

The Chocolate War Study Guide

The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier

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Plot Summary

The Chocolate War is a young adult novel by Robert Comier. Its primary setting is Trinity High School where a secret society called The Vigils exists. The Vigils give different boys “assignments” that they must carry out. Some of The Vigils believe they are upholding a long-held Trinity tradition, while for others the Assignments of The Vigils are a play on power and authority. The assigner of The Vigils is Archie Costello, a moody and unpredictable boy who likes to hold the ultimate authority.

Every year Trinity hosts the Chocolate Sale fundraiser; but this year Brother Leon purchased in advance twice as much chocolate as last year. His superior is ill and Brother Leon is next in line to be headmaster. He wants to prove he can handle taking care of the school by doubling the fundraising efforts. He enlists the help of Archie Costello and The Vigils.

Jerry Renault is a shy, skinny freshman who is trying out for the football team. He makes the freshman team and loves the camaraderie of the team. His mother died of cancer the previous spring, and he has thrown himself into school and his athletics. He watches his father struggle through life. Jerry makes a choice not to live a dull life like his father. He is summoned by The Vigils and told not to sell the chocolates for the first ten days. He accepts the assignment and refuses to participate in the chocolate sale.

At first everybody is shocked by his defiance of Brother Leon. Even though Brother Leon has said the chocolate sale is voluntary, the expectation is that everyone will participate. Each morning at roll call Brother Leon becomes infuriated because Jerry is still refusing to sell chocolates. As a whole, the chocolate sale is suffering. Brother Leon summons Archie, reminding him he has agreed to help the efforts of the chocolate sale.

Archie and The Vigils now demand Jerry sell chocolates, but the following day he still refuses with the T.S. Eliot question of “do I dare disturb the universe?” hanging in his mind. Jerry becomes tired of doing what everyone wants him to do.

The Vigils make selling the chocolates the “cool thing,” and everyone reaches their quota of 50 boxes sold except Jerry. He is harassed and bullied: he’s pushed down stairs, beaten up, his locker is vandalized and his schoolwork stolen. Archie and The Vigils set up a fight on the football field and sell raffle tickets to the student event.

At the fight, Jerry is forced to fight a much larger senior, Emile Janza, who taunts him. The bleachers are filled with students who watch as Jerry is beaten up. In the distance Brother Leon watches the fight but doesn’t stop it. A different teacher, Brother Jacques turns off the stadium lights and the crowd dissipates. Jerry is taken away in an ambulance.



Chapter 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1: It is September and Jerry Renault, a freshman at Trinity High School, is trying out for football. On the scrimmage field, the older guys hit him hard. As he is being pummeled, he tries to remember what his friend, The Goober, told him: "Coach is testing you." Jerry withstands the brutal practice but leaves the field nauseous and sick still hoping he made the team.

Chapter 2: Obie and Archie are sitting on the bleachers watching football practice. Obie both hates and admires Archie. At one point in their conversation Obie swears and Archie chastises him for taking the Lord's name in vain.

Obie is holding a notebook and writing down names that Archie suggests. Archie wants ten names written down for "assignments." The Goober is written down as well as Jerry Renault. Obie mentions it is a little cruel to choose Jerry since his mother just died and he is a young, scrawny freshman. Archie ignores Obie.

Chapter 3: Jerry is waiting for the bus as he peruses Playboy at the mini-mart. He is overwhelmed by the beautiful women in the magazine. When he walks outside, he sees the bus coming. He is confronted by an older teenager who asks him why he is staring. Jerry hurries on trying to avoid the confrontation. The teenager yells after him accusing him of being a "square boy." Jerry thinks about this on the bus ride home. He knows what the other kid called him is true - that he is a "square boy" - but he doesn't want to be.

Analysis

The novel opens with Jerry getting "murdered" on the football field. Yet, despite all of the hits he is enduring, he doesn't give up. He continues to try and take the beatings, hoping someday his hard work will pay off with the coach. He feels he has to believe in this process because he has nothing left. Later, when Jerry is waiting for the bus and the other teenager calls him a "square boy," Jerry knows it is true. He feels he is wasting his life by following the rules, but he's unsure of the ramifications if one doesn't follow the rules. He's not sure what he's going to do; but, as he rides home on the bus that day, he knows he is on the precipice of personal change.

While Jerry is on the football field, Archie and Obie are in the stands coming up with a list of names for the new "assignments." Archie and Obie are part of The Vigils, the secret society at Trinity High School. Archie is the assigner and Obie his assistant. Though Obie shows deference to Archie, he resents him and how he treats others. He believes one day Archie will get his due—that all of the malice he's heaped on others will come back to him. When Archie suggests Obie write down "Jerry" on the assignment list, Obie mentions that Jerry's mother just died and that maybe it is a little



cruel to give Jerry an assignment. But, Archie doesn't care and tells Obie to write Jerry's name down anyway. Already, readers can see that though Obie goes along with it he feels guilty and uneasy about what he does, whereas Archie relishes in the misery he causes for others.

Vocabulary

Grenade, sinews, grotesque, defenseless, pervaded, lassitude, tentatively, massacred, capsized, poised, benevolently, communion, subconscious, uncanny, mused, languidly, contempt, intricacies, malice, skirmishing, surreptitiously, prohibited, perusals, taunts, deftly, contemptuous, confrontations, placards.



Chapter 4-6

Summary

Chapter 4: Brother Leon meets with Archie privately to discuss the chocolate sale. Brother Leon has purchased 20,000 boxes in advance and wants them sold for two dollars apiece, twice the price and twice the number of boxes sold the previous year. Archie is shocked by the amount and skeptical of why Brother Leon has asked to meet specifically with him. Though Archie is the Assigner of The Vigils, the teachers never acknowledge that the group exists. Archie consents, believing now Brother Leon will owe them. He's not sure how The Vigils will help but is confident he will think of something—since that is what he does best and that is what he is known for.

Chapter 5: The Goober is summoned to a Vigils meeting for his assignment. Every meeting Archie begins with a cat-and-mouse game to intimidate the assignees. The other members of The Vigils go along with it, though many like the president Carter, and Obie, dislike how Archie taunts the kids. Goober's assignment is to unscrew all of the screws in room 19 after school. Archie tells him that he must finish it before school starts the next day. The Goober agrees to the assignment because he knows he has no choice.

