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



## The Chosen

by Chaim Potok

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



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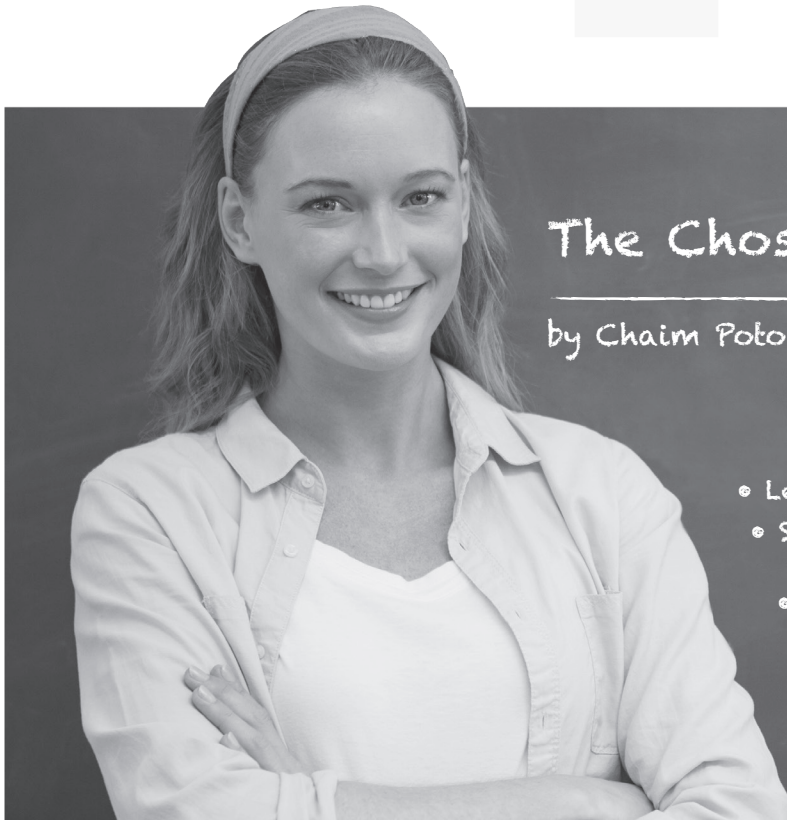
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# Literature Teaching Unit

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## Objectives

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

1. define vocabulary words relating to the Jewish faith.
2. cite events in the story that support the following themes in the novel:
  - Things and people are not always what they seem.
  - Sometimes the most important events in life come as a result of ordinary things.
  - If a person has a contribution to make, it must be made in public.
  - It is important to understand the history of your people.
  - The quality of life is more important than its length.
  - Sometimes, an issue has many sides, which are equally valid; understanding is possible only through hard work and study.
3. point out how the political atmosphere of the time complicates the lives of the characters—specifically, how the existence of both Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews puts pressure on Danny and Reuven’s friendship.
4. cite incidents from the story to support the following theme:  
A person must experience hardships to gain compassion for others and learn to appreciate the good things in life.
5. explain what it means to be a Hasidic Jew and point out how Danny feels about each of these elements of Hasidism:
  - history of the sect
  - mission in life
  - views on Zionism
  - the fact that a tzaddik is an inherited position in his community
  - physical appearance of Hasids
6. contrast the father-and-son relationships of David Malter and Reuven with the relationship of Reb Saunders and Danny, including
  - the way they talk to each other;
  - the reasons and methods for studying the Talmud;
  - their expectations for their futures
7. discuss the overall theme of friendship and point out how the friendship between Danny and Reuven supports the following generalizations:
  - Friends are two bodies with one soul.
  - Honest differences of opinion must not be permitted to destroy a friendship.
8. relate incidents from Reuven’s life to support the following theme:  
It is important to listen to people when they want to talk.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Describe the two ways to study the Talmud presented in the story. Which method does Reuven use and why?
2. In what way does Reuven begin to mature after nearly losing the sight in one eye?
3. Define Zionism. How do the activities of the Zionists impact Danny and Reuven's friendship?
4. Why does Reuven change his mind about Danny's culpability in causing the eye injury?
5. Since Danny has a photographic mind, why does he have trouble reading Freud?
6. Why is Danny concerned about his father's health?
7. What are the two things the Talmud says a man must do for himself? How does Reuven accomplish each of these things in this story?
8. For what reasons does Reb Saunders decide to accept Reuven as Danny's friend?
9. Write a brief character sketch of Reb Saunders. Be sure to include the kind of man he appears to be to Reuven, David Malter, and Danny.
10. In what ways is Reb Saunders's Hasidic Community different from the way of life proposed by Israel (Ba'al Shem Tov)?
11. Define "tzaddik." Why does Reb Saunders believe his son is a tzaddik even though Danny has decided to become a psychologist at the end of the story?
12. What is Reb Saunders's opinion of the world outside the Hasidic community?
13. Why is it ironic that Reuven is planning to become a rabbi?
14. In the end, Danny says he would raise his own son in silence if it were necessary. Why do you think he would put his own child through the same torture he has experienced growing up?
15. Discuss blindness as a possible symbol, standing for the limitations in people's lives.
16. Which incidents from the story support the theme that it is important to listen to people when they want to talk?

