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The Notebook

by

**Nicholas Sparks
1996**



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Diane Clapsaddle

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THE NOTEBOOK BY NICHOLAS SPARKS – BOOK SUMMARY / STUDY GUIDE LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

New Bern, North Carolina, 1932, 1946, and the present day at Creekside Extended Care Facility

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Noah Calhoun - The narrator of the book and the main character, Noah is a good and kind man who fell in love with Allie fourteen years before the novel opens. He has never forgotten her and is overwhelmed with how much he still loves her when she returns to tell him she is engaged.

Allison Nelson - A young woman who comes from a privileged family, she spends a wonderful summer with Noah when they are young, but is forced to leave when her parents disapprove. She meets Lon and becomes engaged to him, but something in her makes her return to Noah to be sure she is not making a mistake.

Lon Hamilton - He is Allie's fiancé, who fights for her in the end, but is too late. He has allowed his career to disrupt any hope he may have had to win her for himself.

Minor Characters

Morris Goldman - A Jewish man who hires Noah for eight years in his scrap.....

Gus - He is the black man who lives down the road from the house Noah has restored. He.....

Anne Nelson - She is Allie's mother and had so disapproved of her being with Noah that she had never delivered his letters to her daughter. She comes to warn them that Lon is on.....

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonists are Noah and Allie. They are very much in love, but nearly lose each other because of societal influences. They ultimately find the courage and the strength to be with each other as life soul mates. Unfortunately, nature deals them a bad hand at the end of.....

Antagonist - The antagonists are Allie's parents who don't think Noah is good enough for their daughter and Lon, who neglects the woman he loves by prioritizing his career ahead of.....

Climax - The climax occurs when Noah, having had a stroke and eighty years old, reads Allie's final letter again and is reminded of the promise she made when she found out she.....

Outcome - Noah goes to Allie's room late at night even though he is chancing a panic attack when she awakens. He means only to leave a poem under her pillow, but instead kisses.....

SHORT PLOT SUMMARY (Synopsis)

The story is told on two levels – one is the present day when Allie and Noah have grown old and live in a home; the other is the story Noah reads from the notebook in which he tells how he and Allie met, fell in love, lost each other, and then found each other again. The end of their love story is.....

THEMES

The first and most important theme is: **Love conquers all**. Although this idea is sometimes overworked, in this particular work, it is the most prevalent theme of all. No matter how many setbacks Allie and Noah faced, their love always brought them together again.

The second theme is: **Follow your heart**. Allie had spent fourteen years in fear of hurting her family and friends if she deviated from the standard way of living for her social class. It was.....

MOOD

The mood is at times troubling and even quite sad, because of the disease that is claiming Allie's mind. However, there is a sense of victory, in spite of the inevitability of Allie's future, because.....

NICHOLAS SPARKS - BIOGRAPHY

This author is a well-known writer who often uses the themes of love, tragedy, and fate in his stories. He tried many careers in his life until he and his wife moved to the setting of *The Notebook*, New Bern, North Carolina. There he wrote *The Notebook*, his first major novel. This was followed by such famous works as *Message in a Bottle* and *A Walk to Remember*. Nicholas based this novel, *The Notebook*, on the lives of his wife's beloved grandparents. He still lives in New Bern with his wife and five children.

Awards Won by *The Notebook*

#1 New York Times bestselling novel

Inspiration for the film *The Notebook*

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

MIRACLES

Summary

This opening chapter acts as a prologue and foreshadowing of a hoped for miracle. The narrator is an eighty year-old man who says he hasn't been warm since George Bush has been President! However, the cold also seems to be internal and has been eighty years in the making.

He explains his life as a blue chip stock: fairly stable, more ups than downs, and gradually trending upward with time. He also insists that he is nothing special, just a common man with common thoughts. However, even though there are no monuments dedicated to him, and his name will eventually be forgotten, he is unique in that he has loved another with all his heart and soul and that has always been enough.

He goes on to describe his story as both a romance and a tragedy which has involved a great deal of his life and the path he chose to follow. He has no complaints about this path and believes that it has always been the right one. Time, unfortunately, hasn't made it easy for him to stay on course on this path. It has become strewn with rocks and gravel accumulated over a lifetime. He is neither strong nor healthy now, an old party balloon which is listless, spongy, and growing softer over time.

