

This shift is given a physical embodiment in the two rivers on campus. The fresh, clear, bubbling Devon River represents the summer session and its naïve carefree character. But this river flows into the salty, ugly, unpredictable Naguamsett, which is joined to the ocean and controlled by the large, global forces of the tides. This river can be seen as a symbol of a dawning era of bitter conflict and disempowerment for the boys.

Whereas Finny, with his spontaneity and rebellious spirit, directs the activities of the former era, Brinker Hadley, a stolid, rigid personality and an advocate for authority and order, now succeeds him as the boys' leader. Indeed, not only does Brinker support order in the classroom and the dormitory, but he also functions as a force for order in the larger moral landscape. It is he who first suspects Gene's guilt and eventually insists on bringing out the truth and seeing justice done at whatever cost.

Gene's desire to manage crew seems to be an attempt to escape Finny's shadow, as it places him far from the central, physical aspect of the school's athletics program, in which Finny excelled. Yet the reader quickly realizes the irony of this attempt when Gene remarks that the job usually goes to disabled students: Gene, of course, is not disabled, but Finny is. Once again, it seems, Gene proves unable to separate his own identity from that of his friend. When the odious Quackenbush (a minor character whose absurd name suits his role as a much-disliked clod) makes fun of Gene for being "maimed," Gene responds violently even though he isn't maimed at all. One can argue that he is fighting for Finny—or, perhaps, that he is fighting as Finny. Gene himself is acutely aware of his increasing identification with his friend, especially when Finny insists that if he, Finny, cannot play sports, then Gene must play them for him. At this moment, Gene understands that he is losing himself and becoming a part of Finny. One might understand the joy that Gene consequently feels as stemming from a deep desire: he may dislike himself so much by now that his dearest wish is to abandon this self altogether.

clear water → dirty, ugly, chaotic
summer/carefree → fall, cold, rigid, conflict

finny → brinker
moral vs. literal landscape

what is truth?

what is justice?