, and his introduction is important, because it also foreshadows his role for latter moments in the novel. It is ironic that Ferris was once a seminary student while he sports tattoos on his body and openly admits to a drinking problem. It is also interesting the contrast the writer has presented between Ferris and Wayne. Wayne is the hero, who is fighting in Vietnam. Ferris is the one who, as rumor has it, shot himself to avoid fighting in the Korean War. Finally, the topic returns to Zachary Beaver, as it will quite often in this novel. Zachary appears to have been abandoned, a fact that will be a pivotal point in the rest of the novel.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The next day, Toby and Cal go to the library to find out if Zachary Beaver is really the fattest boy in the world. The boys have not been to the library since they were very small, therefore Miss Myrtie Mae knows exactly what it is they are after. It seems most of the kids in town have come to the library for the same reason the past few days. However, Zachary Beaver is not listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Later that afternoon, Mr. Wilson treats Toby to lunch at the Bowl-a-Rama Cafy. Mr. Wilson is in a good mood, because 'Super Mex', Lee Trevino won the British Open. Cal is on the roof of the bowling alley when they arrive, so Mr. Wilson invites him to eat with them. Ferris greets them with some surprise, since Mr. Wilson openly dislikes eating in the cafy. Mr. Wilson sees the sign over the counter wishing his wife luck and does not comment.

Soon the local lunch crowd begins coming in. Earline Carter, the real estate agent, Miss Myrtie Mae, and her brother, the Judge join the Wilsons. Everyone asks about Toby's Mom and Mr. Wilson answers with curt, short answers. Miss Myrtie Mae asks if it would be okay for Toby to cut her lawn every Friday and Toby agrees although Cal obviously thought the job would be his since it had been both Billy and Wayne's before him.

Soon the conversation turns to Zachary Beaver. Everyone seems to know that Paulie Rankin left Zachary alone. Toby wants to know where he went and Miss Myrtie Mae says he is probably up to no good and the sheriff will no doubt check into the situation soon. Ferris comments that if Opalina Wilson had been there, she would have made up a song about it, as she was apt to do. Everyone found that funny, except for Toby's Dad.

After lunch, Toby's Dad bought him and Cal a snow cone before going off to run errands. Cal takes his snow cone to Zachary's trailer and leaves it on the steps. After Cal knocks, nothing happens until Toby's Dad comes back and takes them all home. As they drive off, they can see a hand stick out of the trailer door and pick up the snow cone.

At home, Kate is in her driveway. Kate waves at them and tells them that she finally got her driver's license. Everyone tells her how happy they are, including Cal. However, as Kate pulls out of the driveway, she knocks over the mailbox.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Truth and lies seems to be another minor theme in the novel when it comes to Zachary Beaver. The boys want to know if Zachary is really the fattest boy in the world, so they go to the library to check. It turns out that Zachary is not listed, a small amount of foreshadowing for events surrounding Zachary a little later in the novel.



Otto is in a good mood and decides to take Toby and Cal to lunch. However, it turns out to be a mistake for Otto, who decides to take the boys to the place where his wife, Opalina, worked. This is another moment of insight for the reader when it becomes clear that Otto is not happy about Opalina being gone and does not want to talk about it with everyone in town. This foreshadows trouble in the relationship between Toby's parents.

Cal shows that he has a big heart when he leaves a snow cone for Zachary. On the other hand, perhaps Cal just has a normal child's curiosity about Zachary and wants to see him again without paying for it. Whatever Cal's motivation, this act of kindness foreshadows his desires to help Zachary later in the novel.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Toby and Cal can see all of Antler from the flat roof of the bowling alley. However, today they are not up there to see Antler, they are up there to watch Zachary Beaver's trailer. Toby and Cal left a sack of groceries on his step and they want to see him pick it up. It's been three days since Paulie left, and they figured Zachary must have been running low on food.

When the boys see Miss Myrtie Mae head to the library, Cal tells Toby that he heard Miss Myrtie Mae was engaged to a lawyer a long time ago but he broke up with her because of the Judge. Two nights before the wedding, the Judge became deathly ill and after the wedding was called off, the Judge mysteriously got better overnight. Toby is disturbed by the idea of Miss Myrtie Mae and love so he changes the subject by asking if Cal has heard from Wayne.

Cal has a new letter, which he pulls out of his pocket and reads to Toby. Wayne talks about things at home, wanting to know how the summer has been going. Wayne tells Cal that the way they used to play war in the backyard with water balloons is nothing like the war he is fighting now. Wayne asks about the rest of the family, tells Cal and Toby to have a good summer, and asks that Cal write to him sometime.

Toby urges Cal to write his brother while they continue to wait what seems to be an extraordinarily long time. Cal thinks Zachary might be dead. Toby says that maybe they should knock again. However, before they can decide, the curtain at the window moves. A moment later, the door opens, and Zachary picks up the grocery sack. The boys are amazed by Zachary's large size, curious what it would be like to be that big.

The boys decide to go home after that. Toby tells Cal to go on ahead. Toby has to stop at the grocery store for his Dad. On the way down the ladder, Cal drops Wayne's letter. Toby grabs it and sticks it in his pocket to give to Cal later.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Again, the boys leave food for Zachary. Again, their motivations are clouded, but the act foreshadows future actions. The story about Miss Myrtie Mae explains a lot about the kind, old woman, and gives the reader a snapshot of the culture these boys have been raised in. Wayne's letter is nostalgic and sad, a letter that should have forewarned the boys of the horrors that Wayne is experiencing in Vietnam, but does not. Toby might see it more than Cal, since Toby tries so hard to encourage Cal to write back. When Cal drops the letter, showing what the reader might see as callousness, Toby picks it up with the intention of giving it back. This too foreshadows future events as well as touching on the theme of friendship. Only a friend would see past Cal's outward callousness and know that he would want the letter back.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The next day Toby and Cal leave more groceries for Zachary. The boys are back on the roof watching, this time prepared for the wait with candy. The boys pass the time making up stories about Paulie Rankin.

A group of fourth graders approaches the trailer, while Cal and Toby watch and start hitting it with sticks, yelling mean words to Zachary. Cal and Toby climb off the roof and gather a bunch of rocks from a nearby pile, then climb back up. Toby throws a rock at Mason, Malcolm's little brother, and hits him on the bottom. Cal hits another boy's leg, causing him to run off crying. Toby throws at the last remaining boy and misses, knocking out the trailer's window. Cal and Toby run away, leaving their bikes parked next to the bowling alley.

The next morning, Thursday morning, the day of his Mom's contest, Toby wakes to find Sheriff Levi climbing out of his car in front of the house. Toby immediately assumes the sheriff is there because of Zachary's broken window. Toby quickly dresses and runs downstairs at his Dad's request. Toby considers confessing when he sees the serious looks on both his Dad's and the sheriff's faces, but decides he does not want to get Cal into trouble.

The sheriff asks if Toby and Cal could go with him to Zachary's trailer. Toby hesitates, causing his Dad to prod him along. Then the sheriff explains that he needs to know what Zachary's plans are and because Cal and Toby are about the same age, it would really help if they went along to make Zachary feel more secure. The sheriff says that Paulie paid the Dairy Maid to allow the water and power lines from the trailer to connect to their building and that Ferris received an envelope with money in it to pay for meals for Zachary. However, the sheriff needs to know how permanent these plans are. Toby agrees to go.

Zachary does not immediately open the door when they first arrive. Eventually he allows his visitors to enter. Zachary tells the sheriff that he is fifteen and that he is from New York. Zachary says that his partner, Paulie Rankin, is off looking for another act to add to their show but he will be back soon. Zachary says that his parents are dead and that Paulie is his legal guardian.

The sheriff promises to get someone out to fix Zachary's broken window, which Zachary said some kids broke but did not say it was Cal and Toby, and to have the doctor look at a cut Zachary got on his foot when he cleaned up the glass. Then Sheriff Levi also says that he will wait a week for Paulie to return before he calls the authorities in Amarillo, and then leaves the boys alone with Zachary, so they can all get to know each other. However, Zachary is already annoyed with Cal, because he peeked inside the gold box on his shelf and found a bible that Zachary's Mom gave him for his baptism.



Toby shows Zachary a bag of vegetables he has brought from his Dad's garden. Zachary tells him to put it in the refrigerator. When Toby does, he discovers that other people have visited Zachary. In the refrigerator is a Chicken Delight casserole that is Miss Myrtie Mae's specialty and a barbecue plate from Ferris's Bowl-a-Rama Cafy.

Zachary asks Cal and Toby to dust and clean places in the trailer he cannot reach. Cal finds a book about sideshows and Zachary tells him that someday he and Paulie will be partners in the biggest sideshow business in the world. They will be famous. Cal tells Zachary that his Dad grows cotton and Toby's Dad grows worms. Toby is embarrassed by this, as he usually is. This leads to a discussion about Paris. Zachary brags that he has been to Paris and spouts off many facts that leave Toby unable to doubt the truth of his story.

On the way home, Toby asks Cal why Zachary did not tell on them about the window. Cal tells Toby that Zachary was lying about being baptized. The place in the bible where the preacher writes the date of the baptism is blank in Zachary's bible.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Irony touches this chapter when Cal and Toby attempt to protect Zachary and his trailer only to inflict the worst damage of all by breaking the window. Toby is terribly afraid he will get in trouble for what he has done, though he refuses to confess, because he wants to protect Cal, which touches on the theme of friendship. Despite his own morals, Toby is confused and surprised when Zachary does not tell on them. This provides insight into Zachary's character, however. Although he is unpleasant and rude to everyone, Zachary did not tell. This foreshadows the relationship that will grow between Cal, Toby, and Zachary. It also says something about the people in Antler, when Toby discovers that other people besides him and Cal have been giving food to Zachary. There is also foreshadowing in the story Zachary tells Toby and Cal about Paris, as well as the lie Zachary told about being baptized, touching again on the minor theme of truth and lies.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Toby learns that evening that his Mom did not win her competition, but came in second. Toby also learns that his Mom will not be coming home. Toby argues with his Dad when his Dad refuses to tell Toby how long it will be until his Mom comes home. Finally, Toby insists that his Dad give him her phone number, which his Dad does. Toby does not call, though he finds himself imagining her taking him to live with her in the mansion she will buy after she becomes a big star.

