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# *Shoeless Joe*

by

**W. P. Kinsella**

**1982**



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Sharon Radisch

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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

This novel is set circa 1976 in rural Iowa. The majority of the story takes place on Ray Kinsella's farm, which is a suburb of Iowa City, located in central Iowa.

The farming industry began changing radically in the 1970's. Smaller family owned farms were being bought out by companies and consolidated into single, larger farms. Small farms, producing a variety of crops and animals were being changed into specialty farms, concentrating on mass production of a single crop. This is the decade in which family farms began decreasing and cooperate farms were on the rise by.....

### LIST OF CHARACTERS

#### Major Characters

**Ray Kinsella** - Ray is the protagonist and narrator in this story. He is a baseball fanatic, dreamer and creator. He has four loves in his life: Annie, Karin, baseball and Iowa. Ray hears a voice, "If you....."

#### Minor Characters

**Annie** - Annie is Ray's loving wife. Not only is she understanding of Ray, but she is also an eternal optimist. She is extremely supportive of Ray and his dreams. Her main role in this story is to serve.....

**Karin** - Ray and Annie's five-year-old daughter. She is a dreamer, like her father, but also encompasses her mother's practicality. Karin's innocence is also important in the story; she is a.....

**Johnny Kinsella** - Ray's father who was a minor league catcher. He was a diehard.....

**Shoeless Joe Jackson** - Left fielder for the Chicago White Sox from 1915-1921. He was banned from baseball for life, in 1921, for allegedly throwing the 1919 World Series. He is the first to.....

**Mark** - Antagonist; Annie's brother who is eager to force Ray to leave his .....

**Bluestein** - Mark's business partner. He is also interested in capitalism and.....

**Eddie Scissons (Kid Scissons)** - Baseball fanatic and dreamer. It is he from who Ray purchased the farm. Eddie claims to be the oldest living Chicago Cub; however, it is later revealed that he .....

**Richard Kinsella** - Ray's identical twin who he has not seen since they were sixteen-years-old. He works with a traveling midway and finds himself drawn to Ray's farm during the midway's.....

**J.D. Salinger (Jerry)** - Writer whose reputation was based on his most popular novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). He was unhappy with his fame, lack of privacy, and being.....

**Archie "Moonlight" Graham (Doc Graham)** - played one inning of baseball for the New York Giants in 1905; he never had the opportunity to bat in the major leagues. He was a doctor.....

**Gypsy (Annie)** - Richard's love interest; she also works as a ticket saleswoman at the midway. Gypsy was immediately able to see the baseball stadium and players. She and Richard .....

### CONFLICT

The major conflict throughout this story is Ray vs. himself. He hears several voices, which he sees as instructions to carry out a mission. The mission is not clear at the beginning of the novel; however, as the story

unfolds and Ray continues following the instructions presented to him. At the end of the story, his conflicts are resolved and he is finally reacquainted with his father.

A second conflict throughout the story is Ray vs. Mark, which can also be viewed as Ray vs. the growth of technology. Mark symbolizes the larger companies, which put family owned farms out of business, during the 1970's.

**Protagonist** - Ray Kinsella is the protagonist of *Shoeless Joe*. He is the character around which the action develops. He is an idealist; because of his character, many dreams come true .....

**Antagonist** - Mark is the antagonist simply because his goal is to own Ray's farm, knock down the baseball field and turn the land into a highly profitable commercial farm. Mark symbolizes the conventional farmer's worst nightmare during this time period. He acquired possession of family.....

**Climax** - The climax of this story occurs when Ray and Salinger pick up a hitchhiker on their way out of Chisholm, Minnesota; the hitchhiker is the younger Archie Graham. This.....

**Falling Action** - The falling action occurs as Ray, Salinger, and Archie enter Iowa. Ray is disappointed in the upcoming franchises taking over the land of Iowa. More importantly, when they see the .....

**Outcome** - The outcome of the novel, also called the denouement, happens the evening when Salinger tells Ray of the dream he had. In his dream people were drawn to Ray's farm from all over the country. Salinger predicted that many would come and pay a fee to look around the land. They.....

## **SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)**

The story opens with the narrator and protagonist, Ray Kinsella, recalling three years earlier when he heard the voice that inspired him to build the baseball field. Ray heard the voice of a ballpark announcer state, "If you build it, he will come" (3). He heard this command twice and envisioned a baseball field. Ray believed that if he built a baseball field, it would be Shoeless Joe Jackson who will come. Since Shoeless Joe Jackson played left field, and was the heart of Ray's vision, Ray decided to construct a left field area first.

