SOFTWARE & TECH

The Story Of Edgar Sawtelle Summary

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Introduction: A Modern Classic Unfolds

There are some novels that linger in the mind long after the final page is turned, and David Wroblewski's **The Story Of Edgar Sawtelle** is one of them. Published in 2008, this ambitious debut immediately drew comparisons to literary giants, earning a devoted readership and a spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list. For anyone seeking a compelling **The Story Of Edgar Sawtelle Summary**, the heart of the novel lies in its fusion of family drama, pastoral beauty, and a profound reimagining of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Set on a remote farm in northern Wisconsin, the book follows a boy named Edgar who cannot speak but who possesses an extraordinary gift for training dogs. What unfolds is a story of loyalty, betrayal, murder, and a relentless search for truth. This article provides a thorough, chapter-by-chapter style overview of the plot, examines key characters, explores central themes, and discusses why this novel continues to captivate readers.

Part One: The World of the Sawtelle Farm

The Setting and the Sawtelle Family Legacy

The novel opens by establishing the rich, sensory world of the Sawtelle farm. This is not just any farm; it is a place dedicated to the selective breeding of a unique line of dogs—the Sawtelle dogs. These dogs are not mere pets; they are companions, workers, and creatures of remarkable intelligence and restraint, bred for their ability to form deep, almost telepathic bonds with humans. The farm itself becomes a character in the story, with its rhythms of seasons, the beauty of the Northwoods, and the isolation that both protects and imprisons the family.

We are introduced to Gar and Trudy Sawtelle, Edgar's parents, who run the kennel and continue the work started by Gar's father. Their lives are one of quiet dedication. Into this world, Edgar is born. The first major twist of his life arrives early: he is born mute. He can hear perfectly well, but he will never speak a word. This silence defines his existence, shaping his perception of the world and his relationships with everyone around him, especially his parents and the dogs.

Edgar's Silent World and His Bond with the Dogs

David Wroblewski does not present Edgar's muteness as a tragedy. Instead, it becomes a lens through which Edgar observes the world with incredible acuity. He communicates through a sophisticated system of sign language, developed with his family. More profoundly, he connects with the Sawtelle dogs on an instinctual level. The novel spends considerable time describing the breeding philosophy of the Sawtelles, a philosophy based on observation, patience, and a kind of quiet respect for the animal's nature. Edgar learns his father's trade not through words, but through watching, feeling, and doing. The dogs, particularly a puppy named Almondine who becomes his constant companion, are his true confidants. This section of any **The Story Of Edgar Sawtelle Summary**must emphasize that the dogs are not accessories; they are integral to the plot and the emotional core of the book.

Part Two: The Arrival of Claude and the Unraveling

The Inciting Incident: A Brother's Return

The relative peace of the Sawtelle farm is shattered by the arrival of Claude, Gar's younger brother. Claude is everything Gar is not: charismatic, reckless, and deeply unstable. He has been absent for years, and his return is met with a mixture of wariness and forced welcome. Claude is a classic antagonist, not because he is purely evil, but because his presence acts as a corrosive agent on the family's already fragile dynamics. He is jealous of Gar's life, his farm, and his seemingly perfect family. He begins to manipulate Trudy, subtly and then more openly, planting seeds of doubt about Gar's competence and love.

Edgar, from his silent vantage point, senses the danger Claude represents. He sees the way Claude looks at his mother, the way Claude dismisses his father's work, the way the dogs seem uneasy around his uncle. The tension builds slowly, masterfully, like a thunderstorm gathering over the lake. This is not a story of fast-paced action, but of psychological dread.

The Breakdown of Trust and the First Death

The central tragedy of the novel—the event that mirrors the murder of Hamlet's father—occurs when Gar Sawtelle dies suddenly. It is a shocking moment. Claude is present, and Edgar's suspicions crystallize into a terrible certainty: Claude has poisoned his father. The exact method is left somewhat ambiguous, which adds to the story's power. What is clear is that Claude's return has led directly to Gar's death.

In the aftermath, Trudy, in her grief and vulnerability, turns to Claude. She is not a villain; she is a woman who has lost her partner and is perhaps seeking comfort in the wrong place. Edgar watches in horror as his uncle moves into the farmhouse, takes over the kennel, and begins to steal everything that was his father's. This section is the core of the **The Story Of Edgar Sawtelle Summary**as it sets the entire revenge plot in motion. Edgar is trapped. He cannot speak to accuse Claude. He is a boy in a world of adults, and no one will listen to a mute child's accusations against the charming, helpful uncle.