At the end of every meeting Archie must pull a marble out of the black box—to keep things fair and balanced, to keep Archie from having too much control. In the box are 5 white marbles and one black. If Archie pulls the black marble, then he must complete the assignment, but in all three years that Archie has been the Assigner, he has never pulled a black marble because he cheats by holding onto a white marble during the meeting.

Chapter 6: Jerry is sitting in Brother Leon's classroom with only a few minutes left. But every day Brother Leon puts on some sort of charade to intimidate the students. Brother Leon is unpredictable and malicious—none of the students like him. He is small and sweaty and generally repulsive. Today he is picking on a nerdy straight-A student named Gregory Bailey. He has Bailey come to the front of the room and accidentally smacks him with his pointer; Brother Leon then accuses Bailey of cheating. Jerry feels guilty for not coming to Bailey's rescue but doesn't know what he can do against Brother Leon's authority. No one steps forward to Bailey's aid until the very end of class. Finally, Brother Leon says it was all just an exercise and the classroom allowed him to turn it into Nazi Germany. The boys leave class guilty and stricken.

Analysis

Cormier sets up Archie and Brother Leon so they are complimentary characters. For instance, they both have some authority, yet it is not the ultimate power they want. Brother Leon is temporarily the headmaster, though he is trying to prove he is a good



choice for the position, whereas, Archie is the Assigner and not the President of The Vigils. He feels he has the ultimate power and tries to assert this so it will not be challenged. Both characters feel insecure at the slightest hint of insubordination. Even during their conversation about the chocolate sale, both characters put on fronts in order not to be intimidated by the other. Readers know both characters' authority will be challenged and even though they hold power, their peers and subordinates do not like them. And the most important characteristic they share is their maliciousness at all costs, to get what they want.

Jerry feels he has failed Bailey in Brother Leon's room. He avoids contact with Brother Leon and avoids standing up for Bailey because he is afraid of the humiliation Brother Leon will put him through. As Jerry leaves the classroom that day he knows he has let something very dark happen, that everybody did. This thematically fits with the same issue he thought about in the previous chapter—whether he should follow the crowd and go with the status quo or stand up for himself and others.

Vocabulary

Astonishment, crevices, vulnerable, ingratiating, smirking, venomous, winced, incapacitated, feigning, audacity, fertile, eluded, bestowed, feeble, exulted, spellbound, irrevocable, reprieve, inscrutable, nemesis, ceaselessly, introverted, beckoning, specimen, caricature, subsided, sacrilegious, paternal, contempt.



Chapter 7-9

Summary

Chapter 7: Archie Costello finds Emile Janza siphoning gas out of the senior president's car in broad daylight. Archie tells Emile that what he's doing is beautiful and Emile appreciates the comment. Emile is a bully and enjoys not only picking on students but also on the teachers as well. Though he is not part of The Vigils, he is pleased Archie is impressed by his siphoning gas and hopes he will be asked to join.

Archie thinks Emile is an animal and though he hates people like that, he admires their bravado and ability to pull off stunts. Already, Archie is planning on using Janza for an assignment, not because he wants Janza to become part of The Vigils, but because he can use him to do what Archie would like.

Chapter 8: The Goober is in Brother Eugene's room fulfilling his assignment. The school is dark and quiet, and he is working silently to unscrew all of the screws. It is already 9 o'clock and he has only completed three rows of desks. The Goober hears sounds of the walls creaking and stops to see if someone is coming. A handful of people wearing masks crawl through the open door in the dark and help The Goober complete his assignment.

Chapter 9: Jerry thinks about his mother and how his father and his life have changed. His mother died in the spring from cancer. It is now September. His father sold their family home, and they now live in a small apartment. Ever since his mother's funeral he and his father live in different orbits. His father goes to work, comes home, and then goes to sleep. He feels like watching his father is like watching the dead, and maybe they had buried the wrong parent.

When Jerry asks his father how his day was, he always says 'fine' and nothing more. It scares and saddens Jerry that his father is so devoid of emotion. He resolves he will do whatever it takes not to live a life like his father. He thinks of football but realizes football is what is expected of a high school boy and then he thinks of the student Bailey for whom he failed to stand up but he doesn't know why he thinks of Bailey.

Analysis

Archie views Emile as an animal devoid of feelings and remorse. Archie implicitly believes his reasons for doing things have a higher purpose whereas Emile does things just because he can. Archie believes he is teaching the boys a lesson that is making them stronger. So, even though it may seem like he is being heartless and cruel it is really for their benefit. Archie knows Emile wants to impress him and though Archie dislikes, even hates, guys like Emile, he plays along because he knows he can and will use Emile as a pawn later.



A group of The Vigils, presumably, comes to Goober's aid in dismantling room 19. The Goober isn't sure who it is but they tell them that completing the assignment is the most important thing of all, even if they help him. Members of The Vigils understand in order for them to remain powerful, all of their assignments must be completed; if not it shows insubordination and then there is room for the power hierarchy to break down. This is so important some of The Vigils help complete the assignment.

Jerry feels not only has he lost his mother to cancer, but he has lost his father, too. Watching his father sleep through his days terrifies him. He does not want to grow up and have endless days that are mediocre. And Jerry knows this is the path he is following. He knows that he must change his course of action now—he thinks maybe making the football team will help him feel this and then his mind flashes to Bailey, the student accused of cheating in Brother Leon's class. Jerry is unsure of why he thinks of Bailey at this particular moment, but readers understand it represented a chance for Jerry to do something important, to go against the grain of the status quo, and he failed at it.

Vocabulary

Siphon, wistful, envisioned, ebb, diminish, topple, lingering, normalcy, tousling, gnarled, presiding, superimposed.



Chapter 10-13

Summary

Chapter 10: Brother Leon calls an assembly after chapel. Archie believes he delivers an award-winning performance lamenting about school spirit and tradition at Trinity. A handful of Brother Leon's helpers bring in posters with each boy's name on it to hang on the wall. Brother Leon explains that the posters are where the totals will be tallied and kept so all can see who is doing their part.

At The Vigils meeting Archie tells Carter and the other members he has pledged support for the chocolate sale and support for Brother Leon's efforts. No one in The Vigils is happy that Archie has gotten them mixed up in it or that Archie took the ultimate authority to pledge the support of The Vigils.

Chapter 11: One boy touched his desk in Room 19. Then, everyone's desk began to fall apart. Cormier describes the sound and chaos as if a "bomb was being dropped." Archie stands in the doorway satisfied when Brother Leon walks by and accuses him. Archie says nothing and walks away. The Goober feels insurmountable guilt about the destruction and Brother Eugene leaves the room with tears streaming down his face.

