

PinkMonkey® Literature Notes on . . .

This is a sample of the MonkeyNotes for "Something Wicked This Way Comes". This sample only contains a few selected excerpts from the summary, but it will provide you with an idea of the layout and content.

Something Wicked This Way Comes

by

Ray Bradbury



MonkeyNotes by Mindy Matter

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

Setting

The text is set in Green Town, Illinois during October 23 - October 25. The year is not listed, but it seems probable that it takes place in the 1950's era. Several things might lead a reader to conclude this fact, including the simple freedoms the boys enjoy, the respect the boys offer to adults, and the small town.....

CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Will Halloway - Will has blond-white hair the color of milk. He has clear blue eyes, and he was born one minute before midnight on October 30. He is happy with who he is, and overall, he's a good.....

Jim Nightshade - Jim has wild, thick hair, the color of waxed chestnuts. He has mint green eyes, and he was born one minute after midnight on October 31. He's thirteen years, eleven months, and 23 days old. Jim is constantly looking for excitement. He is not content with who he is. His sense of

Charles Halloway - Charles is Will's father. He's fifty-four and works for the library as a custodian. He loves Will and does the best he can, but his thoughts are consumed with the idea that.....

Mr. Dark / The Illustrated Man - Mr. Dark is tall and has a pale, pockmarked face. He wears a red vest with a black suit that appears to be made of itchy things like brambles. His hair and

Conflict

Antagonist - The conflict of this story definitely occurs within two realms: man versus man, and man versus the supernatural. That's not to say, though, that there are two antagonists. The only real antagonist

Protagonist - The major stable protagonist of the story is Will Halloway. Occasionally Jim

Climax - The conflict comes to a head in the climactic final battle that occurs over the last.....

Outcome - The conflict has several outcomes: the carnival is destroyed, Will and Jim remain.....

Plot (Synopsis)

On the afternoon of October 23, Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade are sitting on their front lawns when a traveling lightning rod salesman arrives, and after talking with the boys, offers them a free lightning rod for a storm that promises to come in that night. The boys have spent literally every second of their lives together. At thirteen, though, differences are starting to become apparent. Will is quite content with who he is. Jim can only look to what will be. He is unhappy with all of who he is.

At three a.m. on October 24, a carnival arrives in town. The boys hear the music, and run out to meet the carnival train, but immediately, they know something is different about this carnival, as it looks like it puts itself together. The boys spend the entire next day at the carnival trying to discover anything strange about it. Only one strange thing happens during the day. The boys' seventh grade teacher, Miss Foley, comes out of the mirror maze, frightened, saying a little girl who looks like she did as a child, is lost in the maze. She goes home to rest, and at sundown, the boys find the odd duck they're looking for. They discover a working carousel that has an out-of-order sign posted on it. The redheaded Cooger immediately appears, about to throw them out. Dark, who looks like his name, appears, gives the boys a free ride ticket and asks them to leave. They start to leave, but end up hiding in a tree. From their view, the carousel begins to run backward, playing the funeral march backward. Cooger rides the backward carousel around 28 times, and emerges as a boy of 12.

Will and Jim follow him to Miss Foley's house, where she's taken him in at his suggestion that he's her nephew. Will knows they're in trouble for what they've seen. Jim's intrigued, as he knows the carnival could make him the older man he wishes he could be.

The boys arrive home late, only to get yelled at by their parents, and sent to bed without any supper. Later that evening, Will watches as Jim creeps out of his house alone and head toward Miss Foley's, hoping

THEMES

Major Themes

Loss of childhood innocence - Will and Jim, on the verge of maturity, also reach psychological.....

Lack of contentment with life - Several characters in the book, notably Jim, Charles, and Miss

Evil can only be defeated through true joy - Cooger and Dark are only defeated through joy

Mood

The mood of the novel is sinister, suspenseful, and dark. The suspense begins when Tom

Background Information

RAY BRADBURY - Ray Bradbury was born in Waukegan, Illinois, on August 22, 1920. The third son of Leonard Spaulding Bradbury and Esthere Marie Moberg Bradbury, Ray showed promise as a writer at the early age of eleven when he began writing short stories on butcher paper. As a child, he was fascinated by magic and fantasy and spent many an afternoon dreaming that he would grow up to be a magician himself. Bradbury's family moved between Waukegan and Tucson, Arizona, several times. In 1934, the family moved to Los Angeles, California, where Bradbury attended high school and involved himself in the drama club. He planned to become an actor, but a few of his teachers recognized his talent and encouraged him to begin writing. Bradbury graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1938 and did not attend further formal education. From 1938 to 1942, Bradbury sold newspapers on Los Angeles street corners. He.....

