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The Chocolate War
BY ROBERT CORMIER



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All references come from the Laurel-Leaf Books edition of *The Chocolate War* copyright 1974.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Journal

Objective: Relating to a novel and character

Activity

The following paragraphs from the introduction to *The Chocolate War* provide the reader with several insights. The introduction reveals information regarding the hero's circumstances and character, as well as the central conflict and potential outcomes in the novel. After reading the paragraphs, write a journal entry that addresses the following questions:

- What does the introduction reveal about the hero's home life? Discuss how this might affect the choices Jerry could make and the attitudes he might possess.
- What is Jerry's "universe"? What things define your own "universe"? How might you "disturb" it?
- What information or revelations in this introduction might make you want to read the novel? Does any part of the introduction speak to your own life experiences?
- What clues about the novel's outcome does the introduction reveal?

"Stunned by his mother's recent death and appalled by the way his father sleepwalks through life, Jerry Renault, a New England high school student, ponders the poster in his locker—*Do I dare disturb the universe?*

Part of his universe is Archie Costello, leader of a secret school society—The Vigils—and master of intimidation. Archie himself is intimidated by a cool, ambitious teacher into having The Vigils spearhead the annual fund-raising event—a chocolate sale. When Jerry refuses to be bullied into selling the chocolates, he becomes a hero, but his defiance is a threat to Archie, The Vigils, and the school. In the inevitable showdown, Archie's skill at intimidation turns Jerry from hero to outcast to victim, leaving him alone and terribly vulnerable."

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters One – Thirty-Nine**Chapter Titles**

Objective: Identifying the main idea of each chapter by assigning titles to each

Activity

As you read, note that each chapter is numbered rather than titled. Create a title for each chapter based on the significant event in that chapter. We have done one for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter Five

Point of View

Objective: Identifying strengths and weaknesses of various points of view

Activity

Cormier chose to write *The Chocolate War* from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, rather than from a more limited first-person or third-person one. An omniscient narrator has the advantage of knowing the thoughts, feelings, and actions of any and all characters. One of the weaknesses of an omniscient point of view (which becomes a strength for the other two perspectives) is that the reader, does not feel as personally connected with the protagonist. Do you think this is the case with *The Chocolate War*? To help you determine your answer, read the following passage and follow the directions that accompany it.

[Archie] could feel a heightening of interest in the room. It always happened this way when an assignment was about to be given. He knew what they were thinking—what's Archie come up with this time? Sometimes Archie resented them. The members of the Vigils did nothing but enforce the rules. Carter was muscle and Obie an errand boy. Archie alone was always under pressure, devising the assignments, working them out. As if he was some kind of machine. Press a button: out comes an assignment. What did they know about the agonies of it all? The nights he tossed and turned? The times he felt so used up, empty? And yet he couldn't deny that he exulted in moments like this, the guys leaning forward in anticipation, the mystery that surrounded them all, the kid Goober white-faced and frightened, the place so quiet you could almost hear your own heartbeat. And all eyes on him: Archie.

Imagine that the novel was written in first person point of view from either Archie's or Jerry's perspective. Re-write the above passage using one of these two first-person points of view.

After rewriting this passage, which point of view do you feel works and why?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters One – Nine**Setting**

Objective: Identifying setting

Activity

Most of the action in *The Chocolate War*, set during a relatively modern time, occurs at Trinity High School, a Catholic preparatory school for young men.

In groups, discuss some of the specific locations identified below. Try to envision each one as you think Cormier intended. Each group will then be assigned one location in particular to create a representation for. These representations can be posters, murals, actual physical sets, shadow boxes, or models. Be creative, and use details from the story to focus your efforts.

- Football field
- Room Nineteen
- A Trinity hallway
- The gym
- Vigil meeting location (room behind gym)
- Brother Leon's office