Chapter 12: Jerry is at football practice scrimmaging with the seniors. He makes a few plays and passes earning him slaps of congratulations from other team members. Jerry feels like he finally is part of the team. Later his coach tells him what a good job he did and calls him "a son-of-a-bitch" which the other boys says is a term of endearment from the coach. When the coach finally calls you this, it means that you're officially on the team. Feeling good about himself, he heads to the showers and his locker where he finds a note summoning him to a Vigils meeting for an assignment.

Chapter 13: The Goober is sitting in homeroom listening to Brother Leon do role call regarding selling chocolates. Brother Leon is looking for affirmations from all of the boys agreeing to do their part. But, the Goober is thinking about Brother Eugene and the destruction he caused. Though most of the chairs and desks were put back together within the hour, Brother Eugene still had not been seen on campus. Some claim that he was ill and suffered a nervous breakdown.

Brother Leon continues calling names. He calls Goubert who agrees to sell the chocolates. When he gets to Jerry's last name, Renault, he refuses. There is a silent pause, and everyone can see the fury building in Brother Leon.

Analysis

Brother Leon spots Archie in the doorway during the destruction of Room 19. He knows what kind of work Archie and The Vigils can handle. Though he is angry with Archie for



making him look like he can't keep control over the school, Brother Leon realizes he can use this against Archie later.

The Goober is haunted by the destruction of Room 19. It isn't the physical destruction because most of the room was put back together within hours; but, it's the damage done to Brother Eugene. The Goober feels there is something implicitly dark and evil about this school and he does not want any part of it.

When Jerry refuses to sell chocolates, Brother Leon is furious. Even though he says the chocolate sale is voluntary, it really isn't. Jerry's refusal to sell chocolates is an act of insubordination against Brother Leon. Brother Leon is going to fight to maintain his authority by any means.

Vocabulary

Concede, hoopla, caliber, edifice, skepticism, endorsement, embarking, bedlam, haven, compensated, pandemonium, swiveled, glistened, grotesque, tumultuous, bellowed, stalked, scrimmage, blitz, annihilating, consecutive, raucous, summons, askew, adulation, apprehension, ceremoniously, mockery, indistinct, bewildered, defying, Technicolor, specimens, eerie.



Chapter 14-17

Summary

Chapter 14: Chapter 14 is a montage of three different characters and how they are feeling about the chocolate sale as Brother Leon is taking roll call in homeroom. John Sulkey has already sold his 50 boxes and earned a place on a special honor roll—he is plotting how to sell more. Tubs Casper is trying to sell the chocolates so he can keep the money and buy his girlfriend Rita a bracelet. He plans on paying the money back before the end of the sale. Brian Cochran is Brother Leon's appointed treasurer who is in charge of collecting money and tabulating the totals.

As the roll call nears Renault's name it gets quiet and then sounds like the whole room inhales simultaneously and Jerry still says no. Brian Cochran can see Brother Leon's hands shaking in fury and he worries it will all be taken out on him later when he has to deal with Brother Leon.

Chapter 15: Archie and Emile have a conversation about a picture Archie took a while back. Archie stole a camera and barged into the bathroom. He took a picture of Emile masturbating. What Emile doesn't know is that there really is no picture but Archie knows that he can use the threat of the picture to use later against Emile if he needs the leverage. While they are having this conversation Emile bullies a freshman into running across the street and buying cigarettes. Archie is not impressed by Emile. At the end of their conversation Archie tells Emile he probably likes kicking old ladies down and Emile giggled. The giggle chilled Archie even though he knows he, too, is capable of the same thing.

Chapter 16: The chocolate sale is not going well and Brother Leon calls David Caroni in to talk with him. David Caroni, a straight-A student, has failed a test in Brother Leon's class. Caroni is surprised by this and Brother Leon never lets him see the test. Brother Leon suggests if Caroni sells a lot of chocolates that maybe he will change the grade on the test. Caroni is disappointed and disgusted at Brother Leon's moral ineptitude.

In this conversation, Brother Leon learns the reason Jerry is not selling the chocolates is because for ten days he is supposed to refuse them as per his Vigils Assignment. This information seems initially to put Brother Leon at ease. Tomorrow is the tenth day, so after that, Jerry should accept them.

Chapter 17: It is the eleventh day of the chocolate sale. During Brother Leon's roll call, Jerry still refuses to sell the chocolates. Brother Leon is irate, and everyone is stunned. Now, Jerry has shown insubordination to Brother Leon for not selling the chocolates the first ten days and then insubordination to The Vigils for not selling them on the eleventh day.



Analysis

Brother Leon is sincerely surprised on the first day that Jerry does not accept the task of selling the chocolates. Like The Vigils and the importance of the completion of Goober's assignment, it is essential for Brother Leon that all the boys accept the task heartily. If one boy thinks that he does not have to do it, then the whole scheme can fall apart. Brother Leon knows this and uses the "school spirit" and everybody-pulls-their-own-weight guilt trips to shame and humiliate Jerry.

Archie sees a savageness in Emile he does not see in himself—a savageness that actually makes him uncomfortable. This suggests Archie feels he is morally superior to Emile even though the actions may be the same, Archie believes intentions matter. And Emile's intentions are never for higher purposes, putting him morally on the same level as an animal Archie believes.

Brother Leon blackmailing David Caroni with his grades is an indication of how far Brother Leon is willing to go to succeed at the chocolate sale. This shows he will not let anything stand in his way and will manipulate the students if necessary to secure his position of authority at the school.

Jerry has made a stance with himself not to just do what is forced upon him but to make his own decisions. With his Vigils assignment he already feels like a puppet performing tasks and then when the assignment ends he is supposed to start selling the chocolates, now as Brother Leon's puppet. Instead, he takes a stand and chooses not to participate.

Vocabulary

Rectory, massacred, exemplified, quote, simonizing, divert, prolong, rigid, furtively, deliriously, squalled, tenements, concocting, discrepancy, notorious, apprehension, tabulating, contention, suppressing, ricochet, taunted, splendid, commiseration, pupils, assertions, recoil, detained, buoyant.



Chapter 18-20

Summary

Chapter 18: Jerry wakes in the night thinking about his mother and death. He ponders the possibility of being buried alive. He jumps out of bed damp with sweat. He fears he has made the wrong choice by not taking the chocolates earlier that day. For ten days he had waited for that afternoon to be finally able to say yes to Brother Leon. To have the stress of all of those faces staring at him over with and to participate, to blend in, but he had said no and now his decision haunted him. He hadn't planned to say no, he just had.