Literary/Historical Information

This text was first published in 1962, and it is highly possible that some of the ideas were created from Bradbury's childhood experiences. Many of the actions the boys engage in have a very

Summaries and Notes

Prologue

Summary

October, according to the narrator, is an interesting month for boys. While months like June are better, it's not all bad because school has been in session for a month, and things are getting easier. Moreover, though, Halloween is at the end of the month, so boys spend time planning their costumes for the YMCA party on October 31. One October, Halloween comes early for Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade, two boys who are both about to turn fourteen. That year, Halloween arrives three hours after midnight on October 24. It was that October, the text mentions, that the boys truly grow up and are never so young again.

Notes

The prologue establishes the idea that it is fall, a season of looming darkness. The seasons are described through a boy's eyes, allowing readers to immediately connect with Will and Jim and feel the youth the story holds. It is possible, through this early description, to see the excitement they anticipate through both

Halloween and their birthdays. It is also, however, immediately possible, to sense the ominous tone in the text. The narrator already previews the idea that the boys will lose their youth.

Part I

Chapter 1

Summary

In the first chapter, we meet the two main characters, Jim Nightshade and Will Halloway, as they are lying together on Will's front lawn. It is a cloudy October day in Green Town, Illinois. Jim is described as having chestnut hair and green eyes. Will has blond hair and blue eyes. A lightning rod salesman is making his way door-to-door throughout the town. He notices the boys and stops to talk with them. After ascertaining that their parents aren't home and they have no money themselves, he asks their names.

Will replies quickly and truthfully. Jim considers lying to the man, but ends up telling him the truth. Already differences between the two boys' personalities are being established. The salesman comments on the abnormality of Jim's last name, and Will proudly relates the story of their births to the salesman. Will was born one minute before midnight on October 30. Jim was born one minute after midnight on October 31. Bradbury mentions it is a story the boys have proudly told all of their lives. After asking about the boys' financial state again, the lightning rod salesman hands them a free lightning rod, and tells them that lightning will strike one of their houses. Will immediately comments on the weight of the lightning rod. Jim studies it for a moment and questions its various cultural markings. He notices both Egyptian and Phoenician markings. The salesman answers Jim's question by revealing his name, Tom Fury, then discussing the idea that storms occur in all cultures, and for the rod to "communicate" properly with the storm, it must have languages of various cultures. The salesman assures the boys, at the prompting of Jim's questions, that not only will a large storm will definitely strike their town tonight, it will certainly strike one of their homes. Will begs to know which one, and after touching both of the houses, the salesman indicates that it will strike Jim's home. Will feels a bit dejected, but Jim is quite proud. The salesman hurries on his way, leaving Jim and Will.

Will pushes Jim to get the ladder and the nails to hang the rod, but Jim suggests that hanging the lightning rod would spoil the adventure of being struck by lightning. As Will gathers the necessary materials, Jim doesn't move. Only after Will reminds Jim that his mother will also be burnt if lightning strikes the house does Jim begin to help Will. As the chapter ends, thunder sounds in the distance.

Notes

The first chapter sets the agitated tone that we will feel for the rest of the story. The storm mentioned in the chapter foreshadows the uneasiness presented to us throughout the text. The fact that the markings on the lightning rod are multi-cultural insinuates that storms, mayhem, and evil cross cultural boundaries.

This chapter also sets up much of the conflict between the boys' personalities. Will was born one minute before midnight on October 30. Bradbury refers to his birth as being in the "light." Jim was born one minute after midnight on October 31. Jim's birth is referred to as being in the "dark." These hue adjectives will be used throughout the novel and characterize the boys' personalities. Jim has a tendency to be more mischievous. He is starving for adventure on a constant basis. More than anything, Jim wants to know "why," and "what if" for everything. Jim looks at hidden details. Will leans toward surface issues. Jim has a mature quality that Will doesn't. Above all, though, Will is happy with who he is, and Jim isn't. From this point forward in the novel, these personality divisions will grow.

The lightning rod salesman is quite representative of the other adults we meet in the book. He seems to remember his childhood and connect with the boys on that basis. He wants to impress and scare the boys. He enjoys the youth the boys represent.

Chapter 2

Summary

This chapter opens with the comment that Jim only reads books of adventure, intrigue and fantasy. As he reads and discusses these books with Will, Will takes it in, following Jim's lead.

After the boys nailed the lightning rod to the roof, an act of cowardice in Jim's mind, they literally run to the library. As they reach the library door, Jim stops, thinking he has heard music on the horizon. Will doesn't hear it, and after a minute or so, Jim shrugs and heads in. The boys consider the depths of the library as an entire world filled with far-off places, mystery, and adventure.