The narrator then looks at his watch and realizes it's time to go. He picks up a notebook from his desk on his way out the door, a notebook that he has read a hundred times. He begins his walk down the tiled hallway off of which are rooms filled with people alone but for the sound of the television. He hears the muffled sounds of crying in the distance and he knows exactly who is making the sounds. The nurses exchange greetings with him, and he hears them whisper as he passes, "There he goes again. I hope it turns out well." They say nothing directly to him, probably because they fear it would hurt him to talk about it.

When he reaches his destination, he speaks briefly to two others in the room, asking about children, schools, and vacations. They finish dressing her, the one who has been crying, and he knows once they leave it will be better, because the excitement of mornings always upsets her. He sits in the same chair he always sits in, and for just a second, he stares at her. He knows he is a stranger to her. He takes a moment, also, to say a prayer that God will give him the strength he needs, and he observes to himself that once he has gone, he will have a whole list of questions for God to answer.

The narrator sits back, puts on his glasses, and opens the notebook. Just like always, he wonders for a moment if “it will happen today.” He thinks to himself that it really doesn’t matter if it does, because deep down, it’s the possibility that keeps him going, not the guarantee. He knows that the odds, and science, are against him, but he is also left with the “belief that miracles, no matter how inexplicable or unbelievable, are real and can occur without regard to the natural order of things.” He reads to her from the notebook every day and hopes that the miracle that has come to dominate his life will happen.

Notes

This entire chapter is a giant example of foreshadowing. We are introduced to an unnamed man who seems to live in a nursing home. He reads everyday to a woman who thinks he is a stranger and he reads to her from an old notebook which he hopes will create a miracle. It is obvious that the woman he reads to may be a victim of dementia or Alzheimer’s and yet he continues to read and wait for the miracle (which probably is the hope that she will recognize him one more time). All of this sets us up for the notebook.

GHOSTS

Summary

This chapter switches to the third person point of view as it opens with an introduction to Noah Calhoun in October 1946. He is sitting on his wrap-around porch of a plantation-style home. He sits here every evening, which is a routine that helps him relax. This house was built in 1772 in the town of New Bern, North Carolina. Originally, it was the main house of a working plantation, and he had bought it right after the war ended and had spent the last eleven months and a small fortune repairing it. It had been featured in a Raleigh newspaper as one of the finest restorations the writer had ever seen. However, the grounds had yet to be restored, and that was Noah’s current project. He discovers as he sits on the porch that there are benefits to work: the sweat, the fatigue, the sense of accomplishment, the cleanliness of a late-day shower, and the glass of iced tea on the porch at the end of the day.

Noah also reaches for his guitar, an instrument that reminds him of his father and makes him realize how much he misses him. He plays and sings until the sun goes down and then sits back again to look at the stars. He starts to run numbers through his head – he has spent almost his entire savings on the house, and soon he will have to find a job again. However, he pushes away the thought of being broke and decides to enjoy the remaining months of the restoration. He knows the need for a job will eventually work out.

Noah is eventually joined by Clem, his hound dog, who we learn is his only companion. Noah is thirty-one years old, just old enough to be lonely. He hasn’t dated anyone for a long time, because there is something that keeps a distance between him and any woman who starts to get close. It’s something he’s not sure he can change even if he tries. He wonders if he is destined to be alone forever.

Like always, he turns to nature for comfort. “The sound of nature is more real and arouses more emotion than things like cars and planes. Natural things give back more than they take, and their sounds always bring him back to the way man is supposed to be.” His father had told him that sounds of nature are “God’s music and they’ll take you home.” The thoughts of nature make him take out his favorite, dog-eared copy of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. This author always reminds him of New Bern and how glad he is that he has come back.

These days, his best friend is Gus, a seventy year-old black man, who lives down the road. They had met a couple of weeks after Noah had bought the house, and Gus had shown up with some homemade liquor and Brunswick stew. Now, he shows up every few nights to get away momentarily from his four children and eleven grandchildren. He brings his harmonica, and they sing and play together. Noah has come to think of Gus

as his only family. His mother died when he was two, and his father has recently died, so Gus fills the gaps. Noah has never married, even though he had wanted to once. It had been the only time he had been in love. “Once and only once, and a long time ago. And it had changed him forever. Perfect love did that to a person, and this had been perfect.”