Chapter 19: On the bus to school a boy slips by Jerry and tells him good job and admits to being sick of selling chocolates. At the entrance to the school a few more boys congratulate him and tell him to keep up the good work. Jerry had assumed his not selling the chocolates was a private battle between Brother Leon and himself and that it would go unnoticed by the other boys. But, they too, were sick of selling the chocolates.

The Goober begs Jerry to say yes today, to take the assignment and sell the chocolates. He tells Jerry that nothing good can come of his refusal. Jerry thinks of the universe and how his defiant answer is his way of doing his own thing.

Chapter 20: In Brother Jacques' social studies class, an assignment is being played out. The students have been instructed to get up and jump around flapping their arms and legs when they hear the word "environment" and if the teacher doesn't say it, Obie is required to ask a question to feed the word to him. But there is very little for Obie to feed to him because Brother Jacques has already said the word "environment" many times and it is only part-way through the class period. The boys are getting tired. Brother Jacques is calm and not bothered by the commotion. Obie realizes Brother Jacques is saying "environment" excessively and was most likely tipped off by Archie. Obie is infuriated for Archie playing him and the other boys for a fool.

Analysis

Brother Leon's worst fear of one boy saying 'no' to the chocolate sale and the others following suit is happening. Jerry is surprised by how many people whisper congratulatory statements to him on his way into school. Goober's pleading with him to accept the chocolates catches Jerry by surprise. Jerry underestimated how affected The Goober was by his assignment and its effects on Brother Eugene. The Goober knows nothing good can come of crossing Brother Leon and now also crossing The Vigils. His premonition is foreshadowing for the characters and the readers.

Dissension toward Archie is building. Obie realizes he has been played a fool by Archie when Archie tips off Brother Jacques. Like The Goober's warning to Jerry, Obie warns Archie that his time will come—that nothing good will come of this.



Vocabulary

Shroud, embalming, specter, pretense, indifference, transparent, defiant, vulnerability, consoled, ordeal, summon, lurching, lousy, lumbering, admiringly, menacingly, receptacle, vengeance, inhibitions, disregard, haggard, desolate, pandemonium, reigned, aghast, futile, nursemaid, indicating, disguising, battalion.



Chapter 21-23

Summary

Chapter 21: Boys start talking about how Jerry is refusing to sell the chocolates and getting away with it, even the junior class president decides he is not going to sell chocolates anymore. Obie asks Archie to meet him in the gymnasium. Obie wants to point out to Archie that Jerry is still not selling the chocolates, even though the assignment is over, and part of the assignment was to begin selling the chocolates. Obie wants alert Archie to the fact that he is not completing the assignment, but he is being insubordinate to Archie and The Vigils.

Archie decides they will have another meeting and make it clear to Jerry he must now begin selling the chocolates. They will make it the “cool” thing to sell chocolates since they pledged their support to Brother Leon and now the sale is not doing well supposedly due to Jerry’s influence.

Chapter 22: Brian Cochran, Brother Leon’s appointed chocolate sale treasurer, notices a pattern he’s reluctant to tell Brother Leon. Since Jerry’s Vigils assignment ended and he now is supposed to sell chocolates but isn’t, other boys are following suit. The chocolate sale numbers have dropped off drastically, even lower than last year and they have twice as many chocolates to sell this year.

Alone together, Brother Leon requires Brian Cochran read out all of the boys’ names slowly and disclose how many chocolates they have sold, starting with the boys who have sold the most. When they get to Jerry Renault’s name, Brian reads “zero”. Brother Leon calls Jerry a disease that has affected everyone, a disease that must be treated.

Chapter 23: Jerry and The Goober are waiting at the bus stop when The Goober tells Jerry he wants to quit football. This takes Jerry as surprise as the season is just getting started and he knows The Goober loves to play. The Goober also tells him he is not going to run track in the spring either.

The boys decided rather than waiting for the bus they are going to run to school. On their way, The Goober tries to explain to Jerry his complicated feelings about the school. He says he doesn’t want to give anything back to Trinity. He believes the school is a dark and dangerous place, even evil and he does not want to give it his spirit or his participation in sports. As they are walking into school, The Goober pleads with Jerry to just sell the chocolates.

Analysis

There is a foreboding feeling in these chapters. Tension is at a climax. Both Brian Cochran and The Goober know that Jerry is in trouble. Brian knows Brother Leon will do anything to prevent Jerry from ruining the chocolate sale. Readers know The Vigils plan



on making selling the chocolates cool. So, if Jerry still chooses not to sell the chocolates he will be going against Brother Leon and The Vigils, and potentially everybody except for his friend, The Goober.

The Goober is still profoundly disturbed by his participation in Room 19 and does not want the school to have any gain from his presence. Even though it has been described and outlined in previous chapters that The Goober loves athletics, specifically running, he is still willing to give this up. The Goober senses Jerry's dangerous predicament—he feels the school harbors an unforgiving maliciousness and does not want to see his friend get hurt.

Vocabulary

Tentatively, leering, reckless, guffawed, pronouncement, secretions, obscene, conscience, preliminaries, infuriated, farce, simultaneously, litany, sibilant, lamely, apathy, sensational, abandon, crimson, bellows, curbstone, jackknifed.



Chapter 24-26

Summary

Chapter 24: Brother Leon summons Archie to his office after school. Brother Leon is upset that The Vigils have not followed through on their promised support of the chocolate sale. Archie defends The Vigils saying they have done nothing wrong, that they have demanded Jerry sell the chocolates. Brother Leon threatens Archie with destruction of The Vigils if the chocolates aren't sold.

Chapter 25: Jerry is sent a note telling him to meet The Vigils in the storage room. Once there, The Vigils are assembled and Archie proceeds to interrogate him demanding to know why he has chosen not to sell the chocolates. Jerry claims the reason is personal and Archie says that there are no secrets allowed in The Vigils. Archie calls through all of the boys' names in the groups and has them call out the numbers of boxes sold—although this is a lie. He tells Jerry they all do things they don't want to do like attend school and sell chocolates, but they all do their part.

Archie threatens Jerry telling him that disobedience from The Vigils comes at a steep punishment, but if he starts selling the chocolates the following day, they will let him off the hook.

