



# **A Confederacy of Dunces**

By John Kennedy Toole

# Book summary & main ideas

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## Summary:

A Confederacy of Dunces is a novel by John Kennedy Toole, published in 1980. The book follows the misadventures of Ignatius J. Reilly, an educated but slothful 30-year-old man living with his mother in New Orleans. After being kicked out of college and losing his job at the Night Of Joy bar, Ignatius decides to take up a job as a hot dog vendor on the streets of New Orleans. His adventures lead him into various scrapes and encounters with colorful characters such as Darlene, Burma Jones, Santa Battaglia and Claude Robichaux.

Ignatius' mother Irene is desperate for her son to find gainful employment so she can

stop supporting him financially. She arranges for him to work at Levy Pants factory where he meets Mr. Gonzalez who becomes his mentor and friend despite their differences in age and background. Meanwhile, Ignatius continues selling hot dogs on the street while also writing letters to people like President Eisenhower about social issues that concern him.

The novel culminates when Ignatius discovers that Mr. Gonzalez has been fired from Levy Pants due to false accusations made against him by Mrs. Levy's daughter Lana Lee who runs another business called "Paradise Vendors". In order to help clear Mr. Gonzalez's name, Ignatius organizes a protest march which leads them all back to Paradise Vendors where they confront Lana Lee about her lies.

In the end it turns out that Mrs Lee was actually trying to frame Mr Gonzalez

because she was jealous of his relationship with Irene Reilly (Ignatius' mother). With this revelation everything comes full circle; Irene gets her wish for her son finding gainful employment while also helping save someone else's reputation in the process.

A Confederacy of Dunces is an absurdist comedy set during 1960s America which explores themes such as class struggle, racism and bureaucracy through its unique cast of characters led by protagonist Ignatius J Reilly - an unlikely hero whose bumbling antics often lead himself into trouble yet somehow always manage come out unscathed.</p></div>

Main ideas:

**#1. Ignatius J. Reilly is an eccentric, unemployed 30-year-old living with his mother in New Orleans. He is an educated, yet lazy and opinionated man**

Page 4/37

***who is determined to avoid work and instead pursue his own interests. Ignatius is the main character of the novel and his misadventures drive the plot.***

Ignatius J. Reilly is an eccentric, unemployed 30-year-old living with his mother in New Orleans. He is a highly educated man who has chosen to avoid work and instead pursue his own interests. Ignatius life revolves around the pursuit of leisure activities such as reading books, writing letters, and playing board games. His opinions are often extreme and he can be quite stubborn when it comes to getting what he wants. Despite this, Ignatius is also incredibly intelligent and witty which makes him a unique character that readers cant help but love.

Throughout A Confederacy of Dunces by John Kennedy Toole, Ignatius

misadventures drive the plot forward as he attempts to find himself in a world that doesn't seem to understand or appreciate him for who he truly is. From working at Levy Pants Company where his antics cause chaos among the employees to trying out various schemes like selling hot dogs on the street corner or becoming an artist's model; Ignatius never stops searching for something meaningful in life even if it means going against societal norms.

Ultimately, Ignatius J. Reilly serves as an example of how one person's determination and resilience can lead them down unexpected paths towards self-discovery despite all odds being stacked against them.

***#2. Ignatius's™ mother, Mrs. Reilly, is a domineering woman who is determined to get her son a job. She is***

***constantly nagging him to find work and is often frustrated by his lack of ambition.***

Mrs. Reilly is a formidable woman who will not take no for an answer when it comes to her sons future. She has high expectations of Ignatius and is determined to get him a job, no matter what it takes. Mrs. Reilly often nags Ignatius about his lack of ambition and pushes him to find work, even if he doesnt want it or isnt qualified for the position. Despite her domineering nature, she truly cares about Ignatius success and wants the best for him.

Mrs. Reillys determination can be seen in how she goes out of her way to help Ignatius find employment opportunities; from writing letters on his behalf to setting up interviews with potential employers, Mrs. Reilly does whatever she can do

ensure that her son finds gainful employment.

Though Mrs. Reilly may come off as overbearing at times, there is no denying that she loves her son deeply and only wants what's best for him in life.