While making their way through the library, Will sees his father, Charles William Halloway, the library custodian. Will and his father, as always, are surprised to see each other. As Charles helps Jim look for books on dinosaurs, Will realizes that his dad looks like him if one was looking through a smashed mirror. Will thinks back on the times he has awoken in the early hours of the morning, looked out the window, and seen the lights of library still on, indicating that Charles is still inside reading. Charles then shakes Will back to reality by asking if he wants a "white-hat" book or a "black-hat" book. The boys ask him to explain, and Charles attempts to describe the difference in people's attitudes. Charles suggests that Jim is looking for black-hat books - books dealing with excitement and evil - while Will tends toward books about goodness and peace. Jim asks about the color of Charles' hat. It makes Charles a bit uneasy to know that Jim can't tell. As a whole, the commentary goes over the boy's heads, and Will settles for a Jules Verne story. The boys check out their books, and as they leave, they notice a clear sky. Jim gets a bit upset, worried that he won't get a storm. Will reassures him, suggesting that the goose bumps on his arm imply there will be a storm. The boys run for home.

Notes

Bradbury's early commentary on books further reveals the nature of youth and boyhood. The text asks the reader to recall a time when books held a world of adventure not possible for the average person. Jim's love for all things related to adventure, espionage, intrigue, and crime is reflected in his literary choices. However, as Jim breathes these stories to Will, Will inhales Jim's passions. This furthers the contrast of the boys - indicating that Jim is the leader, and Will is the follower. The difference is only furthered when Charles suggests Jim wears a black-hat, and Will wears a white-hat. Charles' idea that black-hats symbolize all things connected to evil, and white-hats appear to be the opposite allows readers to see a good versus evil theme developing. It is strongly hinted that though Charles himself wears a white-hat, he once held many of the same attitudes and ideas that Jim does.

The idea that the boys run everywhere they go continues the theme of innocence and youth. Bradbury suggests that their style of running isn't a race, it is simply for pleasure - an indulgence they boys always hope to have.

Charles William Halloway is only the second adult we've met in the novel. He, like most of the other adult characters in the text, envies the boys for their youth. He also regards his age as a handicap, a theme that will continue through the novel. The fact that Will wakes up during the night and sees his father's lights on at the library indicates that Charles spends large amounts of time alone dealing with his regrets.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

Characters

Will Halloway - Will drives the story. He appears as a highly typical boy-next-door type of thirteen-year-old. He is continually referred to as good. It is his overall goodness, though, and his discovery.....

Jim Nightshade - Jim is unhappy with his life from the start of the novel. He no longer has a father, and he's lost two siblings. He's mildly angry, and he's in search of the elusive something better. He's hungry for excitement and adventure on a constant basis. He starts the lack of contentment in life.....

Charles Halloway - Charles tries to be a good man, but he's usually so busy thinking about it that he has little time for doing it. He wants to be part of Will's life, but he feels unable to communicate

Dark - Dark's sinister nature both draws people in and pushes them away. It is impossible to tell his age, as with the carousel, age is not a factor for him. It is clear, though, that he enjoys pain in all forms. He.....

PLOT

The text is broken into three parts: arrivals, pursuits, and departures. The arrivals section deals primarily with the exposition and rising action of the story. We meet all of the necessary and important characters, and by the end of the arrivals section, we know about the hidden evils of the carnival. We also know the carnival will undoubtedly pursue the boys for hurting Cooger. The pursuits section also deals with the rising action.....

Themes

Loss of innocence - This theme begins at the end of the prologue when the text suggests there was an October week where the boys grew up overnight and were never so young again. It is clear

Lack of contentment with life - This text presents several characters who are wholly discontent with their lives, particularly with their ages. This unhappiness leads them to drastic measures that prove unhealthy for themselves and those around them. The first adult we meet in the book, Tom Fury, envies

Evil can only be defeated through true joy - The end of section two leaves readers with no clear plan of action, only with an impression. Charles was nearing death, and he was only able to step.....

Quotations

"Maybe they're already here." *End of Chapter 54 (page 214)*- Charles Halloway - Charles first utters these words with regard to the fact that eventually the carnival will return, and perhaps not in a recognizable shape. The boys repeat the quotation. It is important because and ending point of the.....

Study Questions

(answer key below)

1. In order of appearance, what are Cooger's various identities?
 - A. Nephew, Cooger, Electrico
 - B. Cooger, Nephew, Electrico
 - C. Electico, Cooger, Nephew.....

Essay Topic Ideas

1. How are the various characters in the novel illustrative of the dark versus light conflict? How is the dark versus light conflict presented in the novel?.....

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