Part Three: Edgar's Flight and Journey

The Escape into the Wild

Unable to bear the sight of Claude controlling his home and his mother, and fearing for his own life, Edgar makes the desperate decision to flee. He takes three of the Sawtelle dogs with him—Almondine, Elbow, and Essay—and vanishes into the vast, unforgiving wilderness of northern Wisconsin. This section of the novel shifts from domestic drama to a survival narrative. Wroblewski's descriptions of the natural world are at their most lyrical here. Edgar must forage, hunt, and find shelter. He must rely on the dogs, not just for companionship, but for survival. His deafening silence is no longer a social barrier; in the woods, it becomes a source of strength. He is a ghost, moving unseen through the landscape.

This journey is also a period of profound transformation for Edgar. He sheds the last vestiges of his childhood. He thinks constantly of revenge, of returning to the farm to confront Claude, but he is not yet ready. The dogs are his guides and his family. This part of the plot is often described as the most gripping in any **The Story Of Edgar Sawtelle Summary** because it is a raw, primal story of a boy and his dogs against the elements.

Encounters and Lessons Along the Way

Edgar's journey is not entirely solitary. He has a series of encounters that shape him. He meets a kind and solitary older man who teaches him about the land and about the nature of good and evil. He meets a group of traveling musicians who accept him for who he is, marking one of the first times he has felt a sense of belonging outside his family. These episodes are not mere diversions; they deepen Edgar's understanding of the world and prepare him for the final confrontation. The journey is a classic hero's quest, complete with

mentors, trials, and a final, grim resolution.

Part Four: The Return and Confrontation

Coming Home to a Changed World

Eventually, driven by a need for closure and justice, Edgar returns to the Sawtelle farm. He is no longer the frightened boy who left. He is hardened, focused, and silent in a way that has become terrifying. The farm has changed under Claude's control. The quality of the dog breeding has slipped. The house feels different. Most painfully, Trudy has married Claude. The reunion between Edgar and his mother is one of the most heartbreaking scenes in the book. She is overcome with joy but also terrified; she knows what Edgar suspects, and she is torn between her son and the man she now loves.

This section of the **The Story Of Edgar Sawtelle Summary**ratchets up the tension to an almost unbearable level. Claude is now firmly in control. He is paranoid, aggressive, and sees Edgar as a threat to everything he has stolen. The final act of the novel plays out like a tragic opera, with every character moving inexorably toward a devastating finale.

The Climax: The Final Confrontation with Claude

The climax is both violent and ambiguous. Edgar sets in motion a plan to expose Claude, but things go horribly wrong. There is a fire, confusion, and a final, brutal struggle between Edgar and Claude. In the chaos, both Claude and Almondine, the dog who has been Edgar's soulmate, are killed. The ending of the novel is not a simple victory. It is a tragedy. Edgar survives, but he has lost everything that mattered to him—his father, his home, his innocence, and his beloved dog. He is left utterly alone, but he is free. The final image of the novel is one of ambiguous hope, as Edgar sets off once more into the wilderness, accompanied by the spirit of the dogs who have come before.

Key Characters and Their Roles

Edgar Sawtelle: The Silent Hero

Edgar is one of the most memorable protagonists in modern fiction. His silence is not a handicap but a form of power. He is an acute observer, deeply empathetic, and fiercely loyal. His journey from a dependent boy to a self-sufficient young man is the spine of the novel. He is the Hamlet figure, cursed with knowledge he cannot share and driven to avenge a wrong that no one else seems to see.

Claude Sawtelle: The Corrosive Antagonist

Claude is a masterful villain because he is so believable. He is not a monster; he is a weak, jealous, and selfish man who makes a series of choices that lead to murder. He is charming enough to deceive Trudy and ruthless enough to destroy his brother. He represents the darkness that can hide just beneath the surface of a normal life.

Trudy Sawtelle: The Grieving Mother

Trudy is a complex character, often more tragic than the others. She is a victim of Claude's manipulation, but she is also complicit in his rise. Her failure to believe in Edgar's accusations is what ultimately leads to the tragedy. She represents the terrible power of denial and the difficulty of seeing the truth when it hurts too much.

Almondine: More Than a Dog

Almondine is arguably the second most important character in the book. She is not a pet; she is Edgar's other half. Their bond is telepathic and profound. Her death at the end of the novel is as devastating as any human loss. She represents unconditional love, loyalty, and the silent understanding that exists between a boy and his dog.

Major Themes in the Novel

Communication and Silence

The most obvious theme is that of communication. Edgar's muteness forces the novel to explore all the ways we communicate: through sign, through gesture, through touch, and, most importantly, through the silent bond with animals. The irony is that in a world full of talkers, the silent boy is the one who sees and understands the most.

Loyalty and Betrayal

The story is a deep meditation on loyalty. The dogs are the embodiment of pure, unwavering loyalty. In contrast, the human characters are constantly betraying each other—Claude betrays his brother, Trudy betrays her son's trust, and the wider community betrays Edgar by refusing to believe him.

Fate and Free Will

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