Ray introduces his family, Annie and Karin. He also describes the true loves of his life: Annie, Karin, Iowa and baseball.

As a child, Ray was raised on baseball. Instead of fairy tales and nursery rhymes, Ray's father regularly told him baseball stories, specifically the story of the Black Sox Scandal. Ray's father was a diehard Chicago White Sox fan and his hero was none other than Shoeless Joe Jackson. Johnny Kinsella played catcher in minor league baseball.

Ray has a strong love for Iowa: its land, people and the cornfields. Before Ray was a farmer he sold life insurance for a living. It was Annie, his loving wife and primary supporter, who inspired him to purchase the farm, leave the life insurance business and embrace the land of Iowa.

Annie is Ray's biggest fan and she believes wholeheartedly in him; she is the first to see a man on the baseball field. Ray talks with Shoeless Joe and watches him play baseball. He notices however, that Shoeless Joe is the only player that Ray can distinguish; the others are merely vapor-like figures. Shoeless Joe asks Ray if he can come back to the field to play ball. He states that there are also others who would like to.....

## THEMES

**Baseball/Religion** - The novel centers around the idea of baseball as a life-promoting, true religion, more so than traditional Christianity.

**Following Dreams** - Ray, J.D. Salinger, Moonlight Graham and Eddie Scissons all follow and live their dreams throughout the novel. They have all kept their dreams close to their hearts and.....  
Additional themes are discussed in the complete study guide.

## MOOD

The mood is idealistic and hopeful. W.P. Kinsella could have portrayed Ray as an absurd lunatic who listens to voices in his head. Instead, Kinsella's lyrical and sentimental prose causes.....

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

William Patrick (W.P.) Kinsella was born on May 24, 1935 in Alberta, Canada. He was an only child and lived with his parents on a farm, near Edmonton. He frequently walked around his farm and told stories to his cats. He worked a variety of jobs such as selling insurance, working as a taxi driver and managing a pizzeria. He began writing fiction at age 17, but did not enroll in college until age 35.

In 1970, Kinsella (age 35) enrolled in the University of Victoria to study creative writing; he received his B.A. in creative writing at age 39.

Kinsella first came to Iowa in August of 1976 to study at the Writers' Workshop in Iowa City. He quickly fell in love with the state: the seas of cornfields, dense humidity and tall bamboo.....

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND NOTES / ANALYSIS

### PART I: Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa

#### Summary

The novel opens with the narrator, Ray Kinsella, recalling an incident three years prior, in which he heard a voice that inspired him to build his baseball field. He heard the voice of a ballpark announcer say, "If you build it, he will come" (pg. 3). As the announcer spoke, Ray immediately envisioned a baseball field. He hears the same command a second time and is again flooded with visions of a baseball field, dimensions and even cost figures. Ray believes that it is Shoeless Joe Jackson, for whom he is to build the baseball field.

Ray describes how he met Annie and how supportive she is. It is Annie's words that continuously inspire Ray to build the baseball field despite their pending bankruptcy.

Ray then talks of his deceased father who was also a baseball fanatic and played in the minor leagues as a catcher. He was a diehard Chicago White Sox fan and was heartbroken when eight team members, including Shoeless Joe Jackson, were accused of throwing the 1919 World Series. Ray was raised on the story of the Black Sox Scandal; in the Kinsella household Kenesaw Mountain Landis was synonymous with the Devil. Even as his father was dying, he and Ray listened to a White Sox game on the radio and his father told him, for the last time, the story of the Black Sox Scandal.

Initially, Ray was only concerned with building left most part of the baseball field. There was originally no backstop or grandstand, home plate was constructed from two-by-fours and he had built only about fifty feet of a left-field wall. His intuition told him to mainly be concerned with the left-field grass.

He repeatedly talks about his love for Iowa throughout the novel. Ray previously sold life insurance and

despised his job. It was Annie who inspired him to quit his job and purchase the farm on which they live. Annie was the first to see a man on the baseball field; Ray immediately knows that it is Shoeless Joe Jackson.

Ray goes to the baseball field to talk with Shoeless Joe; they talk about the true consistency of the left-field grass. Shoeless Joe is the only player that is distinct to Ray. The other players on the field appear as vapor with nondescript faces and features. Ray and Shoeless Joe continue conversing about the field and baseball. Ray sees his daughter, Karin, approach the baseball field and he is terrified that players will disappear. He is relieved that nothing is disturbed as a result of her presence.

Shoeless Joe tells Ray that there are other players that would like to come back and play on his field. This inspires Ray to finish building the rest of the baseball field.