# The Chosen

## Chapter One

### DEFINITIONS

**Hasidic**—a sect of Jewish mystics that originated in Poland in the eighteenth century  
**samovars**—metal urns used throughout Russia for boiling water for tea.

**Yiddish**—a language spoken by many European Jews and their descendants.

**Michna service**—afternoon services

**Shabbat**—the Sabbath, the day set apart in the fourth commandment of the Bible to be observed as a day of rest from all labor, originally the seventh day of the week, Saturday, the day on which God rested from the work of creation

**Yeshiva**—a school or college for Talmudic studies, combining religious and secular studies.

**Apikorism**—Jews who are not Hasids; an extremely negative term

**Shamashim**—an official in synagogue

**Jewish Orthodox**—strictly observing the rites and traditions of Judaism as formulated in the Torah and Talmud

**Talmud**—the collection of writings constituting the Jewish civil and religious law, made up of two parts

**tzitzit**—the fringes or tassels worn by orthodox Jewish men.

**Torah**—the first five books of the Old Testament

**momzer**—a curse; a term of abuse

1. Why do the Jewish parochial schools have competitive baseball leagues?

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2. Briefly describe Mr. Galanter. What is his baseball philosophy?

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3. What painful thing does Reuven do just before the start of a game?

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## Chapter Three

### DEFINITIONS

**phylacteries**—a leather box which holds passages from the Torah, worn during prayers  
**rabbi**—the Jewish religious leader, similar to a priest or minister  
**blatt**—a section of reading from the Talmud

1. What is happening in Europe that is exciting to the patients in the ward?

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2. Why does Reuven need to ask the nurse for permission to pray using his phylactery?

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3. Reuven says to Danny, "...you can go to hell, and take your whole snooty bunch of Hasidim along with you!" In what way is Reuven being unfair to Danny and his team?

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4. What rule from the Talmud does Reuven violate when he sends Danny away?

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5. While talking to Danny in the hospital, why does Reuven have "the feeling that everything around [him] was out of focus"?

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## Chapter Eight

### DEFINITIONS

**goy**—a non-Jew

1. Why is Danny bothered by the history he reads concerning Dov Baer, a man his father considers to be almost a saint?

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2. State a theme for this story using the following passage from the novel.

“Your father said I should read Jewish history. He said the first important step in anyone’s education is to know your own people.”

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3. Cite a passage from this chapter to support or refute the following statement: Not everything you read is true; it is important to understand the limitations and biases of the author.

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4. How does Mr. Malter justify his decision to suggest books for Danny without Reb Saunders’s knowledge?

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