A Separate Peace Unit Project Menu

You may work alone or with one other partner. After choosing a project, create an extensive rubric that stipulates how the project is to be evaluated. With permission from your teacher, you may alter any of these assignments to match your interests or talents.

**Sculpture**
Create a series of sculptures that explore psychological cause and effect themes from the novel. Put your sculptures on display (on a table) and serve as the curator and docent of your own exhibit, explaining on several placards how each piece captures or reflects a central cause and effect idea illustrated by the novel. For each sculpture’s placard, also include a textual passage that develops the same theme as your sculpture and explain how it does so.

**Tableau**
Perform three “freeze frame” tableau scenes from interesting passages in the novel. Each scene must exhibit causes of the effects depicted in the subsequent scene. Actors will stand for at least three minutes for each scene, frozen in action and facing the audience. Actors will also use appropriate facial expression and stance to reflect the thoughts and emotions of the characters they are playing. The dramatic representation should be believable, and the scenes should insightfully interpret the selected passages from the novel. Be certain to practice the scenes several times so that none of the actors break character.

**Literary Allusion**
In a 2-3 page typed essay, relate the Biblical stories of Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel (and the life and teachings of Jesus) to the themes and images of the novel, focusing especially on the causes and consequences of sin. Use plenty of evidence from the text to prove that John Knowles alludes directly and indirectly to the themes and stories in the book of Genesis and in the Gospels.

**Author Study**
After reading “My Separate Peace” by John Knowles, write a competent (1-2 page typed) summary of what you have learned about his approach to writing the novel. Then identify several more questions you would like to ask the author, hazarding guesses as to how he might respond. Then videotape a mock interview with the writer, with him providing thoughtful and believable answers to your questions.

**Roundtable Discussion**
After discussing how the themes of friendship, conformity, truth & falsehood, and growing up relate to your own life, discuss ways in which they relate to the novel. Define these ideas and how they affect individual behavior. Find 15-20 examples of specific passages from the novel to reinforce your ideas about what the author has to say in regard to these themes. Conduct your discussion in front of the entire class, using overhead transparencies to show the textual evidence you have accumulated for each of these themes.

**Poetry Analysis**
Study the poem by Randall Jarrell titled “Losses” and answer the questions attached to it. Then relate (in a 2-3 page typed essay) the cause and effect relationships of the poem to those in the novel, using ample textual evidence for support. Then find another poem by another poet that develops themes related to those in the novel, repeating the work you did with the first poem.

**Crossword Puzzle**
Create a crossword puzzle that incorporates more than forty sophisticated vocabulary words from the novel. Create both the master puzzle (blank) and the answer key. Your written clues should cleverly incorporate at least thirty of our rhetorical strategies and literary analysis terms, and you must point out—in parentheses after each clue—which rhetorical strategy or literary analysis term is embedded in that particular clue. Make enough copies of the puzzle for all members of the class to have one. To earn an A, B, or C on this assignment, the
clues must all be clever. (If you do this well, creating the clues will be extremely time consuming.)

**Popular Music**

Listen to at least eight songs that examine the causes and/or effects of enmity and/or war, study the lyrics, and relate the themes of the songs to the themes of the novel in a 2-3 page typed essay (or a mock television documentary) supported by textual evidence from the novel and from the songs themselves. The essay should answer the question: What do popular music and *A Separate Peace* teach us about the causes and effects of war? For each song, identify at least one powerful image in its lyrics. Consider using the following tunes: Paul Hardcastle’s “19,” Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the USA,” Barry McGuire’s “Eve of Destruction,” Pat Benatar’s “Love Is a Battlefield,” Crosby Stills & Nash’s “Ohio,” Peter Paul & Mary’s “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” Billy Joel’s “Goodnight Saigon,” John Denver’s “What Are We Making Weapons For?” Bette Midler’s “From a Distance,” Sting’s “Russians,” Julia Fordham’s “Invisible War,” and “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables” from *Les Miserables.* (Your teacher has a four page list of songs from which you may choose.)