It is late when Toby wakes after his argument with his Dad. Toby finds the letter Wayne wrote to Cal and decides to write back. Toby writes about the summer he and Cal have had so far, about Zachary and Kate and some of the other people in town. Then Toby signs the letter Cal. Sneaking out of the house, Toby takes the letter to the mailbox outside the post office and mails it right away. Then he goes out to Gossimer Lake.

While Toby sits beside the water, Scarlett walks up with a small radio in her hands. They talk for a while and Scarlett tells Toby how Juan canceled on an important family party they had intended to attend together without giving her a good reason. Scarlett is so upset about it that she broke up with Juan. Then a good song comes on the radio and Scarlett asks Toby to dance with her. Toby cannot believe his luck: first Scarlett and Juan are broke up and now she wants to dance. Toby dances with her, afraid he will be a complete klutz and hurt her, but before he can step on her toe, they are attacked by a bunch of mosquitoes. Scarlett kisses Toby's cheek for the dance and runs off, leaving Toby lost in a heaven of his own making.

Chapter 8 Analysis

A small amount of foreshadowing has come to satisfaction in the fact that Toby's Mom is not returning home now that her contest is over. Toby is understandably upset by this and his anger at his Dad foreshadows the continuation of his attitude toward his Mom's perceived abandonment.

Toby writes a nice letter to Wayne, but instead of signing his own name to it, he signs Cal's. The reader is already aware that Toby believes Cal should write his brother as often as possible, but this event was not foreshadowed specifically. This touches on the theme of friendship, but it is unclear to the reader if Toby has done this because of his friendship for Cal and that Toby believes Cal would appreciate this act, or if Toby did it because of his friendship with Wayne, to make Wayne happy. Or, perhaps it is another, minor theme of envy. Perhaps Toby envies Cal his heroic brother so much that for just the amount of time it took him to write the letter he wanted to feel like Wayne was his brother, too.

Another touch of foreshadowing has come to satisfaction, Scarlett's conversation and dance with Toby. This moment fulfils so many things for Toby that he is too young to even understand what each emotion he is feeling truly is. However, it also sets up more foreshadowing. Will Scarlett like Toby now that Juan is no longer her boyfriend?



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Toby wakes extra early on Friday morning in order to mow Miss Myrtle Mae's grass before it gets too late and to save time to visit Scarlett later in the afternoon. Toby dresses and goes downstairs to find his Dad still in his pajamas. Toby is surprised because his Dad is usually up and dressed before everyone in the house. Toby impresses his Dad by drinking coffee, only to discover that he does not like it. Then his Dad asks Toby to take Mrs. McKnight a bucket of soil from the worms for her roses. Now Toby knows his Dad is depressed. Toby's Dad normally does not like to miss a chance to speak with Mrs. McKnight.

Toby finds Mrs. McKnight in her backyard. When she asks about Toby's Mom's competition, Toby finds himself lying. Toby says there was a fire in the auditorium where the competition was to take place and it was postponed. Mrs. McKnight is shocked because the auditorium is the famous Ryman where the Grand Ole Opry takes place.

Toby gets the lawnmower from his garage and drags it around the corner to Miss Myrtle Mae's stately home. Miss Myrtle Mae has Toby wait in the living room with the Judge, who speaks to Toby as though he is a convicted convict in his courtroom. Toby is relieved when Miss Myrtle Mae comes back until he sees the list she has of things for him to do that day. There are twenty-three tasks on the list, each one meticulously written out, including instructions to only mow the lawn in an east-west pattern.

Toby begins his tasks under the watchful eye of Miss Myrtle Mae. At lunchtime, she brings a meal of turkey Jell-o salad out onto the back porch for them to share. The sheriff arrives about this time and Miss Myrtle Mae insists he join them although he only wanted to ask Toby if he could take some worms from his Dad's shop to fish with. Neither the sheriff nor Toby like the salad, but they both eat it to avoid conflict with Miss Myrtle Mae. Before the sheriff finally makes his escape, he tells both Toby and Miss Myrtle Mae that if Paulie Rankin does not return for Zachary, that Zachary will be put in a foster home in Amarillo.

Later, Toby finishes his work, proud of himself. Miss Myrtle Mae inspects the work before paying Toby. Miss Myrtle Mae asks Toby if his mother did well at her competition and Toby finds himself repeating the same lie he told to Mrs. McKnight earlier that day. Miss Myrtle Mae does not seem to believe him and Toby briefly worries that she will call his Dad and ask about the lie. However, Miss Myrtle Mae only gives Toby a chocolate cake and asks that he take it to Zachary Beaver. As Toby leaves, the Judge yells out to him from the porch, reminding him to stay out of trouble from now on.



Chapter 9 Analysis

Toby's Dad is clearly not happy about his wife's refusal to come home, foreshadowing again the rocky relationship the two shares and allowing Toby some insight that the reader has already received via subtler hints. Toby's lies about his Mom's competition are a surprise and not terribly smart considering how easy it would be for one of the people he tells to verify. However, this is Toby's way of dealing with a traumatic fact in his life, more foreshadowing into future events.

The sheriff's announcement that Zachary will have to go into foster care if Paulie Rankin does not return also offers foreshadowing into future events. Toby's discomfort around the Judge also offers some foreshadowing, especially since it seems the Judge continuously gets Toby confused with someone else.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Toby rushes home and showers before dressing again and going over to Scarlett's. Toby hides the cake for Zachary in the bushes before he climbs Scarlett's front steps to join her on the swing like Juan had done before him. Toby is disappointed not to sit on the side Juan sat on, but happy Scarlett does not send him away.

Scarlett talks about wanting to leave Antler and be a flight attendant or a model. Scarlett wants to be beautiful like the girls in the magazine she is reading, but she has a gap between her front teeth. Toby assures her that the gap only makes her more beautiful. Scarlett then says she wants to see the world, to be an International stewardess, however, she needs to learn another language to do that. Juan was teaching her Spanish, but he is gone now. Toby is sorry he cannot teach her a language.

Scarlett has to make dinner and invites Toby inside while she does. Once in the house, Scarlett sends Toby into her bedroom to get her radio. Toby is overwhelmed by being in such an intimate area of Scarlett's life. Toby picks up her perfume and sprays it to smell it. Tara sees him and immediately tells Scarlett. Scarlett dismisses the younger girl as the phone rings. It is Juan. Scarlett tells Juan she does not want to talk to him and that Toby is there. Toby does not like that, he is afraid Juan will be mad at him for being at Scarlett's house. Tara insists on going to see Zachary Beaver again. Scarlett asks if Toby would not mind. Toby agrees although it is the last thing he wants to do.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Toby thinks because Juan and Scarlett broke up and Scarlett danced with him the night before, that he has a chance in Scarlett's life, something foreshadowed in a previous chapter. Toby rushes over to Scarlett's house to take Juan's place on the porch. However, from the first moment things do not go well. Scarlett does not let Toby sit in Juan's place, a symbolic way of telling him that Juan is still not out of her system. Then, in the house, Juan calls, again warning Toby that all is not finished between the two of them. This foreshadows events in the rest of the novel.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Toby goes to retrieve the cake for Zachary and finds the foil topping gone. Tara has taken it to make a bracelet for her role as a Shiner. When Toby and Tara get to Zachary's, Cal is already there. Zachary makes a face at Tara, runs screaming out of the trailer before they are even able to close the door. Cal, Toby and Zachary laugh.

The boys share the chocolate cake and discuss more of Zachary's travels. Zachary tells them he visited the Louvre and discusses it as though reading it from an encyclopedia. Cal asks Zachary about the lack of a minister's notes in his bible, and Zachary tells him he never said he was baptized, only that he almost was baptized.

At home, Toby finds a letter from his Mom on his bed. Toby opens it and reads about the contest his Mom is preparing for, and how exciting it all is. Then, his Mom tells him that she does not intend to come home, because she and his Dad have been fighting and have decided to separate. She tells him that she is not leaving him, she just needs time to figure things out. Toby tears the letter up.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Zachary's tales of his travels in Paris strike Toby as if he is reading it from an encyclopedia, which touches on the minor theme of truth and lies. Could Zachary really have done everything he says he has? Zachary is unpleasant to Toby and Cal and Cal sticks up for him, saying he is only lonely. This is the beginning of growth in Cal. The fact that he can recognize this in someone else is proof that he is beginning to lose his callous ways. Finally, the story touches on the theme of loss when Toby gets home to find a letter from his Mom where she confesses to having planned all along on not coming home. Toby feels betrayed by the letter. This reaction foreshadows future events in the novel, namely Toby's behavior toward his mother.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Today is the second Saturday of the month, the day Toby and his Dad go around to all the bait shops delivering worms. Normally Toby's Mom would get up and make them pancakes before they leave. When Toby finds his Dad making the pancakes instead, he insists on cereal. Toby and his Dad pack up the worms and head out to the truck. Normally, when Toby's mother would go with them, she would chatter so much that no one else could get a word in. Toby misses the noise of her chatter now that silence lays heavy between he and his Dad.