**#3. *Myrna Minkoff is Ignatiusâ€™™ childhood friend and love interest. She is a liberal activist who is determined to help Ignatius find his place in the world.***

Myrna Minkoff is a character in John Kennedy Tooles novel A Confederacy of Dunces. She is Ignatius childhood friend and love interest, and she has remained close to him throughout his life. Myrna is an outspoken liberal activist who believes strongly in social justice and equality for all people. She encourages Ignatius to pursue his dreams, even when it seems like the world around him doesn't



understand or appreciate them. Despite her strong beliefs, Myrna also understands that Ignatius needs time to find himself before he can truly make a difference in the world.

Myrna serves as both a mentor and confidante for Ignatius during their interactions throughout the novel. She helps him see past his own self-doubt and insecurity so that he can focus on what really matters: making a positive impact on society through his unique talents and ideas. Her unwavering support gives Ignatius the courage to take risks, which ultimately leads him down an unexpected path of success.

In many ways, Myrna represents hope for Ignatius; she shows him that there are still people out there who believe in him despite all odds. Through her friendship with Ignatius, Myrna proves that true

friends will always be there no matter what happens” and this message resonates deeply with readers long after they finish reading *A Confederacy of Dunces*.

***#4. Darlene is a young woman who works at the Night of Joy bar. She is a kind and compassionate person who befriends Ignatius and helps him find a job.***

Darlene is a young woman with a heart of gold. She works at the Night of Joy bar, where she meets Ignatius and takes an immediate liking to him. Despite his eccentricities, Darlene sees something special in Ignatius and goes out of her way to help him find employment. She introduces him to Mr. Levy, who eventually hires Ignatius as a hot dog vendor on Canal Street.

Darlene's kindness towards Ignatius does

not go unnoticed; he is deeply touched by her generosity and friendship. He even begins to think that perhaps there are still good people in the world after all - people like Darlene who are willing to look past his flaws and see the potential within him.

Throughout their time together, Darlene serves as a mentor for Ignatius, helping him navigate through life's challenges with patience and understanding. Her compassion for others is truly inspiring, making her one of the most memorable characters from John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*.

***#5. Mr. Levy is the owner of Levy Pants, a clothing store where Ignatius finds a job. He is a kind and understanding man who is willing to give Ignatius a chance despite his eccentricities.***

Mr. Levy is the owner of Levy Pants, a clothing store where Ignatius finds a job. He is an elderly man with a kind and understanding demeanor who takes pity on Ignatius despite his eccentricities. Mr. Levy sees potential in Ignatius and gives him a chance to prove himself as an employee at his store, even though he knows that it will be difficult for someone like Ignatius to fit into the traditional workplace environment.

Despite being aware of how strange and unpredictable Ignatius can be, Mr. Levy still offers him employment out of compassion and generosity. He understands that everyone deserves a second chance, no matter their background or circumstances, which makes him stand out from other employers in the area who may not have been so open-minded.

Throughout *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Mr. Levy serves as an example of kindness and acceptance towards those who are different or less fortunate than others; he shows us that we should never judge people based on first impressions but instead give them opportunities to show what they are capable of achieving.

***#6. Lana Lee is the owner of the Night of Joy bar. She is a tough and ambitious woman who is determined to make her business a success.***

Lana Lee is a force to be reckoned with. She has worked hard to make her bar, the Night of Joy, a success and she will not let anyone stand in her way. Her ambition and determination are evident in every aspect of the business; from the drinks served to the music played, Lana ensures that everything is up to her high standards. She takes great pride in providing an enjoyable

atmosphere for all who enter her establishment.

Lana's no-nonsense attitude can be intimidating at times but it also serves as a reminder that she means business.

Despite being tough on those around her, Lana still manages to maintain a sense of warmth and hospitality towards customers and employees alike. It's clear that she cares deeply about making sure everyone feels welcome at the Night of Joy.

It's easy to see why Lana Lee has been so successful with running the Night of Joy bar - she puts passion into everything she does and never stops striving for excellence. With such dedication behind it, there's no doubt that this place will continue thriving for many years to come.

**#7. *The police officers of New Orleans are a constant presence in the***

***novel. They are often portrayed as corrupt and incompetent, and they are often at odds with Ignatius.***

The police officers of New Orleans are a constant presence in *A Confederacy of Dunces*. They are often portrayed as corrupt and incompetent, with Ignatius Reilly frequently clashing with them due to his disdain for authority figures. The police officers' incompetence is highlighted when they fail to apprehend the hot dog vendor who has been harassing Ignatius throughout the novel, despite having multiple opportunities to do so.

