

In writing a piece of literature an author aims not only to tell a story but often to also make a statement about values and social issues relevant at the time. In Antigone the author explores the value of the Greek people at the time placed on the laws of the gods and the social issues of a woman's place in society. Likewise in A Separate Peace the author explores the value of friendship and the social issue of the war's impact on the youth of the time.

When Antigone was first written the people of the time heavily believed in a higher power of gods and goddesses that ruled over them with great power. One such belief of these people was that the dead were to be given a proper burial so they could pass on to their next life. As the play opens the warrior Polynices has died in battle attempting to invade the city of Thebes. The king of Thebes, Creon considers Polynices a traitor and as punishment for his treasonous acts he is not to be buried and instead left to be eaten by dogs and birds in the desert. The sister of Polynices, Antigone is set on following the will of the gods and burying her brother Polynices even though she knows Creon will have her killed for such acts. When Creon finds out about Antigone burying her brother he has Polynices unearthed and Antigone sentenced to death. Creon is then warned by both his son and the prophet of the gods Teiresias that what he is doing is going against the will of the gods and shall be punished for it. Creon attempts to make up for his misdeeds, but it is too late and as punishment both his son and wife kill themselves. This illustrates the values of people at the time as it is a cautionary tale of what will happen if you anger their gods.

Another function that is served by Antigone is that it explores the social issue of a woman's place in Greek society. The titular character Antigone is very representative of the archetypal strong woman. She believes that it is her duty to bury her brother Polynices even though her king has expressly forbidden it. At the time women in Greek society were seen as inferior to men. This is embodied in the character Ismene, Antigone's sister. When asked by her sister to help bury Polynices against the King's edict Ismene responds that it is not their place to defy Creon as he is their King and they are but women. Despite what is expected of her Antigone still follows what she believes in and buries her brother. When Creon finds out he first assumes it must have been a man who defied his orders, but once he discovers she is a woman he is twice as offended since it is not only someone below him in status as the King who defied him, it was also someone inferior in sex. Since Antigone refuses to turn away from her beliefs, she is sentenced to death. This is the author's commentary on the position of women in Greek society.

In A Separate Peace the value the author explores is not a social one but instead a personal one about friendship and trust. In the novel Gene is very close to his friend Phineas. Gene admires traits in Phineas such as his abilities to charm people and his talent at sports that he does not possess himself. As time progresses Gene grows jealous of these traits and grows to resent Phineas as a result. Gene starts to believe that Phineas is jealous of his academic ability and is sabotaging his studies as a way of coping with his jealousy. This jealousy comes to its peak when Gene causes Phineas to fall from a tree when they are trying to jump into a river below and brake his leg. This results in Phineas not being able to play sports again and Gene overwhelmingly guilty. When Gene tries to admit to Phineas that he caused him to fall on purpose however Phineas refuses to believe him since he values Gene so much as a friend and kicks him out of the room. This causes Gene to realize that Phineas was actually his friend and barred no ill will toward him. This is the author's comment on friendship and trust.

A Separate Peace also explores the social issue of the effect World War II had on young men. In the story two characters show the effect and pressures of this war, being Leper and Phineas. Leper joins the war effort himself and leaves to fight. He returns part way through the novel having "escaped" the war. He tells Gene that the things he saw hunt him constantly and it is obvious that it has changed him. Phineas on the other hand is almost old enough to be drafted himself. He begins to come up with these theories that the war is not real and actually a conspiracy. This shows that it scares him and he is not able to rationalize the major pressure the war is putting on him. This is the author's comment on the social issue of World War II's effect on young men.

In conclusion an author will often use their work to make a comment on values and social issues. In Antigone these are the values of the law of the Gods and the issue of a woman's role and in A Separate Peace it is the value of friendship and the social issue of the Second World War placing pressure on young men.