On the drive to the first bait shop, Toby asks his Dad why he left Dallas. His Dad says because there was nothing in Dallas to stay for, that his family is in Antler. Toby says his Mom is not there. Toby thinks about the story his Mom told him about the sunflowers his Dad brought her on their first date and every anniversary for years after. Toby realizes there have not been sunflowers in the house for along time. Toby pushes his Dad on the subject of Dallas until his Dad finally says that he is not the one who was not happy with his life. Suddenly Toby feels like he does not fit in anywhere anymore.

At the first bait shop, Toby becomes annoyed that his Dad is acting as though nothing is wrong. His Dad drinks coffee with the owner and talks about the worms, talk about the Vietnam War. Then, his Dad tells the shop owner that Toby wants to move to the big city, and that he thinks there is more to do there. Toby becomes angry with his father over this and begins to imagine how his mother will be famous, and he will be her manager, just as famous as her. Then maybe Scarlett will finally love him.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Toby takes out his hurt over his mother's absence on his father, touching on the theme of loss. Toby is angry that she has left, angry that things are different. Toby's Dad tries hard to pretend things are the same and that only makes Toby's anger even deeper. Toby also realizes that Scarlett will never love him, how can she when his own Mom does not love him enough to stay in Antler? The routine of the day only deepens Toby's anger and sets up foreshadowing for the explosion that will eventually come when Toby must deal with his emotions.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

It has been a week since Paulie Rankin left. Cal has become obsessed with the idea of getting Zachary out of his trailer. The two boys are in Toby's room talking about it when Cal comes up with an idea to take Zachary to the drive-in movie. Cal says they can take Zachary in the truck and Kate can drive. The only problem is how to get Zachary into the bed of the truck. Finally, they decide to make steps.

Half way through making the steps, the boys go ask Kate if she will drive. Toby and Cal trick Kate into agreeing by suggesting that she is too busy to help a guy who is about to go to juvenile hall. The boys then return to Toby's yard to finish the steps. That night Kate backs the truck up to Zachary's trailer. Toby and Cal go inside to tell Zachary their plan. Zachary does not want to go until Kate comes into the trailer and introduces herself. The boys' plan works and the four of them head for the drive-in movie.

On the drive, people call out names at Zachary and laugh out their car windows. At the drive-in, Kate parks in the back so people will not bother Zachary. Kate and Cal go to buy snacks, leaving Toby alone with Zachary. Toby does not know what to say. Toby asks if Zachary has ever been to a movie. When Zachary says he goes all the time, Toby realizes that Zachary is a liar.

Kate and Cal come back and sit in the back with Zachary. Kate is very nice to Zachary, talking to him as if he is just a normal kid. Kate asks about Zachary's Mom and Zachary says she was a nice woman and really religious. Then Kate asks about Paulie and Zachary says Paulie would have taken him with him, but he had to go a long ways away. Toby can tell by the way Zachary talks that these stories are true as compared to his lies about the Louvre and all his other travels. After the movie is over and they have dropped Zachary off, Cal says to Toby that they should get Zachary baptized.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Cal again shows his big heart, or perhaps his curiosity, when he devises a plan to get Zachary out of the trailer. Cal seems to have transferred his concern for his brother Wayne, which he had not known how to express before, onto Zachary, Zachary being a symbol to Cal of his brother in danger. The idea is brilliant and successful, which clearly pleases Zachary, more so because of Kate's attentions rather than the movie, it seems. This is foreshadowing. When Toby realizes the difference between Zachary telling the truth and Zachary telling lies, he realizes how often Zachary has lied to him and Cal, touching on the minor theme of truth and lies. However, Toby also realizes, by watching Zachary, how difficult it must be to be different and how much compassion a person like Zachary deserves.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Cal and Toby sit on the roof of the bowling alley and discuss Zachary's baptism. Cal wants Toby to find out how to do it since he is Baptist and they do baptisms when the person is older, like Zachary is. Toby does not understand why this is so important to Cal, but agrees to ask. While they talk, the boys see Kate stop at Zachary's and take a bag full of something with her. Later they discover that she has taken his laundry to wash it.

On Friday, after cutting Miss Myrtie Mae's lawn, Toby asks her how someone would be baptized. Miss Myrtie Mae tells Toby that he would have to go to the church and talk to the preacher, something Zachary clearly cannot do.

When Toby is nearly finished with his work, fantasizing that if he bought Scarlett something really good she would fall in love with him, Toby is attacked by a flying apple. The Judge is throwing apples at him and calling him T.J. At home, Toby finds another letter from his Mom, which he tosses onto the dresser unopened. Toby goes into his Mom and Dad's room to find something for Scarlett and remembers the pearl necklace his Mom once told him she wanted to give to the woman he marries. Toby wraps it up and takes it to Scarlett's house, regretting it the moment he returns home. Toby decides to go back and get the necklace, but when he opens the door Reverend Newton there, and he wants to talk.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Cal tells Toby to ask someone about the baptism that sets up foreshadowing for the next chapter in which the Reverend believes Toby is the one who wants to be baptized. The Judge's confusing Toby with someone called TJ is also foreshadowing, causing the reader to wonder who TJ is. Finally, when Toby takes his mother's pearl necklace, leaves it at Scarlett's house and then regrets it, foreshadows what could be a disastrous outcome for our hero.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Reverend Newton settles in the living room and Toby's Dad goes to get him some coffee and cookies. The Reverend tells Toby that Miss Myrtie Mae told him Toby wanted to be baptized. Toby tells him he was not asking for himself and the Reverend is clearly disappointed. When Toby's Dad returns, the Reverend asks about Toby's Mom, telling them that he heard about the fire at the Grand Ole Opry. Toby's Dad is surprised by this, but does not say anything. The Reverend then tells Toby that if his friend wants to be baptized he must attend services and respond to the alter call. This is not possible for Zachary, however. After the Reverend leaves, Toby's Dad asks about the fire rumor but does not pursue it.

Toby races over to Scarlett's to get the necklace back, however the family has returned home and Toby can see Tara walking through the living room with the necklace on. Behind him, a car horn blasts. Cal calls out that the ladybugs have come. Toby stores his bike in the back of the truck and goes to the train depot with Cal and Kate to collect the bugs. Back at the McKnight house, Mrs. McKnight is pruning her roses in the yard, and she sends Cal and Kate into the house to prepare for dinner.

Mrs. McKnight stops Toby to ask about his mother and to tell him how brave she is to pursue her dreams. Mrs. McKnight says it has always been her dream to travel the country searching for rare species of roses. Everything seems so perfect at the McKnight house until Toby sees that a car has pulled up and two uniformed men have gotten out. Toby wishes Kate would come out or someone, when Mrs. McKnight frantically begins cutting away at her roses, mumbling under her breath, not my Wayne. Finally, Kate comes outside to her mother, and Toby runs away to hide in his bedroom.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The chapter begins with the humorous scene with the Reverend telling Toby that Zachary essentially cannot be baptized, foreshadowing future events within the story. The ladybugs arrive, a happy time in the Wilson and McKnight families. It is ironic that it is this night, a night that would have been especially exciting for Wayne, for the families to receive the news that Wayne has died. Although foreshadowed many times in previous chapters, Wayne's death is still a shock to reader as it is to the characters of the story. This also foreshadows the following chapters with the now expected funeral and all the things that come with it.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

The next morning, nearly all the houses on the block are flying their flags half-mast. Toby stays in his room and watches the activities next door from his bedroom window. Toby sees Cal attempt to water the ladybugs but give up and kicks one of the crates. Toby has never seen him angry before this.

Three days later Toby is still in his room. Toby watches Billy and Mr. McKnight leave for the fields each day, but he never sees Mrs. McKnight leave. The whole town seems to have changed, closed up their businesses, and stopped laughing like they might have done before. The phone rings a lot but Toby refuses to answer, afraid it will be Cal. Toby does not know what to say to Cal. At dinner, Toby's Dad says his Mom called and would be calling back. After dinner, Toby's Dad goes to the wake but Toby refuses.

Toby thinks about Wayne, about the ladybugs and the waltz that Wayne designed. It was Wayne's idea to have Toby's Dad pick some sort of music while they release the bugs. Toby thinks he did it to make Toby's Dad feel a part of the ceremony. This reminds Toby about the bugs, and he goes next door to water them.

The phone is ringing when Toby returns home. Toby answers it and it is his Mom. Toby's Mom tells him how sorry she is about Wayne and how much she misses Toby, wishes he would come visit her. Toby hangs up on her.

The morning of the funeral, Toby dresses in a suit that is so old that it is a few inches too short on his wrist. Toby refuses an offer of a ride and watches his Dad leave alone. Then he knocks all the toy soldiers off his dresser before walking into town. Toby goes to the bowling alley first and finds Ferris there, drunk. Ferris confesses to Toby that he really did shoot himself on purpose, so he would not have to go to Korea. Now, he feels like a coward compared to Wayne.

Toby goes to Zachary's trailer then, where the sewage tank is overflowing and smelling the whole place up. Zachary wants to know who died since Kate and Cal both stopped coming to see him. Toby explains about Wayne. Then Toby changes the subject and tells Zachary they can get him baptized. Zachary says that he is not interested. Then, Toby gets Zachary to talk about Holland, so Toby does not have to think about the funeral or feel guilty for not going, when they hear the bugler playing taps.

Later someone knocks on the door. It is Cal. Cal throws forty-six bucks at Toby for all the money he ever borrowed. Then, Cal turns on Zachary and calls him a freak, pulling back the curtain at the back of the trailer to reveal a large group of books about all the places Zachary claimed to have visited and the bathroom. Cal turns on Toby and calls him a liar, saying everyone knows about his Mom. He runs out of the trailer.



