

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES

This Boy's Life

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AUTHOR NOTES

About the Author

Tobias Jonathan Wolff was born on the 19th of June, 1945 in Birmingham, Alabama to Rosemary Loftus and Arthur Wolff. A renowned American writer, Wolff is best known for his short stories and his memoir, *This Boy's Life*. After a troubled childhood and adolescence, Wolff joined the Army and served in Vietnam where he became an advisor for the South Vietnamese military. Upon his discharge, he moved to England and attended Oxford University where he graduated with first class honours in 1972 and began his writing career. This was followed by an M.A from Stanford. Wolff has received many commendations and awards for his work, most notably the PEN/Malamud Award, the Rea Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and the PEN/Faulkner Award. He is currently a Professor of creative writing at Stanford University.

Childhood and Adolescence

Wolff's memoir traces his experiences of a nomadic childhood and difficult adolescence living with his step-father in Chinook, Washington. Wolff's parents divorced when he was young; he and his mother travelled from state to state trying their luck as his mother desperately tried to build a better life for them. In an attempt to transform himself, Tobias changed his name to Jack. Growing up, he was involved in a string of incidents at school, told lies, stole, and drank. He was accepted to, and expelled from Hill, a preparatory boarding school. In *This Boy's Life* Wolff reflects on his life from 1955 to 1965 and the many facades he assumed along the way.

GENRE

Memoir

Wolff's account of growing up in post-war America is a memoir. Whilst similar to an autobiography, a memoir differs in that it is a detailed account of a specific aspect of a person's life. In Wolff's case, the narrative chronicles his years on the road with his mother and the circumstances that led to them to living in Chinook with his aggressive step-father. Wolff's recreation of the events of the past in his memoir gives readers an insight into his motivations as a troubled teenager.

The main characteristics of a memoir that can be found in *This Boy's Life* include:

Relevant Themes

The success of memoirs is dependent on the ability of the reader to connect with the themes explored by the author. Hope, the search for freedom, personal loss, and the longing for the meaning of life are a few of the many universal themes in the text that readers can find relevant in their own lives. Wolff's reflection on his years in Chinook examine the frustrations and cruelties of adolescence.

Sincerity

As a great storyteller, Wolff writes in an honest and sincere tone. His ability to admit, in hindsight, that he knew exactly what he was doing at times and still failed to feel remorse, along with his revelations about his constant lies conveys a sense of vulnerability and authenticity to his words.

Reflection

The ability to reflect on one's past is crucial to a memoir. Not only is the ability to give a detailed description of the past important, but as Wolff demonstrates, there must be a sense of self-reflection on one's actions and motivations.