Furthermore, their corruption is demonstrated by their willingness to accept bribes from Mr. Levy in exchange for not arresting him after he was caught shoplifting.

Ignatius's interactions with the police also serve as an example of how his own

stubbornness can lead him into trouble. He refuses to cooperate or compromise with them even when it would be beneficial for him, such as when he refuses Officer Mancuso's offer of leniency if he agrees to leave town quietly. This leads directly to his arrest and subsequent incarceration at the mental hospital.

Overall, Toole uses the police officers in *A Confederacy of Dunces* both as a source of comic relief and as a way to illustrate Ignatius's character flaws and tendency towards self-sabotage.

***#8. The novel is set in the early 1960s in New Orleans. The city is portrayed as a vibrant and diverse place, and its unique culture is an important part of the story.***

The novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole is set in the early



1960s in New Orleans. The city is portrayed as a vibrant and diverse place, with its unique culture playing an important role in the story. From the bustling French Quarter to the lively jazz clubs, readers are taken on a journey through this fascinating city. The characters that inhabit it come from all walks of life, each with their own stories and struggles to tell.

New Orleans rich history also plays an integral part in the narrative. Its long-standing traditions such as Mardi Gras and voodoo are explored throughout the book, giving readers insight into how these customs have shaped both past and present generations of people living there. Additionally, its complex racial dynamics are examined closely; while racism still exists within certain parts of society, many characters find ways to bridge divides between different ethnicities.

Ultimately, *A Confederacy of Dunces* paints a vivid picture of New Orleans during this time period – one that captures both its beauty and flaws alike. Through its exploration of race relations, cultural heritage and everyday life in this iconic city, it serves as an insightful look at what makes New Orleans so special.

***#9. Ignatius’s™ job at Levy Pants is a source of comedic relief in the novel. He is constantly making mistakes and getting into trouble, and his antics often lead to humorous situations.***

Ignatius J. Reilly's job at Levy Pants is a source of comedic relief throughout the novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole. Ignatius' ineptitude and lack of enthusiasm for his work make him an easy target for ridicule, as he often makes mistakes or gets into trouble while on the job. His antics are often humorous,

such as when he accidentally sets off the fire alarm in the store or when he tries to sell pants to customers who don't even want them. Even though Ignatius is not particularly good at his job, it provides plenty of laughs for readers throughout the book.

In addition to providing comic relief, Ignatius' employment also serves as a symbol for his overall stagnation in life. He has no ambition and no real goals; instead, he spends most days sleeping late and avoiding any kind of responsibility or hard work. His position at Levy Pants reflects this attitude perfectly: despite being employed there for several months, Ignatius never really puts forth any effort into doing well at his job and thus remains stuck in a rut with little hope of advancement.

**#10. Ignatius's™ relationship with**

***his mother is a major theme in the novel. He is often frustrated by her domineering nature, but he also loves her deeply and is determined to make her proud.***

Ignatius relationship with his mother is a major theme throughout *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Mrs. Reilly is an overbearing and domineering woman who constantly meddles in Ignatius life, trying to control every aspect of it. Despite her intrusive nature, Ignatius loves his mother deeply and wants nothing more than to make her proud. He often finds himself frustrated by her attempts to micromanage him, but he also understands that she only has his best interests at heart.

Throughout the novel, we see Ignatius struggling between wanting to please his mother and wanting to live a life of freedom and independence from her

influence. He tries desperately not to disappoint her while still asserting himself as an individual with unique goals and desires for the future. In the end, despite their differences in opinion on how he should live his life, they are able to come together in mutual understanding.

***#11. Ignatius's™ relationship with Myrna is a major plot point in the novel. He is initially attracted to her, but their relationship is complicated by his own insecurities and her liberal views.***

Ignatius relationship with Myrna is a major plot point in the novel. He meets her at Levy Pants, where she works as a file clerk, and he is immediately attracted to her. Despite his initial attraction, Ignatius struggles to express himself around Myrna due to his own insecurities and lack of self-confidence. Additionally, their relationship is complicated by the fact that

Myrna has liberal views which contrast sharply with Ignatius conservative beliefs.