Chapter 16 Analysis

Toby's reaction to Wayne's death and his mother's phone call were all foreshadowed by earlier chapters. Both events touch on the theme of loss. Obviously, Wayne's death is a terrible loss to everyone who knew him. Toby looked up to Wayne and was somewhat envious of Cal for having such a heroic brother. This loss pushes a mature reality on Toby perhaps before he was truly ready to deal with it. The loss of his mother, too, is another harsh reality that Toby was not prepared to face, and he is not handling the whole idea of her absence well.

Ferris's confession to Toby about his injury that kept him out of the Korean War completes the parallel the writer has set up between Ferris and Wayne. Wayne is the hero and Ferris is, in his mind, the coward. However, in truth they were both just scared men.

Finally, this chapter touches on the theme of friendship. Cal needed Toby to be at the funeral to support him and Toby refused to go for his own reasons. Cal used this as an excuse to end their friendship. However, both boys, just like Ferris and Wayne, are the same, dealing with the same emotions and the same fears. In this parallel, the reader must also include Zachary, who has his own fears, his own ways of dealing with things. All five are symbolically the same. They simply deal with their fears in different manners.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Toby's Dad is upset with him for not going to the funeral and refuses to speak to him the next day. Toby can think of no one he can turn to so he goes to the bowling alley since Ferris is the only other person in town who did not go to the funeral. The sheriff and the local septic tank man are at Zachary's trailer, cleaning out his sewage tank.

Ferris is hung over and complaining that his one waitress is out sick today. Toby volunteers to help out and Ferris jumps at the free help. At lunchtime, the sheriff comes over and has his regular hamburger with jalapenos, telling Ferris about Zachary's sewage tank. The sheriff is concerned about Zachary because there still has not been any word from Paulie Rankin. The sheriff says he found out that Zachary's mother died two years ago and because of her size, her funeral was a media circus. Zachary has no one else in the world except for an uncle who is jail, so the uncle gave custody of Zachary to Paulie Rankin. If Paulie does not show up soon, Zachary will have to go into foster care.

Toby realizes the circus surrounding Zachary's mother's funeral is probably why he was not baptized like he promised his mother he would. People walking through the trailer gawking is one thing, but people staring in public during a private ceremony is another. The sheriff also says that the state is coming for Zachary on Saturday. Toby does not want this to happen, he wants someone in town to take custody so Zachary can stay close. Ferris hands the sheriff the money Paulie sent him to feed Zachary to give to the boy.

When the rest of the lunch crowd comes in, the main topic of conversation is the funeral, adding to Toby's sense of guilt. After lunch, Scarlett comes in to see Toby. Scarlett gives Toby back the necklace, saying it is too much for her, that she never liked him in that way. Toby is relieved to have the necklace back, but he is also disappointed he was not able to win her love.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Zachary's predicament is becoming more precarious by the minute, satisfying some foreshadowing from earlier chapters. The truth about Zachary's mother is also satisfying. It serves as a concrete explanation for why Zachary decided not to be baptized. It also offers insight into his attitude toward everyone and his refusal to go to the movies, until he met Kate. The baptism then becomes a symbol in Toby's mind of a way in which he can repair a little of the damage the cruel people of the world have done.

Scarlett returns the pearls and breaks Toby's heart. The pearls are suddenly this symbol of hurt and heartache to Toby. First, they belong to his mother, and she has abandoned

him. Second, he gives them to the girl of his dreams, and she returns them with the announcement that she never really liked him that way.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Toby spends the next day working for Ferris again. On the way home, Toby sees Juan waiting on his front steps. Toby is afraid that Juan is mad at him for spending time with Scarlett, so he slows down. Juan tells him that Scarlett said Toby was a nice boy and that Juan should be more like him. Juan wants to know what this means. Toby tells him he should have given Scarlett a reason why he did not go to the party that had been so important to her. Then, Toby realizes, partly from the box of Wayne's old clothes, that Juan did not have anything to wear to the formal party. This is why he cancelled on Scarlett, and why he did not tell her. Juan was embarrassed. Toby tells Juan that Scarlett still likes him, and that he should go home and wait for Toby.

Toby goes to Scarlett's house and blind folds her before he helps her onto his bike. Toby tells Scarlett he has a surprise for her and rides her over the railroad tracks to Juan's house. Toby is glad he had Juan wait outside, because he has no idea which house is his. Juan is there, his golf club in his hands as he practices his swing. Toby finally realizes that Juan is a fan of Lee Trevino and that is why he always carries the golf club around, not to beat people up.

Toby pulls to a stop in front of the house and helps Scarlett off the bike. After he takes the scarf off her eyes, Scarlett is not happy to discover where he has taken her. However, Juan quickly apologizes and asks her to let him explain. Scarlett turns to Toby and tells him he is the nicest person in Antler. Toby rides off without looking back.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Toby has been afraid of Juan since the beginning of the book simply because of the stereotype of Hispanics. In this chapter, however, Toby finally realizes that Juan is just a person like him, one with his own fears and joys. The theme of acceptance appears here for the first time in Toby's acceptance that the girl he loves is in love with someone else. Toby not only accepts this at long last, but he goes out of his way to get them back together which symbolizes the growth Toby has experienced these last few days since the loss of his mother and Wayne.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

When Toby gets home, he is exhausted. However, his Dad wants to go fishing. The two go out to Lake Kiezer and sit in silence for a long while. Toby's Dad catches a fish and throws it back, irritating Toby. Toby asks why he does that and his Dad says that it is in thanks for the fish allowing him to catch her. Toby's Dad goes on to tell Toby that he grew up with a father who, when not working, was entertaining important people. Toby's Dad says that his own father was more interested in business and work than he was in his own family. Toby's Dad says he left that life for the precise reason that he did not want any more excitement and wanted to be able to spend time like this with his son.

The conversation shifts to Toby's Mom. Toby's Dad tells him that he had thought his wife had left her dreams to her adolescents, but guessed that their lives now were just too dull for her. Toby says he does not blame his Dad and his Dad says he should not blame his Mom, either. His Mom loves him.

Toby's Dad tells Toby that Cal needs him now. He says that, although he cannot take back not going to the funeral, he can be there tonight when the family goes through Wayne's personal things that have just arrived from Vietnam. Toby remembers the letter he wrote and knows he needs to find Cal right away and ask for his forgiveness.

Cal is riding his bike when Toby gets home. Toby jumps on his bike and chases after him, but Cal rides faster when he sees Toby. Toby falls once trying to catch up but he keeps chasing anyway. Cal races to Gossimer Lake and does not stop when he gets there, just plunges into the water. Cal turns on Toby and slugs him in the arm when he refuses to leave. Then, Cal remembers his bike and they both manage to pull it out of the water. They laugh together.

Toby apologizes for not going to the funeral and tries to tell Cal about the letter, but Cal already knows. Cal forgives Toby. Cal jokes that they just got baptized by falling into the water and then both boys realize how it is they can get Zachary baptized.

Chapter 19 Analysis

A lot of foreshadowing has come to satisfaction in this chapter, beginning with Toby's talk with his Dad and ending with Cal and Toby making up. Toby finally realizes that his Mom's leaving has nothing to do with him or his Dad and that he should not hate her for leaving. Toby still does not understand why she left, but he has accepted it, touching again on the theme of acceptance. Toby has also managed to be there for Cal by helping him save his bike from the mud of Gossimer Lake, a small thing but it symbolizes something much larger to both boys. Their friendship is stronger than almost anything, including death.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

They have to get Zachary baptized Friday night, because the social services woman will be there for Zachary in the morning. Cal is going to talk Kate into helping, and Toby must handle Ferris and Malcolm. However, first he has to mow Miss Myrtie Mae's yard. Toby goes to the house before dawn in order to get done quickly and wakes Miss Myrtie Mae from a sound sleep.

When Toby is done and waiting for Miss Myrtie Mae to pay him, he picks up a picture on the table in the living room. Miss Myrtie Mae tells Toby it is the Judge and his own grandfather, Theodore Joseph or T.J. Toby finally realizes that the Judge confused him with his grandfather the day he threw the apples at him. On his way out, the Judge is in the front yard throwing a ball. Toby picks it up and plays with the Judge for a few minutes. The Judge has trouble catching the ball until Toby remembers what his father used to do when he was little, slide up a little closer so the ball will be easier to catch. Finally, the Judge catches the ball and walks away with a smile.

Toby goes to see Ferris next. Toby tells Ferris that they need him to preside over Zachary's baptism. Ferris says he cannot, because he is not an ordained preacher. However, Toby asks him to please reconsider, as this is a special situation. They want to baptize Zachary at the lake so no one will know and because Zachary cannot fit in the baptistery at the local church. Ferris says no. Malcolm agrees however after Toby flatters him by saying he is the strongest person they know and they need someone strong to keep Zachary from drowning.

At home, Toby searches through the Bible for appropriate passages just in case he cannot convince Ferris to come. Toby finds a passage that says John the Baptist did not think he was worthy to baptize Jesus. Jesus told him "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." (207) Toby calls Ferris and gives him the verse and chapter number.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Again, Toby shows how much he has grown this summer when he stops to play ball with the Judge. Toby is no longer afraid of the Judge, suddenly aware that he is just a senile old man who is reliving his past. This touches on the theme of acceptance as well as satisfying foreshadowing in previous chapters.

Ferris is still stuck on the idea that he is a coward and unworthy of many of the things Toby has asked of him. This again touches on the parallel between Ferris and Wayne and symbolizes everything that is weak about the human condition. However, Toby believes in Ferris more than he believes in himself and finds a passage in the Bible that

Ferris cannot argue with. This foreshadows the next chapter. Will Ferris show up at Zachary's baptism?



