

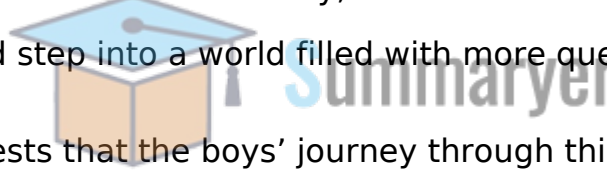
Prologue

Prologue opens with a reflection on the distinctiveness of October, a month that carries an air of nostalgia and contrasts sharply with the other months of the year. September is often disliked, marking the end of the freedom that summer brings and the beginning of the school year, which for many, signals the return to routine and obligations. August, the last month of freedom, is cherished as the final stretch of carefree days before the school year begins. July is seen as the epitome of summer—a time when the constraints of school are entirely absent, allowing for complete enjoyment. June also holds a sense of joy, as it marks the beginning of summer, though it is still somewhat tethered to the ending of school. These months set the stage for the unburdened energy of childhood, where time feels boundless and full of possibilities.

However, October introduces a different tone, one filled with complexity and transition. The school year has already begun, and the boys, Will and Jim, are adjusting to the rhythm of their new routines. They are still finding moments of play and excitement in their daily lives, such as coming up with creative Halloween costume ideas for the YMCA's upcoming celebration or considering small pranks like leaving trash on old man Prickett's porch. The changes in the environment reflect the shifting of time—autumn's cool breeze fills the air with the scent of leaves and wood smoke, and the skies take on shades of orange and grey as the sun sets earlier each evening. The boys feel the transition as Halloween nears, but there is a deeper, more subtle awareness growing within them, one that signals the passage of time and the coming changes that will redefine their experiences.

This particular Halloween arrives unexpectedly early on October 24, marking a pivotal point in the lives of James Nightshade and William Halloway. Both boys, who live next to each other, are nearing their fourteenth birthdays, which makes this moment in

their lives feel even more significant. At thirteen years old and on the cusp of turning fourteen, they stand on the threshold of adolescence, a time when childhood begins to give way to the complexities of growing up. Their connection to one another, shaped by a shared birthday and an unbreakable friendship, is about to be tested by the changes that come with this next phase of life. This shift is marked by a sense of foreboding, as the boys begin to sense that something beyond their control is about to unfold—an event that will change everything they know about the world around them. They are about to confront a new reality, one that will require them to leave behind their innocence and step into a world filled with more questions than answers.



The prologue suggests that the boys' journey through this October week will involve a rapid and profound change. They will mature quickly, faced with experiences that will force them to let go of the carefree innocence they have known. As their world begins to shift around them, the prologue captures the essence of this transition with a mixture of nostalgia for what they are leaving behind and a sense of unease about what lies ahead. The month of October, with its cool breezes, early sunsets, and the promise of Halloween, becomes a symbolic turning point in their lives. It marks a critical juncture where everything begins to change, and they are poised on the brink of a new reality that will challenge their perceptions of the world. The prologue leaves readers with a sense of anticipation, knowing that the events unfolding in the coming days will be anything but ordinary and that the boys' lives will never be the same again.