### Notes

W.P. Kinsella wrote the first part of this novel as background information for the story. The narrator and protagonist, Ray Kinsella, describes an incident three years ago, in which he heard the voice of a ballpark announcer say, "if you build it, he will come" (pg. 3). Throughout this part Ray intermittently describes his love for baseball and Annie, his father, and building his baseball field.

Ray's father was a baseball fanatic and Chicago White Sox fan. He was brokenhearted when eight members of the White Sox were banned from baseball, for life, based on the accusation that they threw the 1919 World Series. This story is often referred to as the Black Sox Scandal and involved pitchers Eddie Cicotte and Claude Williams, first baseman Chick Gandil, shortstop Swede Risberg, third baseman Buck Weaver, infielder Fred McMullin and outfielders Happy Felsch and Shoeless Joe Jackson. At the time of the 1919 World Series, ball players were receiving minimal salaries while the owners of the teams became rich. A group of gamblers allegedly paid the eight players to purposely try and lose the World Series; the eight would further be known as the "Black Sox". After several court cases, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, baseball's first commissioner, banned the eight players from the game altogether. This is why "the name Kenesaw Mountain Landis became synonymous with the Devil" (pg. 7).

This background is important for several reasons. Once Ray hears the voice of the announcer, he believes that he is to build the field for Shoeless Joe: one of his father's favorite players, and who was banned from playing ball for the rest of his life. This alludes to the fact that Ray wants to build the field for Shoeless Joe so he can continue his dream of playing baseball. This is also when we learn about Ray's idealistic character. He believes that when he builds this baseball field, Shoeless Joe will appear; he has been dead for over twenty years. Ray therefore concentrates mainly on building a left field, which was Shoeless Joe's position.

Annie is also introduced in this section. Annie has always supported Ray and encouraged him to follow his dreams. It was she, who supported Ray leaving the life-insurance business, purchasing their farm, and even building this baseball field. Annie's main role throughout this story is to unconditionally love and support Ray. She believes in and understands Ray so much that it is not surprising that she is the first to see a man on the baseball field.

While Ray is talking with Shoeless Joe, for the first time, Karin walks down to the field to her father. Ray is frightened that her appearance will cause Shoeless Joe and the other players to disappear. Karin can also see the ballplayers and Ray is relieved that "her innocence has not disturbed the balance" (pg. 18). Karin and Annie's belief in Ray is causing them to see the baseball game. This introduces one of the recurring themes in the story: the parallelism of baseball to a religion. Only those who believe in Ray can see the game.

Shoeless Joe is the only ballplayer who Ray can distinguish; the others appear to him as a vapor. As Shoeless Joe tells Ray that there are others who would love to play on his field, it becomes apparent that as Ray finishes

building the field, the remaining players will come. When Ray tells Shoeless Joe that he knows a catcher who would love to play, Ray is talking about his father. This is foreshadowing the true reason behind Ray's journey: to be reacquainted with his father and to have him play in the major leagues. ....

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Ray Kinsella** - Although there are many characters in this novel, Ray Kinsella is the main character around which the action of the story develops. His idealistic nature is very well developed in the story, beginning with him hearing a voice, which inspired him to build a baseball field. He had faith that if he built the baseball field Shoeless Joe Jackson would appear, which he did. Ray then heard a second voice, which motivated him to take the reclusive J.D. Salinger to a baseball game. The third voice that Ray hears influences him to travel to Chisholm, Minnesota in search for the late Moonlight Graham.

Ray is important to the story for many reasons; Ray is a dreamer, a believer, and a risk taker. His purpose of the story is to unconditionally believe in himself and his dreams. Ray also serves.....

### PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The plot is fairly straight forward, however, it can be complicated at times; since Ray is the narrator, he tells the story, but he intermittently interjects his own memories and thoughts throughout the story. Although the main story line is the essence of the novel, W.P. Kinsella uses Ray's interjections as.....

### EXPOSITION

The majority of the Exposition occurs in *Part I: Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa*. In the Exposition, introductory material is presented which gives the reader the setting, creates the tone and presents the characters and other facts necessary to understanding the story. Ray Kinsella is .....

### RISING ACTION

The Rising Action is the events that build from the conflict. The start of the Rising Action is when Ray hears the second voice, "Ease his pain" (31). When he hears this voice he envisions he and J.D. Salinger watching a baseball game together at Fenway Park. This inspires Ray to embark on.....