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Juan is in the McKnight's driveway when Cal and Kate return from the fields. Mr. McKnight pays the workers. Juan waves up at Toby in his bedroom window. Toby waves back. After sunset, Toby, Cal, and Kate head over to Zachary's trailer. Zachary is not happy about the idea until Toby explains that they are not going to a church. They all pile outside to go to the lake, but the truck will not start.

Wylie Womack is still dismantling his snow cone stand and offers to let them use his cart. They arrive at the lake and find Malcolm waiting, but Ferris is not there. Toby is worried, because he does not want to have to do the ceremony himself. However, Ferris shows up just as they are about to start. Ferris asks Zachary his middle name before he begins, learning that it is Elvis. Ferris prays over Zachary and then stands behind him, so they can dunk him in the water. Zachary is afraid, but Kate promises they will not allow anything bad to happen.

Zachary slides under the water and they all move under him to help him back up. It is a struggle at first, but with Malcolm's help, they finally raise him back up. Zachary is very happy with the entire ceremony, especially after Ferris signs his bible.

Back at Zachary's trailer, the sheriff is waiting. At first Toby is afraid he is there, because he found out they were in the lake, which is against the law. However, the sheriff is there to tell Zachary he finally heard from Paulie Rankin. Paulie was in France, but will return in a few days. At home, Toy takes his mother's letters out and reads them one by one before writing her back.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Zachary's baptism, while satisfaction of foreshadowing spread throughout the majority of the novel, is symbolic of the changes that have happened over this summer. The combination of experiences these characters have experienced together is like a baptism, initiating them into the world of adulthood and teaching them compassion. It also touches on the theme of acceptance, showing how they have all accepted the changes that have taken place and are emerging from the experience as if they have been born again. The fact that Paulie Rankin has finally resurfaced seems like a part of all this change, a return to the norm but also a salvation from the horrors of foster care for Zachary and more time for the people of Antler to be with Zachary.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

The next day, Cal tells Toby that they all got new letters from Wayne. They were in his things but his parents waited a little while before giving them to them. Cal reads his letter to Toby and it tells the two of them not to be in a hurry to grow up and that this war is not all it is cracked up to be. Wayne says he wants to scare him, because he does not want him to grow up and go to war thinking it will be all fun and games like he did.

That night, the McKnight and the Wilsons go to the fields with the ladybugs to have the annual Ladybug Waltz. Everyone is there, including Zachary, Juan and his family, and Miss Myrtie Mae with her camera. Everyone gets a sack of bugs. When Kate signals Mr. Wilson, he turns on the music and everyone releases their bugs. It is a beautiful sight and Zachary is awed by it.

Monday morning, Cal and Toby sit on the roof of the Bowl-a-Rama and watch Paulie and Zachary leave. Zachary has promised to write, but Toby knows he probably will not. Ferris drives up and tells the boys to come down and have breakfast with him. In the cagy, there is a collection of photographs that Miss Myrtie Mae gave Ferris. They start on the day Zachary came to town and end with the Ladybug Waltz.

Chapter 22 Analysis

All the foreshadowing in the previous chapter have wrapped up here. Zachary has gone back to his sideshow job and the boys are back to trying to find something to fulfill their days. They release the ladybugs in honor of Wayne and somehow it seems to heal some of the pain. The ladybugs symbolize a moving on of sorts, of going on with life despite a major loss, which also touches on the theme of loss. This chapter also touches on the theme of acceptance in that the boys have accepted everything that has happened and have managed to find a way to go back to their normal lives. It also touches on the theme of friendship in that they have proven that a strong friendship can last through almost anything.



Characters

Toby Wilson

Toby Wilson is a thirteen-year-old boy who is trying to survive summer vacation in a very small, Texas panhandle town. Nothing ever happens to him there, so he thinks, nothing exciting like he imagines happens to kids who live in larger towns. However, all of that changes the day Zachary Beaver comes to town. Suddenly with Zachary's arrival, Toby not only has something to do, but all these other things in his life begin to change.

Toby's Mom is an outgoing woman with a dream to be a famous country singer. Although Toby never imagined his Mom might actually achieve her dream, his Mom is invited to Nashville to sing in a national contest. Toby hates that she has gone, hates that she seems so happy about leaving her family. When Toby learns that his Mom does not intend to return, he hates her. Toby's life is shattered by two major events, the crushing of his heart by the girl he loves and the death of his best friend's brother. Toby is devastated, unable to even attend the funeral. Toby has never experienced so many crushing blows in his life and does not know how to deal with it, although by not going to the funeral might cost him the closest friend he has ever had.

Toby is a typical teenager dealing with the same ups and downs most people deal with at some point in their lives. Toby handles each blow with his own unique attitudes, struggling to understand each blow and learn from it. Learn Toby does, until he finds a place of some peace at the end of the story.

Cal McKnight

Cal is Toby's best friend. Toby thinks that Cal is loud and crass, an uncaring person who is always getting the two of them in trouble. Toby even goes so far as to believe that Cal is the reason Toby cannot get involved with the one girl in town he has always loved. However, Cal also has a big heart. Although Cal will not write a letter to his brother Wayne who is in Vietnam, Cal continuously comes up with great plans to help Zachary. First, the boys give Zachary gifts. Cal decides that they should take Zachary to the movie. Finally, it is Cal who thinks that they should arrange a baptism for Zachary. Cal has a big heart. He only has trouble showing it.

Cal becomes very angry with Toby when he decides not to come to Wayne's funeral, perhaps, because he believes that Toby did not care about Wayne's death. However, after Cal finds the letter Toby wrote to Wayne for him, Cal begins to understand Toby's depth of emotion and forgives him. Cal is a good friend to Toby.



Wayne McKnight

Wayne is Cal's older brother. Wayne is in Vietnam. When Wayne writes a letter to Cal, he talks about Antler with great affection. However, both Cal and Toby cannot find anything romantic about their hometown. Cal often refuses to write Wayne back, not at an age where he likes to write letters. However, Toby believes he should and decides to write one himself and sign Cal's name. Wayne receives this letter shortly before his death. Wayne's death has a profound effect on Toby and all the other major characters of the novel. Therefore, Wayne is an important character in the novel, even though he is millions of miles away.

Zachary Beaver

Zachary Beaver comes to Antler Texas as a sideshow act and leaves as one as well. Zachary is an overweight person, weighing more than six hundred pounds, and his partner sells tickets so people can take a look at him. Zachary has become insensitive to the reactions of the people around him, when they are in his trailer. However, when his partner leaves him alone in Antler, Zachary is put in a position where he must be friendly to people, something he has not had much experience with. As well as friendliness, Zachary feels indebted to these people. That is also not an emotion Zachary is used to feeling.

Zachary makes friends with Cal and Toby because of his loneliness, and because the stubborn boys will not leave him alone. After a while, it is clear that Zachary wants to impress these boys. That is why he makes them think that he has intimate knowledge of famous landmarks instead of admitting that his knowledge comes from the books that he reads during his long hours alone. When Zachary meets Kate, there is no doubt to the normal side of his hormone-filled emotions. Kate is a beautiful girl, and she goes out of her way to be nice to Zachary without making him feel as though she is going to too much trouble. Zachary is a normal boy under his extra weight, and it is this lesson that Toby is destined to learn during his summer of change.

Miss Myrtie Mae

Miss Myrtie Mae is the town librarian and historian. Miss Myrtie Mae is a product of the fifties, a very proper woman who made the choice to stay unmarried so that she could take care of her brother. Miss Myrtie Mae's brother was once a well-respected judge, however he has recently begun to suffer from senility. Miss Myrtie Mae takes good care of her brother despite the lack of personal happiness.

Miss Myrtie Mae is viewed as still and proper to the local children, someone to be mocked and pitied. However, Miss Myrtie Mae is a fair woman with a strong sense of morals. Miss Myrtie Mae's life is not an easy one. However she enjoys both her jobs, enjoys working with the children in the library and taking photos of local events to record



them for future generations. Miss Myrtie Mae is a woman of the past and a unique addition to this town of eccentric characters.

Scarlett and Juan

Scarlett is a beautiful young woman, a young girl who has her eye on fashion and glamour. It is Scarlett's desire to grow up and be either a flight attendant for an airline or a model. Toby has been in love with Scarlett since they were both very young and cannot remember a time when he did not dream about being alone with her. Therefore, when Scarlett asks him to dance beside Gossimer Lake one evening, Toby believes it is the beginning of a lasting relationship. However, Toby does not realize how deeply attached Scarlett is to her longtime beau, Juan.

Juan is a member of one of the few Mexican families that live in Antler. Juan's family works for the local farmers as manual laborers. Toby is afraid of Juan because of the stereotypes that describe Mexicans as violent people. Juan always carries around a golf club, and Toby mistakenly thinks it is so he can use it to beat people. However, later in the story Toby realizes the club is because Juan is a fan of the golfer Lee Trevino and wants to play golf, when he is older.

Otto Wilson

Otto Wilson is Toby's Dad. Otto is a quiet man who left Dallas to escape the pressure of his family to become a lawyer. Otto likes the simple life and moves to Antler, because it seemed like an ideal place to grow his worms. Otto raises worms for fishing and also sells them for use in gardens. Toby is embarrassed by this side business his Dad runs and is annoyed by the necessity to go with his Dad to the local tackle shops once a month.

Otto is also the town postmaster. Otto is a caring, if quiet man, who wants to do what is best by his son. When his wife decides to pursue her dreams, Otto remains in Antler as a rock for Toby to lean on. However, Otto is the last person Toby feels like he can turn to in this time of crisis. Otto is such a quiet man, that Toby has never really gotten to know him. However, when Otto explains how lonely and difficult his own childhood was, Toby slowly begins to understand his Dad.

