

## The Body, Stephen King: Part 1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Background on the author:

*The Body* is considered a **novella** (longer than a short story, shorter than a typical novel), and Stephen King admits that parts of the story are fairly autobiographical. Stephen Edwin King was born on September 21, 1947 in Portland, Maine. His parents were Donald Edwin King and Ruth Pillsbury King. Stephen was their only biological child: his older brother, David, was adopted at birth two years earlier.

The Kings were the typical family until one night when Stephen's father said he was stepping out for cigarettes and was never heard from again. At this point Ruth took over raising the family with help from other relatives. They traveled throughout many states over several years, finally moving back to Durham, Maine in 1958.

As a child, King apparently witnessed one of his friends being struck and killed by a train, though he has no memory of the event. His family told him that after leaving home to play with the boy, King returned, speechless and seemingly in shock. Only later did the family learn of the friend's death. Some commentators have suggested that this event may have psychologically inspired King's dark, disturbing creations, but King himself has dismissed the idea.

Stephen King began his actual writing career in January of 1959 when he and his brother decided to publish their own local town newspaper named *Dave's Rag*. David bought a mimeograph and they created a paper that sold for five cents an issue. King attended Lisbon High School, in Lisbon, Maine in 1962. Collaborating with his best friend, Chris Chesley, in 1963 they published a collection of 18 short stories called *People, Places, and Things- Volume I*. King made his first actual published appearance in 1965 in the magazine *Comics Review* with his story "I Was a Teenage Grave Robber." The story ran about 6,000 words in length.

In 1966, King graduated from high school and took a scholarship to attend the University of Maine. Looking back on his high school days, King recalled that "my high school career was totally undistinguished. I was not at the top of my class, nor at the bottom." During his first year at college, King completed his first full length novel, *The Long Walk*. He submitted the novel to Bennett Cerf/Random House only to have it rejected. King took the rejection badly and filed the book away. He made his first small sale with his story "The Glass Floor" for \$35. In June 1970, he graduated from the University of Maine with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a certificate to teach high school. A draft board examination immediately post-graduation found him 4-F on grounds of high blood pressure, limited vision, flat feet, and punctured lungs.

King's next idea came from the poem by Robert Browning, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." He began work on *The Dark Tower* saga, but with no income he was unable to further pursue the novel and it, too, was filed away. King took a job pumping gas earning \$1.25 an hour. He finally began to earn money for his writings submitting his short stories to men's magazines such as *Cavalier*.

On January 2, 1971, King married Tabitha Jane Spruce, and in the fall of 1971, King took a teaching job at Hampden Academy earning \$6,400 a year. The Kings then moved to Hermon, a town west of Bangor, Maine. Stephen King then began work on a short story about a teenage girl named Carietta White. After completing a few pages, King decided it was not a worthy story and crumpled the pages up and tossed them into the trash. Fortunately for him, his wife took the pages out and read them. She encouraged her husband to continue the story. He did. In January 1973, King submitted *Carrie* to Doubleday. In March, Doubleday bought the book. On May 12, Doubleday sold the paperback rights of *Carrie* to New American Library for \$400,000. Based on the book contract, King would get half of that. King quit his teaching job to pursue writing full time. At this time, he began writing a book titled *Second Coming*, later titled *Jerusalem's Lot*, before finally changing the title to *Salem's Lot* (published 1975). Soon after the release of *Carrie* in 1974, his mother died of uterine cancer. His Aunt Emrine read the novel to her before she died. King has written of his severe drinking problem at this time, stating that he was drunk while delivering the eulogy at his mother's funeral. After his mother's death, King and his family moved

to Boulder, Colorado, where King wrote *The Shining* (published 1977). The family returned to western Maine in 1975, where King completed his fourth novel, *The Stand* (published 1978).

Since then, King has had numerous short stories and novels published and movies created from his work. He is called the "Master of Horror." His books have been translated into 33 different languages, published in over 35 different countries. There are over 300 million copies of his novels in publication. He continues to live in Bangor, Maine with his wife where he writes at home.