**Mapmaking**

Using details from the novel, draw a detailed map (at least 2 feet by 2 feet) of Devon Prep (including natural geography and buildings). Highlight and interpret locations of symbolic and sentimental importance, using specific textual citations in a separate (and dialectical journal formatted) key that explains each location on the map. Use your imagination to fill in the rest of the map with appropriate points of interest not mentioned in the novel. Make a special effort to show how the natural setting affects the characters—and how the characters affect the natural setting.

**Theater**

Write and perform a ten to fifteen minute scene in which Gene and Phineas meet in the afterlife. Make your scene a (super?)natural extension of their relationship as depicted in the novel. In the scene, Gene and Phineas should discuss the causes and effects of several of their most significant thoughts, feelings and deeds. You will submit a script complete with stage direction. As a result of the conversation, they should agree to treat one another differently in the afterlife. Your scene must be memorized, blocked, well rehearsed, and competently directed.

**Film Study**

Find a film in which the cause and effect relationship of the central characters mirrors that of Gene and Phineas. Write a 2-3 page typewritten essay in which you draw out this comparison and explain, using plenty of textual evidence from both sources, the benefits and drawbacks of friendship. Films you may wish to consider include *Dominick and Eugene, Rain Man, The Talented Mr. Ripley, Swing Kids,* and *Of Mice and Men.* You may also wish to consider classic movies from the era in which the novel was first published.

**Medical Science**

Write a detailed explanation of how Finny probably died by documenting what you learn about setting broken bones, bone marrow, the heart, and the bloodstream in a paper or documentary. Investigate the methods doctors use to keep such deaths at a minimum. What has changed in this medical procedure since the time of the book’s publication? Cite your sources.

**Mathematical Probability**

We are more likely to die at the hands of someone we know than from the actions of a stranger. Finny would never have guessed that his best friend might have it out for him. Many of us don’t realize that much of what we do is dangerous. Research and calculate the probability of death from at least ten seemingly innocuous events that might prove to be fatal. (Make sure that these events could conceivably take place in your life during the next five years.) Rank these events according to their probability for leading to your death. Explain how you (or experts) figured out that probability. For these items, create a pamphlet explaining
to individuals how they might best avoid that deadly fate. Explain also in that pamphlet to what degree someone like Finny tempts fate when he jumps from trees, swims in the ocean, sunbathes, plays rough sports, rides a bike without a helmet, and volunteers (or wants to volunteer, anyway) for the military.

**Musical Composition**  Compose an original piece of music that represents a character or a pivotal scene from the novel and demonstrates a cause and effect relationship. Then perform or record that piece of music. Submit the original score along with a short essay explaining your composition and relating it to the novel. You must work for at least one hour with a music instructor or a musician who has more experience with composing music than you do. Please come prepared with that person’s name and contact information.

**Dance**  Create and perform--or videotape--an original, carefully choreographed dance that 1) represents a character or pivotal scene from the novel and 2) demonstrates a cause and effect relationship. Submit a 2-3 page essay explaining your work and relating it to the text. Be certain to choose incidental music appropriate for the dance. You must work for at least one hour with a dance instructor or a dance student who has more experience with choreography than you do. Please come prepared with that person’s name and contact information.

**Web Design**  Create a personal web page, as it would be created by either Gene or Phineas, to demonstrate the causes of the particular character’s philosophy of life and/or significant behaviors. This page should reflect the character’s personality, interests, and experiences. Include plenty references to the text, as well as useful and relevant links to other pages. (You will earn an A, a B, or a C only if you reveal to us at least TEN new aspects of Gene’s character or at least TEN new aspects of Phineas’s character.) These should not necessarily alter our understanding of the two boys, but they should add to our understanding of each boy’s complexity. These traits should be suggested by further details about the boys’ lives that you will create and inform us about. (These could take the form, for example, of excerpted diary entries, pictures of secret hiding places, inclusion of an expunged police record, a story about a kindergarten friend, a confession about a romantic liaison, a letter to a former neighbor.)

**Poetry Writing**  Write a poem or a series of poems addressing one of the novel’s central cause and effect themes, and write a short essay that explains your poetry and relates it to the text.