Opalina Wilson

Opalina Wilson is Toby's Mom. It has always been Opalina's desire to be a country singer. Otto has indulged her desires, even encouraged them. However, no one expected Opalina to pack up and move to Nashville, least of all her husband and son. Opalina loves Toby very much, however her dreams are important to her, and she wants to make a go of it. Otto and Opalina have been fighting a lot and their marriage is in danger. However, this fact is not explored very much in the course of the novel, because the most important part of the situation is that Opalina loves her son and wants to spend



time with him despite her new address. At first, Toby is angry with her, but after his summer of change, Toby comes to terms with what his Mom is doing and agrees to go visit her.

Ferris Kelly

Ferris Kelly is a local man who owns the bowling alley. Ferris has a limp that is the result of a self-inflicted gun wound that Ferris claims happened accidentally the day before he was to be shipped off to Korea. Ferris also was once a seminary student, preparing to become a preacher. Although Ferris never completed his studies, it is claimed he knows the bible from cover to cover. Ferris was Opalina's boss at the Bowl-a-Rama Cafy, before she quit to go to Nashville. It is Ferris that Toby turns to when he needs a preacher to help baptize Zachary at the lake.

Sheriff Levi Fetterman

Sheriff Levi is a very kind, gentle man who has a soft place in his heart for stray animals. If anyone in town finds a stray animal, they take it straight to the sheriff, because they know he will take care of it until he can find a good home. The sheriff has a soft spot in his heart for dogs especially and has been known to own more than half a dozen at one time. The sheriff is also honest to a fault, even insisting on finding Toby or his Dad when ever he wants to buy worms rather than leaving money in an old can like everyone else in town does. The sheriff is placed in the awkward position of reporting Paulie Rankin's abandonment of Zachary when Zachary is left alone in the Dairy Maid parking lot. It greatly relieves the sheriff when Paulie returns and takes custody of Zachary once more.



Objects/Places

Dairy Maid

The Dairy Maid is the local ice cream parlor.

Ferris Kelly's Bowl-a-Rama

The local bowling alley is owned by Ferris Kelly and is a favorite hangout for Cal and Toby. The bowling alley's cafe is also where Toby's Mom worked before she left for Nashville.

Lake Gossimer

Lake Gossimer is a lake in Antler where Toby dances with Scarlett and where Toby, Cal, Ferris, and Kate baptize Zachary.

Trailer

Zachary lives in a small travel trailer where people are allowed to enter after paying admission to see him.

Country Music Contest

Toby's Mom goes to Nashville to take place in a country music contest. After the contest, Toby learns that his Mom never intended to return to Antler, and he eventually goes to Nashville to visit her.

Gold Box

There is a gold box in Zachary's trailer that arouses curiosity in both Toby and Cal until Cal becomes nosey and finds a bible inside.

Encyclopedias

Zachary seems to know a lot about the world despite the fact that Toby and Cal find it difficult for Zachary to have traveled to all the places he claims to have seen until they finally realize that he must have learned about those places through the dozens of books and encyclopedias he owns.



Plexiglas

When Toby and Cal first meet Zachary, he is sitting behind three Plexiglas walls to protect him from sightseers.

Grocery Sacks

Cal and Toby leave sacks of groceries on Zachary's door step in case Zachary is running low on food.

Bible

Zachary's Mom gave him a bible in the hopes of his getting baptized. However, after his Mom dies and her funeral creates a media circus, Zachary is afraid of being baptized, because he does not want the same to happen to him.

Steps

Cal and Toby build a set of steps in order to allow Zachary to climb into the back of the truck, so they can take him to the drive-in movies.

Letter

Toby writes a letter to Wayne claiming to be Cal, because Cal never writes Wayne back, and Toby thinks that he should.

Pearl Necklace

Toby's Mom owns a pearl necklace that she inherited from her Mom and has promised to give to the woman Toby marries. Toby takes the necklace and gives it to Scarlett to win her affections. He instantly regrets it.

Pictures

As part of her duties as town historian, Miss Myrtie Mae takes lots of pictures of local events. Some of the pictures Miss Myrtie Mae took of Zachary during his time in Antler are placed on display at the bowling alley.

Setting

Holt's settings are essential to the overall themes of the novel. By their very confines, Antler, Texas, and Zachary's trailer prepare the reader to accept the seemingly inevitable sameness of the character's lives. Gossimer Lake, with all its forbidding signs, further contributes to the idea that life and its possibilities are not readily available to those living in Antler. In contrast, the rooftop of the Bowl-a-Rama offers a broader look at small-town life and the world beyond. But Toby and Cal must learn that it is not so much the view but how a thing is viewed that makes the difference.

In the first chapters, Toby, the main character, takes the reader on a tour of the town and introduces its inhabitants. From the rooftop of the Bowl-a-Rama, Toby and his friend Cal can see all of Antler, Texas. The vacant businesses and the bordering railroad tracks and canyon breaks serve to heighten the sense of Antler's confines and isolation. As Toby sees it, cars whiz by on the highway "on their way to anywhere but here." That Zachary's sideshow would stop in tiny Antler is significant in itself. The trailer is small, the fare cheap, and it is unlikely that Zachary really is the fattest boy in town. But small towns like Antler are eager for anything new, and the initial introductions to the characters and the town so reassure the reader that life goes on the same way every day that Zachary Beaver's arrival in town is exciting.

Zachary's trailer, while it moves him from place to place, also limits his life just as the smallness of Antler appears to limit the opportunities and dreams of its citizens.

Zachary is so obese he is forced to live life through his books and television. His size limits where he can go and what he can do.

Gossimer Lake is yet another reminder to the characters that their possibilities are limited. Initially intended as a place for Antler's young people, the pond is posted with signs stating "No Swimming, No Fishing," and Toby interprets this to mean "No Fun Allowed."

From the Bowl-a-Rama rooftop, Toby is offered a countering vision, if he will only see it. From the roof, he can see everything.

But, even from this vantage point, Toby must come to understand that it is not necessarily what is seen but how something is seen that makes the difference in life. It is here on the rooftop where Toby discovers that cotton fields can be oceans, freaks can be friends, and dreams, whatever they are, can come true if the vision is clear.

Social Sensitivity

When Zachary Beaver Came to Town deals with two particular social issues, divorce and obesity, but it also touches upon the plight of migrant workers, racial issues, the Vietnam War, and the elderly. Toby experiences great difficulties in accepting his mother's leaving, and Holt takes him through several of the stages that children go through when parents divorce: denial, anger, grief, and, finally, acceptance. Society's curiosity about the unusual takes form in the lines of people staring at Zachary Beaver, the fattest boy in the world. The difficulties faced by the morbidly obese are portrayed quite realistically and empathetically in Holt's story. Zachary rarely leaves his trailer. When he does, he can barely squeeze through the door; he must ride in the bed of the pick-up truck; and his condition makes him dependent on others for his daily care.

Juan and his dream of becoming a professional golfer remind readers of the plight of some migrant workers and the unjust racial discriminations they endure. Juan works in the cotton fields, wears hand-medown clothes, and must forego social situations because he has neither the proper clothes nor social skills necessary to participate in them. His social and economic position at once ridicules and idealizes his dream.

The conflicted emotions about the Vietnam War are also addressed in the novel.

Wayne becomes an all-too-real symbol of the thousands of young lives destroyed in that war, and it is important to note that while Wayne's family displays the American flag throughout the novel, it is not until his death that the rest of the townspeople raise their flags. Until they are touched by Wayne's death, the war is not real or very important to anyone except family members and Toby.

Finally, issues of the elderly are brought to light in the characters of Miss Myrtie Mae and the judge. Toby, at first, is frightened of the judge, whose mental health is questionable, but soon, he comes to see the judge as a person who, like himself, once had dreams of his own. This realization helps Toby discover the common thread that links all people.

Literary Qualities

Holt uses several traditional elements of storytelling to create an intimacy between the characters and the reader and, ultimately, to reveal her underlying theme.

The use of first-person narrative and the present tense immediately involve the reader with events taking place in *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*. As the other characters are introduced, the reader gains a real sense of the frustration that Toby feels with the narrowness of life in Antler. As these characters are developed more fully around the one single plot event that occurs in Antler, this frustration is followed by the acknowledgment that life and people are not necessarily as they first appear.

Zachary's arrival in town serves as the pivotal plotting device and reveals much about each of Holt's characters that Toby has not realized. He begins to see the possibilities of how the very qualities of sameness he finds so boring in most of Antler's citizens can become the key to dream fulfillment. Zachary's arrival and circumstances are the catalyst for Toby's change. The repetitive reference to dreams also serves to reinforce Holt's theme that how life is viewed ultimately shapes lives.

Several symbols in the novel play important roles in relation to theme. Toby's initial descriptions of Antler reflect his view of the limitations of life there. He sees the cotton fields that surround it as just that—cotton fields. It takes a broader view, like Zachary's, to see them as an ocean representing vast possibilities. The rooftop, which gives Toby and Cal a view of all of Antler, symbolizes again that it is not what is apparent, but how a thing is viewed that makes it what it is. And while Toby and Cal view Antler as dull, to Zachary it symbolizes the place where some of his dreams come true.

The ladybug waltz also serves as a symbol to reinforce another theme. Thousands of ladybugs are released at once to circle above the fields. As Toby watches one in particular, he says, "instead of following the others, it had its own plan." At this point, Toby begins to form a new understanding and acceptance of people and their differences.

Gossimer Lake, while it is spelled differently, suggests gossamer, a gauze-like material, and one that reveals yet hides. The lake is initially intended for the pleasure of Antler's children, but, after it is created, the water is posted as off limits to them. While seemingly of no use at all, the forbidden lake becomes the critical place needed to bring the characters and their various dreams together.