Now Noah’s thoughts begin to drift to a warm evening like this one fourteen years before. It was 1932 and the opening night of the Neuse River Festival. He strolled through the crowd looking for friends and found Fin and Sarah talking with a girl he’d never seen before. They introduced him to her, and as he shook her hand, Noah knew that she was the one he could spend the rest of his life with. She was spending the summer in New Bern with her family. The four new friends spent the evening together until the festival closed for the night. Then, Noah and the new girl met the next day, and they soon became inseparable. They spent their days doing things that were completely unfamiliar to her while she taught Noah how to dance. Later in the summer, Noah brought her to the decaying old plantation home and told her that someday he was going to own it and fix it up. They spent hours talking about their dreams – his of seeing the world and hers of being an artist. Eventually, they became lovers, both losing their virginity. Three weeks later, she had to leave and their summer together became a lingering memory for Noah.

Noah eventually talks to Gus about this girl, and Gus says she is the “ghost that Noah has been running from.” Now Noah realizes that New Bern is haunted by the ghost of her memory. No matter whether he sits on his porch and plays his guitar or he goes to the drug store or to the theater, he sees her image everywhere. Gus says that his daddy once told him that the first time you fall in love, it changes your life forever and no matter how hard you try, the feeling never goes away.

Noah shakes away her face in his mind by turning back to Whitman and eventually writing in his journal his personal observations and the work he has accomplished on the house. Finally, he falls asleep, having spent the day working as hard as he could so he can forget her, at least for awhile.

Earlier that same evening and a hundred miles away, the girl Noah can never forget is sitting on her own porch swing. She wonders if she has made the right decision. However, she knows that if she doesn’t follow through, she’ll never forgive herself. Lon, her fiancé, doesn’t know the real reason she is leaving the following morning. He just thinks the stress of the wedding has made it necessary for her to get away for a few days. So, the next morning, she packs up and leaves Raleigh, checking into a small inn downtown. She calls Lon right away and after the call reminisces about how she had met him at a Christmas party, where she saw in him someone with confidence about the future and a sense of humor that drove away all her fears. He was a lawyer, successful and handsome. Most important, he had the requisite family name and accomplishments. She had always rebelled against this idea, but the man that Lon became drove away her dislike of “marrying well.” However, despite her guilt about deceiving Lon, she pushes on with her intentions in the town. She also knows her parents would disapprove of what she is doing, but again, she seems determined to follow through.

She dresses casually and thinks momentarily of changing her mind. However, she pulls a folded-up piece of newspaper from her pocketbook and decides as she stares at it that this is what it’s all about.

Meanwhile, Noah rises at five, goes kayaking, and then fishing. It always makes him reflect on his life. As a child, he had stuttered so badly that by the age of five he had stopped speaking altogether. His father then had taken matters into his own hands and made the boy come with him everyday to the lumberyard to stack wood together with his dad. During their time together, Noah’s father would tell him stories about birds or animals or legends common to North Carolina. In the evenings, his father would have him read aloud from Whitman and Tennyson. By the following year, Noah had lost his stutter and became passionately in love with camping and

exploring. He realized that “poets knew the isolation in nature, far from people and things man-made, was good for the soul, and he’s always identified with poets.”

Noah had dated a few girls in school, but none meant as much as Allie, his Allie. Fin had laughed and said that he predicted they would fall out of love and that it wouldn’t work out. He ended up being right on both counts. Noah could never meet the expectations of Allie’s parents who wanted her to marry within her class. Allie had vowed that they would find a way to be together, but in the end, they couldn’t. He told her at the end of the summer when her parents were taking her away, that “the summer was over, Allie, but not us.” He began to write to her every day, but his letters went unanswered.

As a result of his lost love, Noah left New Bern, traveling first to Norfolk, Virginia, where he worked at a shipyard. Then, he went to New Jersey where he ended up in a scrap yard owned by Morris Goldman, who believed that he would get rich on all the scrap he was collecting, since he was convinced it would be needed when an inevitable war began. This wonderful Jewish man believed a person should “give a day’s work for a day’s pay. Anything less is stealing,” and he also thought it was a shame that Noah wasn’t Jewish, because he was such a fine boy in every other way. He worked for Morris for eight years, leaving only once to travel to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in search of Allie. He discovered that her family had moved and left no forwarding address. It was the first and last time he looked for her. He even wrote his final letter and forced himself to accept the fact that the summer they had spent together would be the only thing they ever shared.