Chapter 26: Jerry works up the courage to call Ellen Barrett, a girl he has seen at the bus stop. When she answers the phone his mind goes blank and he tries to talk to her but she quickly tires of the game he seems to be playing. She loses her demureness and he realizes that she's not what he's imagined her to be. He hangs up. Though he was a failure at his attempt to talk to a girl he liked, he's happy he called her, it was a step in taking action, and it was something different from the routine of the day. At the end of this brief chapter he resolves to himself he will not sell the chocolates.

Analysis

Archie learns of Brother Leon's desperation. Brother Leon pre-bought the chocolates with money not allocated for the fundraiser. So, if the chocolates aren't sold, Brother Leon will be in serious trouble with the other school officials. Archie knows if The Vigils help Brother Leon when he needs it most, then The Vigils will have access to a lot more power and Brother Leon will "owe" them.

In The Vigils' summons, it specifically says The Vigils do not believe in violence, but Carter is banging the gavel. Simultaneously, aggressive sounds can be heard from the nearby gymnasium. Everything about this scene is violent. This foreshadows what is to come for Jerry. Even though Archie says they don't believe in violence and through obedience there are other ways, but the reader knows Jerry will not be obedient.



After Jerry's failure at talking to Ellen Barrett, he is filled with a new sense of triumph. Again, that morning he had refused the chocolates and it filled him with a sense of strength, that he was finally making a stand; this courage led him to call Ellen Barrett. Even though he didn't talk to her he knows he has changed, that he is taking steps toward a more interesting life, and he is taking steps away from becoming like his father.

Vocabulary

Disembodied, grudging, offensive, reluctant, defiance, menace, malingerers, malcontents, ransom, grotesque, instinctively, coaxing, incredulous, ventriloquist, insanely, demureness, futile, perversion, ravenous.



Chapter 27-29

Summary

Chapter 27: The Vigils summon Frankie Rollo for an assignment. He's an insolent troublemaker and immediately challenges Archie's authority by refusing to answer any questions and mocking The Vigils. Carter, who watches as Archie fails to gain control of the meeting, bangs the gavel with little effect. He then walks up to Frankie Pollo and begins hitting him in the face. Carter has some of the other guys drag him out of there.

For once in The Vigils history they have lost control. The group momentarily turns against Archie for pledging support for the chocolate sale. No one wants to sell the chocolates but they know if they don't they will have to deal with Brother Leon. Archie devises a plan to make selling chocolates cool, to have The Vigils get the other boys to rally to sell everything.

Chapter 28: At football practice another player tackles Jerry unfairly. He knows that it is not Carter because Carter was in view the entire time. Every time Jerry makes a pass, the ball is dropped and he is pummeled. At home that night someone prank phone calls his house a couple of times. At the end of practice Jerry sees how his teammates look away from him. He then realizes the passes were dropped and fumbled intentionally, and all of the tackles and hits too were intentional.

All Jerry hears are maniacal laughs and giggles at the other end of the receiver. At school someone has vandalized his locker, defacing his poster and slashing his gym shoes. In art class someone has stolen his water color he had turned in a day early.

Chapter 29: Brian Cochran notices all of the totals are up. When he is posting numbers on the bulletins, Carter comes in with monies from 75 boxes sold. Carter tells him to distribute them evenly among a handful of kids. Brian Cochran realizes the chocolates aren't being sold by those kids but by an effort on the part of The Vigils. In the hallway The Vigils stop groups of kids to see what their totals are and to encourage them to sell more. Archie's plan is working

Analysis

In Chapter 26, Archie tells Jerry The Vigils practice non-violence, and if Jerry refuses to obey he will be punished another way. But in their next assignment for Frankie Rollo, Carter gets angry at the disrespect Frankie Rollo is showing to The Vigils and punches him multiple times. Any predisposition for The Vigils to be non-violent has dissipated which opens room for The Vigils to also exercise violence against Jerry.

Both Brother Leon and Archie are losing control of their authority. Brother Leon attempts at gaining it back by putting the responsibility on The Vigils, essentially Archie, and threatening their demise if they don't follow through. When Carter steps in and punches



Frankie Rollo he is showing Archie if he can't control the meetings with his psychological tactics, then Carter, as president, will take over. Archie knows he needs to make some changes and regain control over Jerry, The Vigils, and the meetings.

As Jerry is harassed on the football field, as his locker and shoes are vandalized and his schoolwork has gone missing, he more clearly understands the question: "Do I dare disturb the universe?" He learns if one chooses to do this, then there are dire consequences.

Vocabulary

Insolent, cunning, intimidated, eloquent, smirk, demolition, enliven, dissolution, perennial, malice, adversary, exception, assent, spellbound, assurance, probation, relish, skirmishing, careen, careen, askew, derision, obliterated, immersed, fastidious, resignation, gloating, camaraderie, vogue, prominent, waylaying.



Chapter 30-33

Summary

Chapter 30: During the morning roll call for the chocolate sale, boys are reaching the 50 mark. The Goober even reaches 50 even though he quit at 27 to show solidarity for Jerry. As Jerry's name is called and he says "No", there is a new hostility in the air. Even kids that would be seemingly neutral act hostile toward Jerry, one boy even calling out: "Why do you think you're better than us?" Brother Leon has couched the chocolate sale and its recent success in everyone doing their part for the school, for showing school spirit.

Chapter 31: On his way home, a senior named Emile Janza stops Jerry and asks him why he's hurrying. The taunting menacing voice reminds Jerry of all of the other bullies he has encountered. Emile Janza is a very large senior and Jerry knows he cannot fight him fairly. Emile taunts Jerry calling him a fairy and running his hand along his cheek. Before Jerry has a chance to defend him, a group of boys jump out of the bushes and begin beating him to the ground. His face is bloodied and he is punched and kicked in the ribs and groin. He momentarily blacks out and when he comes to everyone is gone.

Chapter 32: After Jerry wakes up from his blackout he goes home to his apartment. His father is working the late shift and Jerry is grateful he doesn't have to see him like this. The phone starts ringing and Jerry answers it to prove he is not so beaten that he can't answer the phone. Moving hurts for Jerry. After the prank phone caller hangs up, Jerry hears his name being called outside the apartment window. He looks and sees dark shadows lurking. A flashlight sweeps over the bushes and it is the groundskeeper. The dark figures calling his name leave.