The repeated reference to dreams serves to link each of the various characters. While these dreams are different and varied, Holt uses this common thread to build up to the climax of her story. It is Zachary's dream of being baptized that provides the opportunity for Toby to finally accept a broader view of life and understand the difference between limitations and opportunities.

Baptism is also symbolic in the novel.



For Zachary, it is the fulfillment of a dream, but his baptism symbolizes new life for Toby as well because, after the baptism, Toby is able to view his world with a new appreciation. This new vision gives Toby hope and determination, but other characters are affected as well. Cal is finally able to grieve with Toby over the death of his brother; Ferris can, for just a few moments, fulfill his dream of being a preacher; and Malcolm becomes more than just the dumb, fat boy in town. In helping Zachary achieve his dream, the others have also, in some measure, achieved theirs.

Toby's toy soldiers are additional symbols in the novel. He maneuvers and controls them just as he feels life in Antler controls him. After Wayne's death, Toby knocks down all the soldiers, thus symbolically freeing himself from his former ideas of constraint and conformity.

Zachary also must free himself from the boundaries of the glass panels that surround him. While the partitions allow viewers to see Zachary and Zachary to see them, the viewers and Zachary cannot see the realities of one another. The public sees only a fat boy stuck in a trailer, while Zachary sees uncaring, rude strangers. The walls also stand between Zachary and real life; he is much like a person standing at a window looking into a home but unable to go in. He experiences the world only through his books and television. Once the glass walls are removed, the world moves in, and Zachary moves out to seek his dreams while at the same time, Toby gains a new perspective of his own desires.

Themes

Loss

The novel begins with the carefree attitude of two teenage boys enjoying their summer vacation. However loss quickly comes to rest like a dark cloud over their heads. The first sign of loss is the mention that Toby, the narrator, has a Mom who has gone off to Nashville to attempt to live out her dream to be a country singer. Although her absence is thought by Toby to be temporary, he clearly misses her when he mentions how awful a cook his Dad is, not once but several times. It does not take long before the mention of discord between Toby's parents causes the reader to wonder if this absence might not be more permanent than temporary. Finally, Toby's Dad tells him that his Mom has plans to get an apartment in Nashville and attempt to get a record contract despite coming in second at the competition she went to Nashville to participate in the first place.

The second occurrence of loss comes into focus when Toby mentions that his best friend, Cal's, brother is in Vietnam. During the time in which this novel takes place, Vietnam was in the middle of civil war, a civil war in which many American troops were involved in. The physical loss of Cal's brother, Wayne, is felt most intensely with Toby who admires Wayne and is counting down the days until Wayne is scheduled to come back. When word comes that Wayne has been killed in action, the devastation is felt most completely by Cal's Mom, whom Toby witnesses receiving the news. However, it is clear how deeply Toby feels this loss when he refuses to go to the viewing and the funeral. Toby would rather risk his lifelong friendship with Cal than admit to himself that Wayne really is never coming back.

Finally is the loss that Zachary Beaver experiences. Zachary Beaver's loss is on two levels. The first is the loss of his Mom. The only family Zachary had is his Mom and his uncle and his uncle is in prison. When Zachary's Mom dies, not only is Zachary faced with the loss of the only loving person he has ever known, but he is faced with the cruelty of the world from the moment of her death. Zachary's Mom was a big person, just like him. Her funeral becomes a circus because of her unique size and suddenly Zachary not only has lost his Mom, but he has lost the freedom and confidence to live his life beyond the scrutiny of the curious and the cruel. Everywhere Zachary goes, people want to watch, to laugh at him and marvel over his size. The intrusion is so complete that Zachary refuses to be baptized, something his Mom had wanted for her son.

Acceptance

Acceptance is a complicated emotion that is not made any lesser so in this novel. Several characters in this novel must find acceptance in their lives, starting with Toby. Toby is not happy that his Mom is gone. Toby resents his Dad's attempts to keep



everything normal around the house and resents his Mom for leaving him. Toby refuses to open her letters or speak to her on the phone. When Wayne dies, Toby also has trouble accepting that. Toby refuses to go to the viewing and the funeral despite the fact that Cal needs him to be at both to support him. Toby does not want to accept these losses in his life, because it will be like admitting that nothing will ever be the same again. However, with Zachary's unwitting help and Cal's friendship, Toby eventually learns to accept the bad with the good in his life.

Ferris also has something he must learn to accept. Ferris is a kind man who once considered being a preacher before alcohol took over his life. Ferris shot himself rather than fight in the Korean War. Ferris must accept that what he did was not something that makes him unworthy of God's understanding, a fact he finally does accept with Toby's help and a verse from the bible.

Finally there is Zachary. Zachary is a lonely young man who is embarrassed by his large size. Zachary cannot make friends because of his looks, because people would sooner hurt him than be nice to him. However, Zachary finds that the people in Antler are kinder than most people elsewhere, although there are a few mean, confused children in town. Zachary must learn to see past his experiences to realize that there are some people out there who only want to help and accept friendship in any form in which it is offered.

Friendship

Friendship is a strong theme in this novel. The main characters are best friends, have been since small childhood. The course of the novel, Wayne's death and Zachary's presence, test Cal and Toby's friendship, but somehow they find their way back to each other, perhaps a little stronger than before.

Friendship also enters into the novel when the reader considers the other characters. Ferris is a good friend to the boys although he is an adult. Ferris gives Toby a job in his cafe and even helps with Zachary's baptism after Toby convinces him that he is worthy in God's eyes to offer a blessing to another human being. Through his friendship with Toby, Ferris learns that no matter how bad a person might behave, there is always salvation when you ask for it. Miss Myrtie Mae also enters into the friendship theme. If not for Miss Myrtie Mae and the job mowing her lawn, Toby might never have learned the depth of sibling devotion or how to apply himself to a good job. Sheriff Levi also teaches Toby about kindness. Kate offers her services to transport Zachary to the movies and to his baptism, treating him as though she cannot see his large size, through her friendship teaching Toby what compassion is. Friendship is a teacher as well as a support to Toby and most of the characters in the novel.

Zachary also learns about friendship in this novel. Zachary is different from other people, therefore most of the relationships and experiences most people take for granted, Zachary has never experienced. When Toby and Cal offer friendship to Zachary he does not recognize it for what it is at first. Zachary assumes they just want



to satisfy their curiosity, so they can talk about him behind his back with their real friends. However, Cal and Toby surprise Zachary with their persistence and their desire to give Zachary the one thing he wants and is afraid to achieve, his baptism. Friendship transforms Zachary's outlook on life in this novel and shapes his future in a more positive way.



Themes/Characters

Both the characters and settings are used to develop Holt's themes in the novel. Toby believes that because Antler is small it is always the same; everybody knows everybody, and nothing will ever change. Holt uses these aspects of close community to emphasize how they hinder or help her characters' visions of their lives and to teach Toby that the fulfillment of dreams is dependent not so much on where but on how life is lived.

Antler is peopled with numerous characters who appear to know each other well.

But as Toby quickly learns, appearances can be deceiving. In Toby's view, Antler's smallness and security creates an environment where people dream their dreams but appear to have given them up. The town gossip labels Ferris a coward, and because of this he gives up his dream to become a preacher. He sees no options outside the label. As a young woman, Miss Myrtie Mae desired marriage and family, but she appears to have given up that dream to care for her brother, the judge. Juan, a poor Mexican boy, has big plans as well. He envisions himself as a future professional golfer, but his poverty and social circumstances in the town limit his game to a narrow strip of grass and one golf club.

Not all the characters desert their dreams, however, and this fact creates confusion and painful lessons for Toby. His father, Otto Wilson, wants a simple, quiet life unlike the one in which he grew up, and he ultimately sacrifices his marriage to stay in Antler. Toby's mom, Opalina, leaves her family to pursue a career as a country music singer. Wayne McKnight, fighting a war far away from the security and sameness of Antler, dreams of nothing but returning to the peace and security of home. Zachary Beaver benefits from Antler's strong community bonds, finding comfort in friendships and the actual realization of one of his dreams.

For other characters, Antler's small-town sameness clashes with the outside world in such a way as to provide a stimulus to seek fulfillment of their dreams. Mrs. McKnight tends her roses in Antler, dreaming of one day traveling the South to discover old and rare bushes. The death of her son Wayne brings to light the need to live each day fully, and she sets off in search of her dream.

Because he feels stuck, Toby does not know what to dream. His only interest as the story opens is in having Scarlett fall in love with him. When he takes a closer look at himself and his life, Toby sees things differently, and in so doing he frees himself. Zachary tells him that the cotton fields around Antler look like the ocean, but it is not until Toby can see that vast possibility for himself that he begins to understand and to realize that while he may not know what he wants or where he wants to go, he at least knows that he does not have to feel stuck in Antler. His vision shifts to include the notion that everyone has a different dream and fulfillment is based less on place and more on how one envisions the dream.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The novel is written completely from the point of view of Toby Wilson, a thirteen-year-old boy attempting to survive summertime in a small Texas town in the early seventies. By writing the novel in this point of view, the writer opens up the world and the emotions of a typical teenage boy who is just beginning to figure out who he is and what life means to him. The point of view also lends intimacy to a story that might have been more difficult to achieve if written from another viewpoint.