By 1940, Noah had mastered Morris’ business and was running the entire operation. He dated a few women during that time and even became serious with one. However, he could never bring himself to feel the same way about her as he felt for Allie. As for the woman he was dating, she told him once, “I wish I could give you what you’re looking for, but I don’t know what it is. There’s a part of you that you keep closed off from everyone, including me. It’s as if I’m not the one you’re really with. Your mind is on someone else.” Eventually, she met someone else, and they parted as friends. In the meantime, he saw his father once a year at Christmas, when they would talk, fish, and go camping.

In December, 1941, when Noah was twenty-six, the war began just as Morris predicted. He told Morris he was going to enlist, said good-bye to his father, and entered boot camp. While he was there, Morris sent him a letter in which he thanked Noah for all his hard work and included a certificate that entitled Noah to a percentage of the scrap yard if it ever sold. For the next three years, Noah fought with Patton’s Third Army. He saw friends die around him and be buried thousands of miles from home, and once, while he was hiding in a foxhole, he imagined he saw Allie watching over him. Soon after the war ended and he was discharged, he received a letter from Morris’ lawyer. Goldman had died the year before and his estate had been liquidated. Noah’s share of the profit was \$70,000.

Noah returned to New Bern and bought the plantation house he had always wanted. However, he was oddly unexcited about it or the money. He brought his father around to see what he was going to do and talk about the steps his renovation would take. His father seemed weak and he coughed and wheezed as he walked. His father assured him that he just had the flu, but one month later, he was dead of pneumonia. Noah took it hard, dropping by frequently to his parents’ grave to leave flowers and occasionally a note. And every night without fail, he said a prayer for the man who’d taught him everything that mattered.

Now, Noah’s thoughts drift away, and the past disappears for awhile. He puts away his fishing line and discovers his neighbor, Martha, at his house with homemade bread as thanks for all the repairs he has done on her house. Her husband had been killed in the war, and Noah tries to help her out whenever she needs it. Then, he picks up Gus’ daughter, goes to the General Store, and does his grocery shopping. Once home, he finds a Budweiser, a book by Dylan Thomas, and a chair on the porch.

Meanwhile, the girl, Allie, is still looking at the newspaper article she had folded up in her pocketbook. She had discovered it three Sundays before after her father had pointed it out and asked if she remembered the house. She was pale and shaking as she read it, but she whispered to herself that this is where it would end, one way or another. So the article is the reason she has come to New Bern. She climbs into the car and begins her journey. She is not surprised that she knows her way around town so well, but she feels her insides tighten as one by one she recognizes the landmarks she had long since forgotten. A majestic oak tree on the banks of the river comes into view, and she remembers sitting beneath it on a hot July day with someone who looked at her with a longing that took everything else away. Now as she drives along, she remembers every detail about him, especially the sound of his voice as he read poetry to her. She would tell him all her hopes and dreams, and he would promise to make it all come true.

Now comes another turn in the road, and she finally sees the house, dramatically changed from what she remembers. She slows as she approaches what she thinks of as the beacon that has summoned her from Raleigh. Then, she sees him on the porch with the light from the sun behind him. She stops the car and slowly emerges. Noah begins to approach and then stops short when he sees who it is. For a moment, all they can do is stare at each other without moving. They are “Allison Nelson, twenty-nine years old and engaged, a socialite, searching for answers she needs to know, and Noah Calhoun, the dreamer, thirty-one, visited by the ghost that had come to dominate his life.”

Notes

This chapter is a combination of flashback and foreshadowing as Noah’s present life is explained and his past life is revealed. We are also introduced to a girl who turns out to be the love he had never forgotten. She is engaged, but has come back to New Bern to act on her feelings and either reunite with Noah or put those feelings for him away forever.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Noah Taylor Calhoun - Noah is a most engaging character who is unimpressed with striving for success no matter the cost. He is a blue-collar worker who spends an unexpected inheritance on restoring a beautiful plantation home. He is a hard worker in whatever he engages himself, but will never be.....