Chapter 33: Archie calls Emile on the telephone and chastises him for it being a "gang bang." Archie had just wanted Emile to scare and intimidate him by calling him a "fairy" but Emile took things into his own hands and asked some kids from his neighborhood (who he refers to as animals) to help him. Emile didn't throw any hits in this fight. Archie tells Emile just to let things lie because they have plans to use him and his strength later.

Analysis

What initially may have started out as "boys being boys" as Brother Leon calls it, has turned into harassment and serious violence. Jerry has been beaten pretty severely but what he fails to realize is even after his beating they are still harassing him; this indicates the violence will escalate. After his beating, a group of boys goes outside of his apartment to call his name. Presumably they know his father is not home and that he is alone—Jerry is dealing with dangerous people.



Archie indicates on the phone with Emile that more will happen to Jerry. Archie says he wants to “save” him for something else he is working on. All of the violence committed against Jerry is intentional and premeditated unlike boyhood fistfights that are spontaneous and fueled by confrontation.

Vocabulary

Wringing, stooges, erect, exultant, lyrical, averted, stalemate, ominous, sullenly, jubilant, cowardly, goading, cajoling, defiant, demolished, countered, futility, smug, chided, caress, slaughtered, vulnerable, polluting, crooning, oblivion, stalked, maverick, incapacitated, lewd, resonance, parody, luminous, disheveled, crescents, assent, indicated.



Chapter 34-36

Summary

Chapter 34: Jerry goes to school and nobody looks at him. As he walks down the hallway everyone parts “like the Red Sea.” He feels invisible: he wonders if he is invisible. Someone has cleaned up the vandalism in his locker and his poster is missing. During homeroom it is announced that all of the chocolates have been sold except for exactly fifty boxes, presumably Jerry’s fifty boxes. Brother Leon is happy with the results and Brian Cochran is relieved the chocolate sale drama is over.

Later, Obie and Archie are talking and Archie reveals his plan to raffle off the remaining boxes on the football field during a special school assembly. Obie doesn’t understand how this is going to come about.

Chapter 35: Archie marvels at his ability to con everyone as he watches an old boxing ring being set up in the football stadium. Later that night there will be a fight: Jerry versus Emile. Kids begin to fill the stadium. Hundreds of raffle tickets are sold. On the tickets kids get to write who gets hit and how.

Archie convinced Jerry he was sick of him getting picked on, and it was about time Jerry stood up for himself and show everyone he was not afraid to fight back. And Archie convinced Emile by playing to his sympathies—that they liked Emile and wanted Emile to be part of The Vigils.

Chapter 36: Just before the fight begins Obie reveals the black box to Archie catching him off guard. In the past Archie had cheated the black box by secreting a white marble in his hand. Tonight, the night of the fight, he wasn’t prepared. Archie recognized the look of glee on both Carter and Obie’s faces. He picks two white marbles, one for Jerry and one for Janza, so he does not have to fight.

Analysis

These three brief chapters are building tension toward the climax of the story: the fight. Chapter 36 ends with Archie choosing two white marbles much to the chagrin of both Obie and Carter. Like the dislike and distrust for Brother Leon, Carter and Obie feel that for Archie. They want to prove to Archie he is not all-powerful like he thinks he is. Carter wants to fix the black box but fears that Archie will find out. The fact that Carter and Obie want to present Archie with the black box as a surprise when he can’t back down shows they don’t fully agree with what is happening, and they are hoping he will be the one to fight.

Archie’s ability to convince both Jerry and Emile to fight demonstrates Archie’s manipulative nature. He knows how to play to both of their emotions so that they feel they have something to gain from the fight.

Vocabulary

Transparently, berth, rendered, obliterate, tabulation, rancid, disproven, noble, droned, sanctimoniously, dispelling, inhibition, enticingly, desecration, comply, submissiveness, astonishment, garish, threadbare, discarded.



Chapter 37-39

Summary

Chapter 37: The Goober shows up just before the fight is about to start. He has been absent from school for three days because he wants nothing to do with Trinity and was having a hard time watching what was happening to Jerry.

The crowd is anxious for the fight to begin and finally Carter reads the first ticket. The first hit is Jerry's. He swings at Emile Janza and nearly misses because he blocked the hit. The next hit is for Janza and Jerry lets him hit him. The crowd continues to scream for action and Carter hastily pulls another ticket before looking at it. It is for Janza to hit Jerry in the groin. Carter reads it out loud before looking at it and realizes he has made a mistake. They had set up guidelines for the hits and were going to throw out raffle tickets that broke the guidelines, but it is too late he has read it and Janza is already hitting Jerry. Jerry falls to the ground and the crowd cheers Janza on who continues beating Jerry.

Just before someone turns out the stadium lights, Obie sees Brother Leon on the hill watching from the distance and then the lights are turned off.

Chapter 38: The lights are turned back on and The Goober rushes to Jerry. He is cradling Jerry in his arms and telling him it will be okay. Archie rushes to the power switch to find Brother Jacques there who reveals someone came to get him to stop the fight. Brother Leon is there too and Brother Jacques implies he knows they both were in on setting the fight up. Brother Jacques tries to make Archie feel guilty or at least responsible for his actions, but Archie feels nothing.

Jerry is semi-conscious and wants to tell The Goober never to disturb the universe, to go along with what everyone is doing and saying, and not to make your own decisions. Paramedics take Jerry away in an ambulance.

Chapter 39: Obie and Archie are sitting on the football bleachers, where they are when the book begins. Obie is warning Archie that someday all of his misdeeds and maliciousness will come back to him, that someday he "will get his." Obie looks again at the football goal posts but can't remember what they remind him of. Archie looks forward to what the coming year promises.

Analysis

The Goober attends the fight even though he doesn't want to participate or encourage what is happening. Brother Jacques reveals that someone came to get him to stop it. Readers don't know for sure if this was The Goober, but it can be assumed since he appears to be the only sympathetic character to Jerry and Obie was with Archie.



The beginning and the end mirror each other. The first sentence of the book is “They murdered him” but it refers to football practice and in the end readers don’t know what will happen to Jerry except that paramedics take him away in an ambulance. But, Jerry’s spirit has been murdered. As The Goober is holding him Jerry wants to beg him to not fight against the group, the metaphorical universe, that to go along is easier and safer.

At the beginning of the book Obie remarks that the football goal posts look like crucifixes, which is symbolic of what they have done to Jerry. They have sacrificed him for their own greed, their maliciousness and for entertainment. Obie can’t recall what they remind him of signifying how distant they are from their own morality.