### CLIMAX

The climax is the high point of the story and also the point at which the outcome can be predicted. The Climax is prefaced when Ray and Salinger pick up a hitchhiker as they are.....

### FALLING ACTION

The Falling Action is the events after the Climax, which close the story and lead to the resolution. Ray, Salinger, and Archie enter Iowa and are very disappointed in the .....

### RESOLUTION (Denouement)

The resolution occurs gradually in several parts: Moonlight Graham bats in a professional baseball game. He then gives baseball up to continue his real dream in life, which was to practice medicine; Eddie Scissons sees himself as Kid Scissons playing in the major leagues and is buried in his.....

## THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

**Baseball/Religion** - Throughout this story baseball is presented as a life-promoting, true religion. The essence of this theme is that Americans, in general, must cling to baseball as one of the last unifying traditions in their lives. W.P. Kinsella presents baseball as a background and metaphor to tell us a little something more about who we are and what we need in life: faith, love, dreams and unity.

**Following Dreams** - Ray is a dreamer and believer; he goes to any length to.....  
Additional themes are analyzed in the complete study guide.

## POINT OF VIEW

The story is told in the first person. This means that the narrator, Ray Kinsella, is a character in.....

## OTHER ELEMENTS

### QUOTATIONS - IMPORTANT QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

**1. "Annie understands, though it is me she understands and not always what is happening."** (pg. 10) - Ray  
This quote is the essence of Annie and Ray's relationship; it also represents the faith and love theme between Annie and Ray. Ray is describing that although Annie may not understand his devotion to baseball or the voices he hears, but she has eternal faith and love for her husband; she unconditionally inspires him to do what makes him happy and what he feels is right. ....

.....**10. "...if I have the courage to do this, then you'll have to stop badgering me about the other business. I mean, publishing is such a pale horse compared to this. But what a story it will make...a man being able to touch a perfect dream. I'll write of it. I promise."** (pg. 263) – J.D. Salinger  
Salinger is also demonstrating the return of his innocence in this quote. He is confessing that he longs for a simpler time. Salinger loved baseball during his childhood and was heartbroken when the Polo Grounds were torn down. His love for baseball was revived, through Ray, and he.....

Edition used: First Mariner Books edition 1999

## SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS

**Rye in Youth** - The prominent motif is very similar to that of J.D. Salinger's, *The Catcher in the Rye*. W.P. Kinsella frequently references the book in this story because of their similar themes. In *The Catcher in the Rye* the main character, Holden Caulfield, desires to catch children.....

**Iowa and Cornfields** - It is also important that a majority of the novel takes place in Iowa. Iowa was part of the Louisiana Purchase, which occurred in 1803. President, Thomas Jefferson purchased a large stretch of land west of the Mississippi River, from Napoleon Bonaparte. Also during this.....

## Important/Key Facts Summary

**Title:** *Shoeless Joe*

**Author:** W.P. Kinsella

**Date Published:** 1982

**Meaning of Title:** Shoeless Joe Jackson was Ray's father's favorite baseball player. He is the first to appear on Ray's baseball field and eventually brings Ray's father to play on the field where he and Ray reunite.

**Genre:** Fiction

**Point of View:** First Person

**Setting:** Rural Iowa, circa 1976.....

### Main Points:

- The book opens with Ray Kinsella recalling an incident when he heard a voice, which inspired him to begin constructing a baseball field.
- Shoeless Joe Jackson appears on the baseball field and tells Ray that if he finishes the field, others will come to play.....

## **STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ**

1. Who is the first player to appear on Ray's baseball field?
  - A. Chick Gandil
  - B. Lefty Williams
  - C. Happy Felsch
  - D. Joe Jackson
2. What are the major loves in Ray's life?
  - A. Annie, Ray's mother, Richard, Karin
  - B. Annie, Karin, Iowa, Baseball
  - C. Baseball, Shoeless Joe Jackson, Ray's Father, Annie
  - A. Annie, J.D. Salinger, Baseball, Iowa.....

### **Answer Key**

1) D 2) B 3) D 4) A 5) C 6) A 7) B 8) D 9) B 10) C 11) D 12) B 13) A 14) C 15) D

## **ESSAY TOPIC IDEAS - BOOK REPORT TOPICS**

1. Throughout this novel there are countless references and parallelisms to baseball as a religion. Identify specific examples and discuss how they are referenced to baseball and religion.
2. Why are Annie and/or Karin usually the first to see the baseball players on the field?
3. Thinking back to what Eddie Scissons described as the "word" (pg. 229), use this as a basis to discuss what you think the word is and how it should be applied to everyday life. ....

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