Although the novel, from its title, appears to be about Zachary Beaver, the story is told from the point of view of Toby Wilson. This not only allows the reader to feel a more intimate connection with the town of Antler and the people who live there, but it also allows the reader to feel the reactions of the people in this town to Zachary Beaver. The book is not really about Zachary Beaver, despite the title, but it is about a small town and what happens to it when Zachary Beaver comes to town, specifically what happens to one thirteen year old boy, Toby Wilson. Zachary's appearance in town dispels some of the boredom of an ordinary, small town summer. It also takes some of Toby's focus off of his Mom and her sudden absence from his life. Finally, Zachary's presence in town reminds Toby what it means to be part of a family and to be a friend.

This point of view allows an intimacy into the main character that any other view point would have hindered. Had the novel been written from, say Zachary's point of view, it would have been another novel all together. By choosing this point of view, the writer offers the reader an intimacy and understanding they might not have gotten.

Setting

The setting of the novel is a small town in the Texas panhandle, Antler. The writer writes of this area, because it is where she was raised herself, and she has intimate knowledge of small towns like her fictional Antler. The story also takes place in summer, which seems appropriate, because this part of Texas is well-known for its incredible heat and barren, desert-like landscapes. The physical setting only adds to the heat and boredom the main character, Toby, often complains about throughout the beginning of the novel.

The novel is set in the early seventies. This time period is very important to the feel of the novel for two different reasons. The first is the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War had a huge impact on small towns like Antler. One of the characters in the novel is in Vietnam and is killed. The boy who is killed is the older brother of Toby's best friend and a boy that Toby looks up to. His death has a dramatic effect on Toby, causing a rift between him and Cal and creating a situation in which Toby is forced to deal with the absence of



his Mom. In addition, with the Vietnam War constantly in the background, it adds an air of danger to the novel, an idea that disaster could come at any moment, making the carefree activities of a normal summer even more important. The second feel this decade adds to the novel is in regards to Zachary. Zachary is a unique person in that he is larger than most people and in the seventies it was extremely rare for a person to grow to such large proportions. This created a situation in which Zachary is afraid to make friends, afraid to even leave his trailer, causing him to be mean and lonely. If not for this attitude Zachary may not have made such an impact on Toby's life.

The different settings of this novel are almost like a character in their own right, giving the novel their own feel on the emotions and events that mold and change the main character. If not for the carefully drawn settings, the novel may not have had the impact the writer clearly wanted to make on her readers.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is clear and concise, void of any slang or native sayings that might normally fill a book set in Texas. The story is told in an equal mixture of dialogue and exposition with the occasional letter added in. Although her characters are young people, the writer does not endeavor to use the language a child might use, instead having her characters speak clearly and with the intelligence a young teen is capable of expressing. There is nothing immature or childish about the novel, making it an enjoyable read for people of all ages.

Although the Vietnam War was a violent time in American history, Toby only mentions the war in passing. He'll talk of it when discussing Wayne, or when a news report comes on the television, while he is watching. The most violence included in this novel is when Cal throws money at Toby after a disagreement.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-two chapters with an author's note at the end. In the note, the writer confesses to being just like Cal, when a sideshow came to her town offering the world's fattest boy. The author's note also includes information about the writer, such as the fact that she grew up in the Texas panhandle just like Toby and Cal, and mentions her previous works, including an award she earned with a previous novel.

The plot is linear without flashbacks, though there are many times, when Toby tells the reader a memory from months or years before. Also included in Wayne's letters are memories of childhood activities that Wayne misses. For the most part, the novel is straightforward and takes place over a few short weeks during Toby and Cal's summer break from school.



Quotes

"Nothing ever happens in Antler, Texas. Nothing much at all." Chapter 1, pg. 3

"It seems weird, standing here, staring at someone because they look different."

Chapter 2, pg. 13

"Whenever I spend the night with Cal, I get thrown into their routine. But I don't mind. They seem like a happy army on a mission, zipping through their list." Chapter 4, pg. 27

"The talk around town is his limp was a self-inflicted wound so he didn't have to serve in the Korean War. Ferris claims it was a pure coincidence that he was cleaning his gun the day before he was to report for active duty." Chapter 4, pg. 36

"Now I know what we can do with all those smashed-up garbage cans."

'What?' I ask.

'Make helmets for everybody in town. We're going to need them when Kate gets on the road.'"

Chapter 5, pg. 52

"A huge lump slides down my throat. I circle her shoulders, wishing I had taken a Fred Astaire class or something." Chapter 8, pg. 81

"This must be what it's like for him when he's traveling around the world. Then it hits me hard. Zachary hasn't gone to all those places. From the way he diverts his eyes and draws up in himself, I doubt Zachary ever leaves his trailer." Chapter 13, pg. 138

"But as I am about to dash off, two men in army officer uniforms step out.

Mrs. McKnight glances their way, and her face pales." Chapter 15, pg. 159

"Zachary studies the floor, reminding me of that night in the back of the truck at the drive-in. He is trying to disappear." Chapter 16, pg. 174

"When she turns around, I try to imagine a wart on her perfect nose or a deep crooked scar mapping across her smooth cheek. But I can't." Chapter 17, pg. 182

"Soon they will land on the plants in search of bollworm eggs. But right now they are magic--red ribbons flying over our heads, weaving against the pink sky, dancing up there with Mozart."

Chapter 22, pg. 223



Adaptations

Holt's first young adult novel, *My Louisiana Sky*, places smart Tiger Ann Parker center-stage in small-town Saitter, Louisiana, where her parents are known as retarded. With only her grandmother to comfort her, Tiger Ann faces the challenges of loving in spite of difficulties, standing up to the social ostracism she incurs because her parents are "different," and coming to terms with her roots.

In *Mister and Me*, Jolene Johnson holds tight to the memory of her dead father, even though she barely remembers him. Set in a rural Louisiana mill town in 1940, Holt's story chronicles Jolene's resistance to the changes Leroy Redfield brings to her life when he takes notice of Jolene's mother.

Jolene does not want things to change; she does not want a new father, and she most certainly does not want Leroy Redfield, who she calls "Mister," to take on that role.

But her scheme to get rid of Leroy creates more than just trouble for him. It forces her to learn difficult lessons about change and acceptance, and, ultimately, it makes it possible for her to voice exactly what she does want.

In Holt's latest release, *Dancing in Cadillac Light*, the issue of poverty in small town Moon, Texas, takes on a different meaning as Jaynell Lambert discovers the hidden truths about greed, snobbery, and family.

An eccentric grandfather, a green Cadillac convertible, and a secret legacy work together to yield these treasures, and for Jaynell, life will never look the same.



Topics for Discussion

1. Discuss the reasons why Zachary is sarcastic to Cal and Toby but nice to Kate when they first meet.
2. Why is Toby so preoccupied with thoughts of Wayne? What does this say about Toby?
3. The story begins by asserting that "Nothing ever happens in Antler, Texas" until Zachary Beaver arrives. What does his arrival change?
4. Why does Zachary want to be baptized? 5. How would it change the story if the author used past tense rather than present tense?
6. People react to tragedy and respond to grief in a variety of ways. List examples of these reactions from the story.
7. Each of the characters in the novel has a dream. Describe these individually. Are they realistic dreams or impossibilities?
Is it healthy for people to have dreams?
Explain your answer.
8. Explore several reasons why Wayne asked Cal not to play war. What is the significance of this request to the story?
9. Does Scarlett take advantage of Toby's feelings for her? Explain your answer.
10. Why does Cal wait until he is with Toby before he reads Wayne's last letter?



Essay Topics

How does Zachary's arrival in town change everything in Toby's life? Would this change still have taken place if Zachary had not come to town? What is it about Zachary that impacts Toby and Cal's life so obviously? Would Cal and Toby become friends with Zachary had the sheriff not dragged them out there to meet him? Why does Cal insist on helping Zachary become baptized?

Why do you think the writer chose to set the novel in the seventies? How does the backdrop of the Vietnam War affect the novel? Do you think Wayne's death would have had the same impact had he died in a car accident?

How does Opalina's departure affect Toby? Why do you think he lied to everyone about her contest in Nashville, when he said that there had been a fire and the contest was postponed? Why did his Dad not punish him for the lie?

Why did Toby not go to Wayne's funeral? Why was Toby so deeply affected by his friend's death? Why did Ferris get drunk the morning of the funeral? Was Ferris a coward for what he did during the Korean War? Compare and contrast Wayne and Ferris. How are they similar? How are they different?

Why did Cal refuse to write to Wayne? Why was it so important to Toby that Cal write a letter? Why did Toby write the letter and sign Cal's name? What would have happened if Toby had signed his own name?

Why did Zachary lie about all his trips around the world? Why was it important to Zachary that Cal and Toby believed he had been to all those places? Do you think Zachary would have acted the same way if he were thinner and capable of flying to all those places?

Discuss the point of view. How would the novel be different had it been written from Cal's point of view? What if it was written from Zachary, Kate or Otto's viewpoint? Discuss each scenario.



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Juan and his family are migrant farm workers. Research and report on migrant farm workers in the United States.
2. The novel hints at the conflicting attitudes of U.S. citizens about the Vietnam War. Research these and report on them, or interview a Vietnam veteran about how he was treated when he returned home from the war.
3. Research the history and symbolism of baptisms.
4. Research obesity and its effects on physical and psychological health.
5. Organic farming is an effective means of food and crop production. Search out articles that compare and contrast this method to conventional farming, which uses chemicals.
6. If Toby could express what he really feels toward his mother, what would he say? Write a letter from Toby to his mother.
7. According to some divorce statistics, one out of two marriages ends in divorce. What are some of the special problems that some children of divorce must confront?
8. How do you feel about sideshows at fairs and carnivals? Debate the pros and cons of these exhibits.
9. Interview a friend or relative who lives in a small town. Then interview some one who lives in a city. Compare and contrast these two lifestyles.
10. Write a sequel chapter to this novel concerning what becomes of Zachary Beaver.

Further Study

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