***The Body*** was originally published in the 1982 collection *Different Seasons*. It is subtitled "Fall from Innocence." It was adapted into the acclaimed film *Stand By Me* in 1986.

- This story is a **bildungsroman** (a novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main [and usually young] character). The characters are the perfect age, 12 going on 13, and the setting is the hottest days of the year, right before school starts. Everything is poised for change, and we watch as the boys "lose their innocence" and leave childhood behind (notice the sub-title).
- *The Body* is considered a **novella** – longer than a short story but shorter than a typical novel – and it is also a **frame narrative** in that it begins with the narrator as an adult looking back to when he was 12 years old, and it ends with him as an adult, and what is in between is the flashback. In *The Body*, the time shifts often from past to present, because the narrator wants to share what he has learned about life. *"Never write about a place until you're away from it, because that gives you perspective."* Ernest Hemingway

#### Central Questions:

- How does the death of a family member impact a family?
- How do parents impact their children?
- Is it possible to escape one's circumstances through the bond of friendship?
- Can friends truly influence and inspire people more than their family members?

### Chapter 1

React the the quotes from theis brief chapter:

*"The most important things are the hardest things to say ...words diminish them – words shrink things that seemed limitless when they were in your head to no more than living size when they're brought out... And you may make revelations that cost you dearly only to have people look at you in a funny way, not understanding what you've said at all..."*

### Chapter 2

1. In this chapter we meet our four main characters. Identify them below and include a brief description of each:

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- 2. How is it made clear that the narrator is looking back when telling the story?
  
- 3. In the space below, describe how/why each of the following is significant:
  - The boys spend time in their tree house smoking cigarettes and looking at “girly magazines.”
  
  - The setting: Labor Day Weekend; it is the driest, hottest summer in decades
  
  - Truck-dodging
  
- 4. This chapter describes some of the impact a father can have on his child, specifically his son. To prepare to discuss the impact of parenting, please read the passage below (this passage is not from the story):

*“As children, sons idolize their dads and think they can do anything. This identification is most often demonstrated by a son’s imitation of his father’s behavior by walking like him, talking like him or wearing his clothes or shoes. At this age, a son wants so much to please his father and receive his approval and acceptance. As teens, sons experience a period of discord in which conflict is the central theme they share. They often reject the expectations, values and directions their fathers have embraced and take on more non-traditional philosophies, placing them regularly at odds with one other. The teen may resent or even fear his father depending on the intensity of their differences, at times, carrying over into the son’s early twenties.*

*As young adults, the father-son relationship enters into a period of evolving. Distance may still exist emotionally and they may even ignore each other. The conscious attempts at being different than one’s father so characteristic in the discord stage begin to appear more like competition. Competition with another can be viewed as one of the most indirect but highest forms of flattery that exists. Mark Twain once said, “When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years.” As adults in their 30’s and 40’s, sons begin to move into the stage of acceptance toward their fathers. They have begun to forgive, recognize strengths and even admire the qualities that once seemed so out of step with their previous “know it all” manner of thinking. They begin to accept each other’s differences. Fathers and sons often become friends during this time, share common interests and express opinions without heated exchanges. The son may even experience challenges as a father with his own son. Charles Wadsworth once said, “By the time a man realizes that maybe his father was right, he usually has a son who thinks he’s wrong.””*

--D. Charles Williams, Ph.D.

The passage above seems to presume that the father is a caring and responsible person and role model. What happens when that isn’t the case or when there is no father? In the space below, describe the father son relationships described so far in the novel:

### Chapter 3

When Gordie hears about death of Ray Brower, he thinks, *“Nothing like that could happen in southwestern Maine today; most of the area has become suburbanized... But in 1960 the whole area between Chamberlain and Castle Rock was undeveloped, and there were places that hadn’t even been logged since before World War II. In those days it was still possible to walk into the woods and lose your direction there and die there.”*

1. What **connotations** do you have for “woods,” what images/ideas come to mind?
2. The the name of Gordie’s town, Castle Rock, has a different **connotation** from the woods—what might this name **symbolize**?