Vocabulary

Turmoil, defections, conscience, oblivion, feverishly, elemental, girded, savagery, jarred, erect, vague, catapulting, jolting, rampant, floundering, obscenities, contempt.



Characters

Jerry Renault

Jerry Renault is a freshman at Trinity High School. In his locker hangs a poster with the question, “Do I dare disturb the Universe?” by T.S. Eliot. Jerry’s mother died of cancer in the spring and he watches his father drift along in life and makes a resolve not to do the same thing.

During Trinity’s annual chocolate sale Jerry takes a stand and refused to sell them standing up against Brother Leon, The Vigils, and eventually the entire student body. Jerry knows the harassment he is facing has been brought on by his assertion to “disturb the universe” and do his own thing, but he realizes he would rather be true to himself than cave into the pressures of everyone’s expectations. This is what he feels his father has done.

But, in the end when he is being taken away in an ambulance after being beaten very badly by a senior brute (while the whole school cheered him on), he realizes his life would have been easier if he had just gone along with everything. Even though it looks like one might have choices in life, they really don’t.

The Goober

The Goober, whose real name is Goubert, is Jerry’s best friend. They play football together until the Goober quits the team. The Goober is given an assignment to unscrew all the screws in room 19. The following day the room fell apart, sounding like bombs were going off. Brother Eugene left school that day and never returned with some people saying that it had caused him to have a nervous breakdown.

The Goober feels so guilty over what he has done that he quits football and track, even though he loves running. He feels Brother Leon and The Vigils are evil and he doesn’t want to give any more to the school, including his athletics. The night of the fight, the Goober is the only one who rushes to Jerry’s aid. Jerry warns The Goober never to cross them, Brother Leon, the students, or The Vigils.

Archie Costello

Archie Costello is the Assigner for The Vigils. He rules with intimidation but does not believe in physical violence. If somebody swears he will also lecture them with religious doctrine. Though it appears Archie is respected, he isn’t, he is feared. Archie tires of always having to think of assignments for The Vigils but he fears that if he doesn’t he’ll lose all credibility. Outside of The Vigils, he has no friends and detests sports and athletics, so The Vigils are all that he has.



He cheats his way out of the black box and dislikes anyone and anything who challenges his authority. He treats others poorly and relishes in seeing others humiliated. His character is a complimentary character to Brother Leon. Though some of the boys learned from the fight at the end of the chocolate sale, Archie has not and simply looks forward to the rest of the school year.

Obie

Obie is Archie's right-hand man. Obie dislikes how Archie bosses him around and treats him and others like pawns. Though Obie doesn't like Archie, he is hesitant to cross him because of his unpredictability.

Obie is the one who brings forth the black box at the fight silently hoping that Archie's time has come. At the end of the book Obie warned Archie that his time was coming—that he couldn't create so much evil without it eventually coming back to him.

Brother Leon

Brother Leon shares many of the same characteristics with Archie Costello. He is an unpredictable, temperamental teacher who relishes in torturing and humiliating others. He buys 20,000 boxes of chocolates in advance, with money that he should not have spent. With the headmaster absent, he is filling in for him and wants to prove he is capable of the job.

Though Brother Leon hides his affect for the chocolate sale under the guise of school spirit he really wants to see that no one will be insubordinate. He needs the chocolates sold and tells the boys they will do it to show their Trinity school spirit.

No one likes Brother Leon and he rules with the fear that at any moment his power will be taken away. He condones and even encourages the actions of The Vigils as well as bribing students with grades to get the students to sell more chocolates. He knows his own reputation is on the line and will stop at nothing to protect it. At the end of the fight, when Jerry is on the ground and bleeding, Brother Leon is watching in the distance.

Emile Janza

Emile Janza is a large bully who is a senior. He likes to pick on and mess with kids just to see their reaction. He believes there are two types of people in the world - the victim and the perpetrator. If someone chooses to be a victim, then that is their problem. Archie grooms him to be a member of The Vigils and gets him to harass and taunt Jerry.

He taunts Jerry initially by calling him a fairy, but instead of fighting Jerry himself has his friends jump him. At the end of the book, it is Emile Janza who fights Jerry. Emile is chosen because of his size and because he likes to fight. Supposedly, Archie took a

picture of Emile in the bathroom masturbating; so, Archie is blackmailing him. Emile is painted to be like an animal with no remorse or feelings for others.



Objects/Places

Football Goal Posts

At the beginning of the novel, Archie and Obie are watching football practice and listing names for assignments. Obie recognizes that the football goal posts look like crucifixes.

The Poster

In Jerry's locker is a poster of a man walking on the beach with the question, "Do I dare disturb the universe?" written across the top. This question by T.S. Eliot becomes Jerry's mantra.

The Vigils

The Vigils are Trinity High School's secret society.

Assignments

Assignments are given to different Trinity boys by Archie Costello, the Assigner.

Football

After Jerry's mother dies, he chooses to focus on football, even though initially he wasn't very good.

The Chocolate Sale

The chocolate sale is Trinity's annual fundraiser.

Trinity High School

Trinity High School is an all-boys Catholic school.

School Spirit

Brother Leon accuses anyone of not selling chocolates as not having any school spirit.



Black Box

The black box is a box with five white marbles and one black. Carter, The Vigil's president, uses it at the end of assignment meetings to keep Archie humble and honest. Archie always pulls a white marble because he cheats.

The Picture

Archie blackmails Emile Janza by telling him that he has a photograph of him masturbating in a bathroom stall.



Themes

Coming-of-Age/ Loss of Innocence

Cormier's *The Chocolate War* is a classic coming-of-age story. Set in a Catholic boys' high school, the novel explores the loss of innocence that one faces when confronted with the evils of the world. Jerry Renault, still mourning his mother's death, watches as his father slogs through his days—with none good or bad, but just an unending “fine.” Jerry resolves to live a life where things happen, where he makes choices and experiences things—he does not want to become his father.

Inspired by a poster with a T.S. Eliot quote: “Do I dare disturb the universe?” Jerry decides not to sell the chocolates during the annual fundraising chocolate sale. Initially he had the support of the secret society, The Vigils, because they gave him the assignment to defy Brother Leon by not selling them, but when he continues not to participate after The Vigils assignment is over, he is not only defying the school administration which has misleadingly called the fundraiser “voluntary” but also The Vigils and eventually the entire student body.