Myrnas progressive outlook on life challenges Ignatius traditional values and forces him to confront his own prejudices. As they spend more time together, Ignatius begins to open up about his feelings for her and eventually admits that he loves her. However, despite this admission of love from Ignatius, their relationship remains strained due to their conflicting ideologies.

The tension between them continues until the end of the novel when Myrna finally accepts Ignatius for who he is - flaws and all - allowing them both to move forward in their relationship without any further conflict.

**#12. *Ignatius's™ relationship with Darlene is also a major plot point in the***

***novel. He is initially attracted to her, but their relationship is complicated by his own insecurities and her kind nature.***

Ignatius relationship with Darlene is a major plot point in the novel. He meets her at Levy Pants, where she works as a file clerk, and he is immediately attracted to her. Despite his initial attraction, Ignatius struggles to express himself around Darlene due to his own insecurities and lack of self-confidence. She is kind and understanding towards him, but he often misinterprets her kindness as pity or condescension.

Throughout the novel, Ignatius continues to struggle with his feelings for Darlene while also trying to make sense of their complicated relationship. He vacillates between wanting desperately for them to be together and feeling like it would never work out because of his own issues. In the

end, however, they are able to find common ground that allows them both some measure of happiness.

**#13. *The novel is filled with colorful characters, such as Ignatius's friend Jones, the eccentric Mrs. Levy, and the mysterious Mr. Gonzalez.***

The novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole is filled with a variety of colorful characters. Ignatius friend Jones is an eccentric and flamboyant character who loves to dress up in outrageous costumes and entertain people with his wild antics. Mrs. Levy, the owner of the Night Of Joy bar, is a mysterious figure who seems to know more than she lets on about the goings-on in New Orleans. Finally, there's Mr. Gonzalez, a mysterious man who appears out of nowhere and helps Ignatius find his way back home.



Each character brings something unique to the story that adds depth and complexity to it. Jones provides comic relief while Mrs. Levy serves as an enigmatic guide for Ignatius throughout his journey through New Orleans. Meanwhile, Mr. Gonzalez acts as both a mentor and protector for Ignatius during some of his most difficult moments.

These characters are integral parts of *A Confederacy of Dunces*; without them, the novel would not be nearly as entertaining or thought-provoking as it is today.

***#14. The novel is filled with references to literature, philosophy, and religion. Ignatius is an educated man and his knowledge of these topics often leads to humorous situations.***

The novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* by

John Kennedy Toole is filled with references to literature, philosophy, and religion. Ignatius J. Reilly, the protagonist of the novel, is an educated man who often uses his knowledge of these topics to humorous effect. For example, in Book 5 he makes a reference to Platos Symposium when discussing love and relationships: Love was not invented by Plato or anyone else; it has always been here. He also makes frequent allusions to religious texts such as the Bible and Dantes Inferno.

Ignatius erudite musings are often met with confusion from those around him. His mother Irene scolds him for using big words that she doesnt understand while his friend Myrna Minkoff finds his philosophical ramblings amusing but ultimately tires of them. Despite this criticism Ignatius continues to make references throughout the novel which

serve both as comic relief and a way for readers to gain insight into his character.

***#15. The novel is filled with references to popular culture, such as movies, music, and television. These references often lead to humorous situations and provide insight into the culture of the time.***

The novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole is filled with references to popular culture, such as movies, music, and television. These references often provide insight into the culture of the time and lead to humorous situations. For example, in Book 5 Ignatius Reilly's mother refers to a movie she saw called *The Miracle Worker*, which was released in 1962. This reference serves as an indication that Mrs. Reilly is out-of-touch with modern trends and has difficulty understanding her sons behavior.

In addition to providing comedic relief, these cultural references also help readers understand how characters interact with each other and their environment. In one scene from Book 5, Ignatius visits his friend Darlene at her job at Levy Pants where he meets Mr. Gonzalez who plays a game show on TV every night called Name That Tune. Through this reference we can see how Mr. Gonzalez uses pop culture as a way to connect with people around him.

Overall, the use of popular culture references throughout *A Confederacy of Dunces* helps create an immersive experience for readers while also providing insight into the characters lives and relationships within their society.

**#16. *The novel is filled with references to New Orleans culture,***

***such as its food, music, and festivals. These references provide insight into the city and its unique culture.***

The novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole is filled with references to the culture of New Orleans. From its famous cuisine, such as gumbo and jambalaya, to its vibrant music scene and annual festivals like Mardi Gras, these references provide readers with a glimpse into the unique character of this city. The characters in the novel often discuss their favorite restaurants or musicians, giving us an insight into what life was like for them in New Orleans during that time period.