### Chapter 4

1. Why is Vern Tessio’s nickname “Penny Tessio”?
2. While he was under the porch, what did Vern overhear his brother, Billy, and Charlie Hogan talking about?

### Chapter 5

A **catalyst** in literature is a person or an event that causes things to change (a stimulus in bringing about a result). How might Vern and the news he brings to the boys be seen as a **catalyst** in this story?

1. The clubhouse boys make a plan—describe their plan.
2. Why do they want to tell the police about the body?
3. Why do they think that those who found the body won’t get angry at their telling the police?
4. What do we know about Chris’s family?

## Chapter 6

1. Discuss how Gordie views his parents and why. Why does he say that he is an “invisible man”?
2. Discuss how Gordie views his brother and why:
3. Why does Gordie become a writer?

## Chapter 7

This chapter is a story within a story – *Stud City*, one of Gordie’s stories that he writes in college. This is still part of the narrator’s past, but it’s a “future past.” Why do you think the story is included here?

## Chapter 8

In this chapter, the narrator comments on *Stud City*. Why do you think the short story is included in the novella, and why does it come at this point in the story?

## Chapter 9

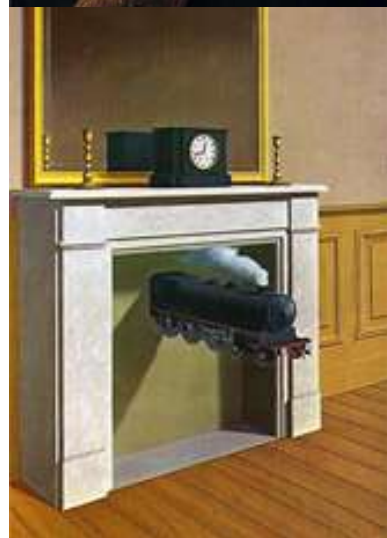
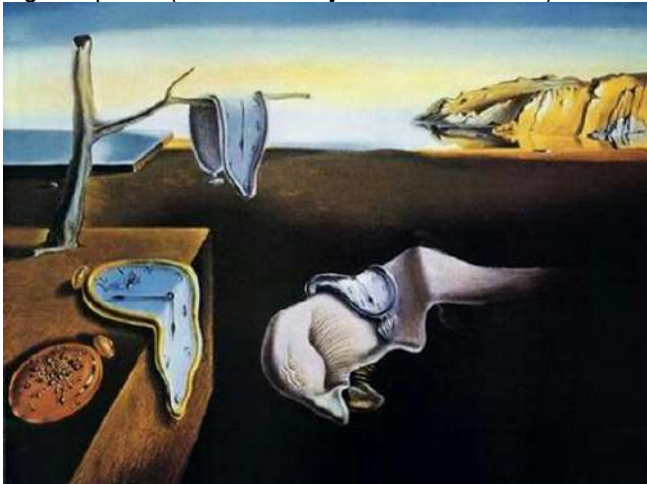
1. Why does Gordie go down the back stairs?
2. Discuss the gun, what it might signify, and what it might foreshadow:
3. How does Gordie feel when he takes the gun—and how does he feel after the shot?
4. What is Chris’s reaction?

## Chapter 10

1. On p. 332, the boys are poised at the beginning of their quest. What is some of the **imagery** that points to this? (Be specific: describe Castle Rock and the Castle River.)
2. Why does Teddy want to dodge the train?
3. What did the boys forget to do?
4. What do they decide to do?

### Chapter 11

1. The dump is one of Gordie's most vivid memories of Castle Rock. Why does he compare it to some surrealist paintings on p.336 (two of which you can see below)? What might be significant about the paintings' titles?