**Sports**  Consider the effects of sports and athleticism in the novel, particularly in how characters view themselves and others. Use the following set of questions to interview several athletes at this school. In a 3-4 page typewritten essay, relate your findings to your thoughts about sports and athleticism in the novel. What motivates you most when you are playing a sport? Do excelling in sports and excelling in academics affect your self-esteem in different ways? Would you rather that other people see you more as a fine athlete or a fine student? Why? Are you a different person when you play sports? (Are you more of your true self or less like your true self when you play sports?) How does dominance in a sport affect the personal relationships of those who play that sport together? What does winning mean to you and what does losing mean to you?

**Psychology**  Research the psychology of Sigmund Freud to produce a psychoanalytical report on one of the major characters in the novel. Why does the character behave as he does? Incorporate your understanding of the Freudian psyche, including defense mechanisms. Document your conclusions using evidence from the novel and from the writings of Freud himself.
**Board Game** Create a board game in which each of the pieces reflects a different character from the novel. As in chess, each piece should move differently (in accordance with the character whose nature it reflects). The objective of the game should mirror the objectives of the boys at Devon, and the game should include several appropriate cause and effect chains. Be sure to write a clear and concise set of rules to accompany the game, as well as a reflective essay of 1-2 pages that explains how the rules of the game reflect the unwritten rules of the boys at Devon.

**Fine Art** Create one representational and one abstract painting, drawing or sculpture that reflects a particular cause and effect relationship chain reflected in the novel. Write a detailed explanation of your artwork as well. The art should be original and carefully crafted. Avoid hackneyed imagery.

**Card Game** Create a deck of cards that represent the characters in *A Separate Peace* and show their position in the hierarchy of Devon School. Design a game to play with your deck that mirrors the objectives of the boys at Devon. Write a clear and concise set of rules to accompany the game, as well as an essay of 1-2 pages that explains how the rules of the game reflect the unwritten social rules at Devon school.

**Character Analysis** Choose a pivotal scene from the novel that involves both Gene and Phineas. Rewrite the scene from Phineas’s point of view. In rewriting the scene, you must decide which details from Gene’s account are objective and must remain the same, and which details will change when you take Phineas’s perspective.

**Gender Differences** After reading an essay by feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan, write a short story that centers on the relationship between two female friends but deals with the same themes as those explored in *A Separate Peace*. Base your story on a true event that you have experienced or heard about from friends.

**Motifs** Explore Knowles’s use of motifs in the novel. Consider how his references to summer and winter, light and dark, or war and peace serve to reinforce the themes of the novel, documenting your conclusions in a carefully created series of annotated charts.

**Understanding One’s Personality Type** Use various Internet websites and the booklet titled *Introduction to Type* ([www.mtbi.com](http://www.mtbi.com)) by Isabel Briggs Myers (Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., Palo Alto) to learn about your own personality type, its strengths, and its areas for growth. Write a reflective essay in which you discuss the ways you will make the most of your areas for growth.

**Personality Type and Relationships** Use the same set of resources listed above to learn about the opposite of your personality type. Given that opposites often do attract, how can you and future friends, college roommates, and romantic interests with opposite personality types make the most of your differences? Write your conclusions in a letter to a current or future friend or boyfriend/girlfriend, explaining your personality type, his/her type, and how best you can get along and grow together. Although the tone of your letter should be friendly, the content should be academic.

**Personality Type and Careers** Use the same set of resources listed above to determine which careers best suit your personality type. For each of at least five careers, explain in depth why the elements of your personality type are so well suited to that career. Then identify two careers that might be better suited for someone with the opposite of your personality type, explaining why they might be intriguing for you, but probably inappropriate. Demonstrate what you have learned
about your professional leanings in a well written multi-paragraph reflective essay that incorporates plenty of research from your sources—along with personal anecdotes that bear out that research.

**Therapy**  After studying the Jungian personality types and Jungian therapeutic techniques, write a dialogue in which you, the therapist, listen to and then counsel Gene, the client, about how to make the most of his relationship with Finny. Be certain to include substantial research in your response to Gene’s commentary about his relationship with Finny. You might want to interview a real Jungian therapist for ideas, suggestions, and other guidance.