Allison Nelson - She is the young woman who faces the challenge of defying the life she has been told she must live in order to connect with her soul mate, Noah Calhoun. She spends a wonderful summer with him, loses her virginity to him, and then loses him for fourteen years. When she sees an article on.....

Lon Hamilton - Essentially a good and decent man, Lon courts Allie ardently, but once he has won her, she takes second place to his blossoming career as a lawyer. He spends many nights at work and only reserves one night a week when they can be together. Allie knows she is second in his.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The first and the last chapters of the novel are narrated by Noah, who is now eighty years old and living in a nursing home with Allie, who is stricken with Alzheimer’s disease. His reading of the notebook to Allie in hopes of restoring her memories is the basis of a third person point of.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

The first and most important theme is: **Love conquers all**. Although this idea is sometimes overworked, in this particular work, it is the most prevalent theme of all. No matter how many setbacks Allie and Noah faced, their love always brought them together again. First, they must face the.....

AUTHOR'S STYLE

This novel is written very simplistically in a reader-friendly manner. And yet, he uses many beautiful metaphors and symbols to highlight the point he wants to.....

RISING ACTION

The rising action begins in 1946 one year after Noah Calhoun has returned to his hometown to buy the house of his dreams and restore it to its former magnificence. It ends with.....

FALLING ACTION

The falling action occurs when Noah makes his way to Allie's bedside on.....

POINT OF VIEW

The point of view is first person in the first and last chapters when Noah narrates his experiences with Allie at Creekside Extended Care home. In the middle chapters, it is.....

OTHER ELEMENTS

FORESHADOWING

There are several literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. One of the most prevalent ones is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

1. Even though there are no monuments dedicated to Noah, and his name will eventually be forgotten, he is unique in that he has loved another with all his heart and soul and that has always been enough. This foreshadows the love story that is about to unfold.....

IRONY

Another important element is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

1. Ironically, as Allie is driving over the drawbridge less than four minutes later, Lon calls from the courthouse. He just misses his chance to convince her to stay with him.
2. Allie drives by people going about their everyday lives in.....

QUOTATIONS – IMPORTANT QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

The following quotations are important at various points of the story (Warner Books, 1996):

1. “Noah is also left with the belief that miracles, no matter how inexplicable or unbelievable, are real and can occur without regard to the natural order of things.” (pg. 5; Here Noah prepares us for the final miracle he will experience in his relationship with Allie.)
2. Gus says Allie is the “ghost that Noah has been running from.” (pg. 14; This reinforces that Noah has never gotten over Allie.).....

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / METAPHORS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

Other elements that are present in this novel include **symbols and metaphors**. **Symbols** are the use of some unrelated idea to represent something else. **Metaphors** are direct comparisons made between characters and ideas. There are many symbols and metaphors used by the author such as:

1. Noah metaphorically explains his life as a blue chip stock: fairly stable, more ups than downs, and gradually trending upward with time.
2. He goes on to describe his story as both a romance and a tragedy, which has involved a great deal of his life and the metaphorical path he chose to follow. He has no complaints about.....

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *The Notebook*

Author: Nicholas Sparks

Date Published: 1996

Meaning of the Title: It refers to the diary that Allie writes in about the events in her life, which ultimately tells the story Noah reads everyday to his wife to keep the memories of their love alive.

Setting: New Bern, North Carolina, 1932, 1946, and the present day at Creekside Extended Care Facility

Protagonists: Noah Calhoun and Allie Nelson

Antagonists: Allie's parents who don't think Noah is good enough for.....

STUDY QUESTIONS – MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

1. The one activity Noah never misses completing every morning at Creekside is
 - a.) walking in the garden with Allie.
 - b.) helping Allie take her medication.
 - c.) reading to Allie.
2. Noah and Allie had met at
 - a.) a picnic in New Bern.
 - b.) a festival in New Bern.
 - c.) Fin's home in New Bern.....

ANSWER KEY

1.) c. 2.) b. 3.) c. 4.) a. 5.) c. 6.) a. 7.) c. 8.) a. 9.) b. 10.) c. 11.) c. 12.) a. 13.) c. 14.) b. 15.) b.

ESSAY TOPICS – BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Noah believes that he and Allie have always been soul mates. Explain what he means by this.
2. Explain Allie's parents' reactions to Noah. Why would they feel that way?
3. What does Gus mean when he says that Allie....

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