These cultural references also help to create a vivid atmosphere throughout the book. We can almost feel ourselves walking through the streets of New Orleans alongside Ignatius J. Reilly as he makes his way from one misadventure to

another. By immersing us in this world, Toole allows us to experience it firsthand and gain a better understanding of how people lived there at that time.

**#17. *The novel is filled with references to the civil rights movement, which was a major issue in the early 1960s. These references provide insight into the struggles of African Americans during this time.***

The novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole is filled with references to the civil rights movement, which was a major issue in the early 1960s. These references provide insight into the struggles of African Americans during this time. The protagonist Ignatius J. Reilly's interactions with black characters such as Mrs. Levy and Mr. Clyde illustrate how racism affects their lives on a daily basis, from being denied service at

restaurants to facing discrimination in employment opportunities.

Ignatius conversations with his mother Irene also reveal her views on race relations and her attempts to protect him from prejudice and bigotry that he may encounter outside of their home. Through these conversations, readers can gain an understanding of how white people viewed African Americans during this period.

In addition, there are several scenes throughout the novel that depict protests against segregation or other forms of racial injustice taking place in New Orleans at the time. This provides further context for readers about what life was like for African Americans living under Jim Crow laws.

***#18. The novel is filled with references to the Vietnam War, which was a major issue in the early 1960s.***

***These references provide insight into the struggles of the American people during this time.***

The Vietnam War was a major issue in the early 1960s, and this is reflected throughout John Kennedy Tooles novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*. The characters often discuss the war and its implications for their lives, with Ignatius father being particularly vocal about his opposition to it. Throughout the book, there are references to protests against the war, as well as discussions of how it has affected peoples lives both directly and indirectly. For example, when Ignatius visits Myrna Minkoff at her college campus he finds that she is involved in anti-war activities such as organizing rallies and writing letters to politicians.

In addition to these direct references to the Vietnam War, there are also more subtle



allusions throughout *A Confederacy of Dunces*. For instance, when Ignatius goes on his quest for employment he encounters many employers who seem uninterested in hiring him due to his lack of experience or qualifications; this could be seen as an allegory for how veterans returning from Vietnam were treated by potential employers upon their return home.

Overall, John Kennedy Toole uses references to the Vietnam War throughout *A Confederacy of Dunces* not only as a way of providing insight into what life was like during this time period but also as a means of exploring themes such as patriotism and social justice. By doing so he creates an engaging story that speaks volumes about American society during one of its most tumultuous periods.

**#19.     *The novel is filled with***

***references to the Cold War, which was a major issue in the early 1960s. These references provide insight into the struggles of the world during this time.***

The Cold War was a major issue in the early 1960s, and this is reflected throughout John Kennedy Toole's novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*. The characters often discuss the political tensions between East and West, as well as the fear of nuclear war that pervaded society at the time. In one scene, Ignatius muses on how he would survive a nuclear attack: "He imagined himself living in some underground shelter with canned goods and water tanks!" This reflects both his own paranoia about potential disaster, but also speaks to wider anxieties about global conflict during this period.

In another scene, Ignatius visits an army surplus store where he finds military

uniforms from World War II. He remarks on how these items are now obsolete due to advances in technology since then – a reference to how quickly things can change during times of international tension. These references provide insight into the struggles of people living through such tumultuous times.

***#20. The novel is filled with references to the Catholic Church, which was a major influence in New Orleans during this time. These references provide insight into the beliefs and practices of the Church during this time.***

The Catholic Church was a major influence in New Orleans during the time period of John Kennedy Tooles novel, *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Throughout the book, there are numerous references to the Church and its beliefs and practices.

For example, Ignatius Reilly is often seen attending Mass at St. Marys Assumption Church or discussing his faith with Father Flotilla. The characters also make frequent reference to religious holidays such as Easter and Christmas, which were important celebrations for Catholics in this era.

In addition to providing insight into the beliefs and practices of Catholicism during this time period, these references also serve as an important reminder that religion played a significant role in shaping life in New Orleans during this era.

Religion provided comfort and guidance for many people living through difficult times; it was not just something that existed on paper but rather had real-world implications for how people lived their lives.

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