Salvadore Dali "The Persistence of Memory"

René Magritte "Time Transfixed"

1. What's the name of the dump's manager?

2. What kind of dog is Chopper?
3. Describe Chris's dream and what it may reveal about Chris.
4. React to the quote on page 388: *"Everything was there and around us. We knew exactly who we were and exactly where we were going. It was grand"*
5. On p. 389, there is a reference to a "goocher." What do you think that means and why might it be significant? Examine the **imagery** surrounding it.

## Chapter 12

1. Part of growing up is pondering one's own mortality. What events in chapter 12 make Gordie more aware of death?

2. Notice that the two adults in this chapter act like children. The adults in the boys' lives have "fallen off their pedestals"—and realizing that is part of growing up, too. Besides the vicious fathers in the novel, discuss these two men:

George Dusset:

Milo Pressman:

3. What does Milo say that makes Teddy so upset?

## Chapter 13

Bridges are often **symbols** in literature and in film. Examine what Teddy does and what Vern shares before they cross the trestle:

1. What does Chris tell Teddy to make him stop crying??

2. Why does Vern say he doesn't want their journey to be a "good time"?

3. Describe Vern's nightmares.

#### **Chapter 14**

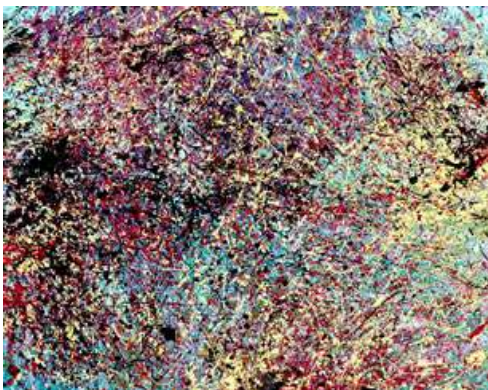
1. Describe Gordie's "first and last psychic flash" (411).
2. Describe what happens on the train trestle.

#### **Chapter 15**

1. According to Gordie, what makes men daredevils?
2. How do Gordie's friends react to his ability and desire to write stories? Does their reaction surprise you?

#### **Chapter 16**

**Allusions and vocabulary from the chapter:**



A painting by **Jackson Pollock**

**Castor oil:** a vegetable oil product that, upon ingestion, acts as a laxative. It may lead to diarrhea and/or vomiting.

**Apogee:** the highest point; the peak; the climax.

1. Discuss Gordie's second **story within a story**:
2. Does the pie-eating contest story connect to the novella in any way that you can see?



## Chapter 17

1. How do Teddy and Vern react to Gordie's story? How does Chris react? Why do you think they feel the way they do about the ending?
2. What advice does Chris give Gordie? And what does he predict will happen if Gordie doesn't listen to him?
3. Define **situational irony** and explain the ironies in Chris's tale of the lunch money:

## Chapter 18

### Allusions and vocabulary from the chapter:

**Algernon Henry Blackwood**, (1869 – 1951) was an English writer of fiction dealing with the supernatural. Although Blackwood wrote a number of horror stories, his most typical work seeks less to frighten than to induce a sense of awe. He is best known now as one of the foremost authors of ghost stories in the early twentieth century, perhaps one of the best ever (p. 384).

1. Notice that Gordie doesn't want to find Ray Brower's body near nightfall because his ghost might be lingering near the body and he says, "there was no way I wanted to wake up in the night and confront the glowing, disembodied ghost of Ray Brower, moaning and gibbering and floating among the dark and rustling pines." What should this remind you of, and what might that mean?
2. **Setting**: notice Gordie's description of nightfall in the woods: "There's something horrible and fascinating about the way dark comes to the woods, its coming unsoftened by headlights or streetlights or houselights or neon. It comes with no mothers' voices, calling for their kids to leave off and come on in now, to herald it. If you're used to the town, the coming of the dark in the woods seems more like a natural disaster than a natural phenomenon..." For kids, what factors make darkness bearable?
3. Why does Gordie pity Ray Brower (besides his being dead)?

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We are just over halfway through the novel—in the space below, please describe the most memorable idea/scene/line of dialogue (and why it is so memorable). ☺