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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit  
*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



## I Am the Cheese

by Robert Cormier

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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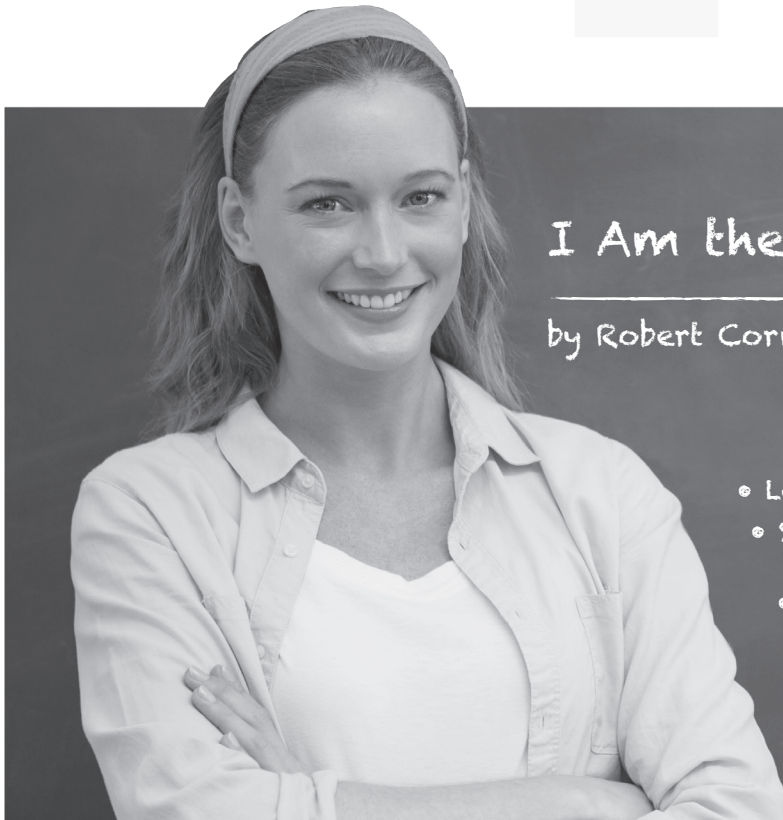
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# Literature Teaching Unit

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# I Am the Cheese

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. follow a plot, which is non-linear, and point out the merits of this type of novel.
2. place events along a timeline.
3. explain how a novel, which has at its center, mystery, false clues, and disguised characters and motives, can come to a sudden conclusion.
4. point out the difference between the flashbacks and the actual evolving events.
5. define the following terms and point out how they apply to *I Am the Cheese*:
  - omniscient narration
  - limited first person narration
  - past tense narration
  - present tense narration
6. define and identify examples of:
  - theme
  - simile
  - metaphor
  - irony
  - personification
7. discuss the literary devices authors sometimes use in order to convey the themes of books. An examples might be: past and present tense which intertwine and literary terms which evoke and contribute to the central idea of the novel.
8. relate the way in which the title of a novel pertains to and fits the novel itself.
9. trace and discuss the role that suspense plays in a psychological novel.
10. discuss how the author manipulates suspense in order to achieve tension.
11. infer events and meanings not explicitly stated.
12. cite incidents from the story to support the following statement of theme: In order for children to mature into adults they must understand themselves.

# I Am the Cheese

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Usually a novel moves along in time with the events of the story, more or less chronologically. *I Am the Cheese* does not. Its events are jumbled together, and this non-linear style of writing is frequently difficult to follow. In *I Am the Cheese* the author switches from present tense to past tense and back many times. What effect did this style of writing have on you? Was it easier or more difficult than the usual novels you read? How did it help or hurt the actual story itself? Why do you think Cormier wrote this way?
2. A mystery novel leaves clues and hints to get the reader interested; it causes misinterpretations, and in the end, it resolves the mysteries. What was the mystery, how were you misled, and how did the novel solve the problems?
3. One theme of *I Am the Cheese* might be the confusion of leaving childhood and attaining adulthood. However, at the end of the novel Adam has not arrived at his maturity. Instead, he is still a teenager and still confused. Discuss in detail Adam's confusion, insecurities, and their causes.
4. The title of the novel refers to a nursery rhyme. Discuss two different ways the rhyme fits both the title and the story.
5. Give at least three examples of how Adam/Paul's false memories conflict with reality. Compare and contrast what he believes truth to be with actuality.
6. *I Am the Cheese* should be a novel about Adam's ability to find his true self after years of constant lies about everything. He can not find himself because of his "mental problems," which were directly caused by years of his parents' deceit. Adam confuses reality with memory, truth with lies, and past with present. He does not understand the situations in which he finds himself. Explain how these falsities, which Adam grew up with and believes to be true, make the inability to discover one's true identity a theme in the novel instead.
7. A psychological novel delves into the thoughts, hopes, weaknesses, and fears of the main character. Psychology, combined with suspense and danger, can create a novel that is very mysterious. Describe the events Cormier uses to reveal Adam's fragile psyche and how that contributes to the mystery and suspense.

# I Am the Cheese

## PAGES 1 – 11

### VOCABULARY

**furiously** – rapidly  
**slithering** – sliding  
**Thomas Wolfe** – American author, wrote *You Can't Go Home Again*  
**dreary** – dull, dark  
**claustrophobic** – fear of closed-in places  
**resolve** – decide  
**provisions** – food  
**reckless** – careless  
**omen** – a sign about the future  
**wavered** – swayed

1. What is the setting of *I Am the Cheese*?

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2. What is the narrator searching for?

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3. What are three things he remembers?

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4. Who is introduced in the beginning of the taping?

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10. What is Adam still positive about?

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**PAGES 39 – 56**

VOCABULARY

- sustain** – give strength to
- vantage point** – position that provides a good view
- imminent** – about to happen
- robust** – healthy
- appraising** – evaluating
- exuberant** – very happy
- prattled** – talk on and on
- abrupt** – sudden
- shunned** – left alone
- irrevocably** – unable to change
- assailed** – assaulted
- premise** – belief
- concocted** – made up
- personnel** – workers
- countenance** – face
- intimidated** – made fearful
- nonchalance** – lack of concern
- canvassed** – covered
- sheepish** – embarrassed
- quivering** – shaking
- vivid** – very clear
- muffled** – muted

1. Who does Adam want to talk to on the phone?

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2. What two things are bothering him?

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**PAGES 107 – 118**

## VOCABULARY

**appalled** – surprised  
**desecrate** – to ruin  
**diversion** – distraction  
**bleak** – empty  
**absurd** – extremely odd  
**intimacy** – closeness  
**stealthily** – cautiously, carefully  
**subterfuge** – deception  
**feeble** – weak  
**skulk** – to sneak

1. Who is the gray man, and what does he do with Adam's father at the house?

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2. What were Adam's two best "clues" that something was wrong in his life?

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3. What did Adam try to overhear?

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4. How did Adam feel about himself afterwards?

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5. What name did Adam's mother use for Mr. Gray?

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