Jerry stands his ground despite being beaten, pushed downstairs, prank phone calls, ignored and having his locker vandalized and schoolwork stolen. It is in the end as hundreds of boys from the school and Brother Leon watch as people cheer against Jerry in an unfair fight and watch him get beaten to the point of needing a hospital, that Jerry gives up telling The Goober, his only friend, that one mustn't go against the grain, that one must not disturb the universe, because if you do, others will break you down.

Individual vs. The Group

One theme that is repeated through *The Chocolate War* is one's responsibility to stand up for what they believe in. Early on in *The Chocolate War*, Brother Leon calls a student, Gregory Bailey, up to the front of the class. He slaps him “accidentally” with his pointer leaving a red welt on his cheek and then accuses him of being a cheater and a blasphemer. As Jerry and The Goober—the moral compasses in the book—watch this they know it is wrong. They feel badly for Bailey but neither does anything. They fear standing up to Brother Leon, the fear that he will pick on and humiliate them and so they do nothing despite knowing what is happening is wrong.

When Jerry chooses to be an individual after being disgusted with the treatment of Bailey and watching his father—whom he believes is a product of this kind of environment—waste away his days, Jerry takes a stand for himself. He wants to live life, to make choices and not allow things to just happen to him. Inspired by his poster that poses the question, “Do I dare disturb the universe?” he refused to sell the chocolates.



Seemingly, the entire school turns against him except The Goober. In the end when the stands are filled with boys from the school as they watch senior Emile Janza beat Jerry mercilessly in a fight, no one does anything—not even The Goober. He believes he cannot change the outcome, that he is just one small voice against an entire student body. Jerry made his stand because he initially believed that his voice might make a difference, if not for others, then for the outcome of his own life.

The ending is grim for Jerry. The readers see him pleading with The Goober to just go along with everything and not be an individual. He tells him not to make your own choices because, if you do, other people will beat you down. Then, Jerry is taken away on a stretcher. The boys have to deal with the force of the group's mentality often lead by a select few—namely Brother Leon and Archie—versus their own moral standing. But, as Cormier shows, for teens yearning for acceptance, the group often wins.

Power & Authority

Through the characters of Brother Leon, Archie and Carter, Cormier explores how power and authority are exerted. Both Brother Leon and Archie use psychological and intimidation tactics. Students fear Brother Leon because of his unpredictability and his ability to shame and humiliate. Even though it is agreed upon by all the students that Brother Leon is unlikable he is still able to shame them into subservience. The boys do not step out of line or confront Brother Leon because they fear they might be humiliated in front of all of their peers.

For Archie, he controls with a menacing power and intimidation. He intimidates the other students and even The Vigils members because he holds the power of assigner. Everyone fears that if they catch his eye, that he might be their next victim. His use of power is more intellectual in The Vigils. He uses his creativity to come up with assignments that he knows the others can't and won't think of. At moments he even feels exploited by this. When things begin to unravel for Archie, he turns to violence even though he says that he doesn't believe in it. Carter rules with force, but not the psychological intimidation.

Archie and Brother Leon prove to be more dangerous than Carter and Emile Janza who are willing to fight physically, because Archie and Brother Leon are both violent and psychologically intimidating.

Style

Point of View

The *Chocolate War* is written from the third-person omniscient point of view. Generally, each chapter is in one person's perspective but there are a few exceptions. There are a few montage-type chapters that show collectively what different boys are thinking about the chocolate sale. Cormier does this to show the school's feelings outside of Jerry and The Vigils.

Most of the chapters are from the perspective of Jerry, The Goober, or Archie. The effect of Cormier switching viewpoints allows for the readers to sympathize with different characters, even Archie. But, Cormier never allows Brother Leon's viewpoint suggesting that he is not a character with whom one can be capable of sympathizing.

Setting

The *Chocolate War* is set in the 1970's in a small Massachusetts town at a Catholic boys' high school. Trinity high school is a private school. However, it does not require the same merit entrance exams as the other more elite schools. Trinity is touted as the best private school in working-class area. The demographic is largely working-class thus making it unique from other private schools. Due to low tuition costs this necessitates one of the reasons for the annual fundraising chocolate sale.

Since it is set in the 1970's, it reflects popular culture of that time period, namely high school boys smoking cigarettes and the price of the chocolates.

Language and Meaning

Cormier's intended audience for *The Chocolate War* is young adults. It is written at an appropriate level for eighth grade reading with some more difficult vocabulary used sparingly. Even though the intended audience is young adults the books has been banned from many schools for the violence and the references to masturbation.

Some of the language and idiomatic expressions (like the use of "man") are reflective of the time period that the book was written in. However, beyond specific phrases and expressions, the language in *The Chocolate War* can be understood. It even relates to today's students.



Structure

Cormier's chapters are very brief often, only a few pages that capture one scene. Generally, with a chapter change comes a change in perspective. Cormier indicates the perspective by context clues and the use of the character's name.

The novel is written from beginning to end in the simple past tense. The novel begins and ends on the football field, coming full circle with an image of the football goal posts as crucifixes.



Quotes

Archie disliked violence—most of his assignments were exercises in the psychological rather than the physical. That's why he got away with so much. (Chapter 2 paragraph 12)

The shadows of the goalposts definitely resembled a network of crosses, empty crucifixes. That's enough symbolism for one day, Obie told himself. If he hurried he could make the four o'clock bus to work. (Chapter 2 paragraph 16)

Leon didn't mean Archie's help—he meant the help of The Vigils. And didn't dare put it into words. No one was allowed to breathe a word about The Vigils. (Chapter 4 paragraph 26)

What did they know about the agonies of it all? The nights he tossed and turned? The times he felt used up, empty. (Chapter 5 paragraph 33)

Listen, Goubert. The assignment is more important than anything else, understand? More important than you, me or the school. That's why we're going to give you some help. To get the thing done right. (Chapter 8 paragraph 55)

He hated to think of his own life stretching ahead of him that way, a long succession of days and nights that were fine, fine—not good, not bad, not great, not lousy, not exciting, not anything. (Chapter 9 paragraph 61)

He didn't want to be a mirror of his father. The thought made him cringe. I want to do something, be somebody. But what? But what? (Chapter 9 paragraph 63)

He saw Leon's hand trembling. He had a terrible feeling of doom about to descend on all of them. (Chapter 14 paragraph 88)

The giggle chilled Archie who himself was considered capable of hurting little old ladies and tripping cripples. (Chapter 15 paragraph 101)

If teachers were allowed to do this kind of thing, what kind would could it be...And he did see—that life was rotten, that there were no heroes, really, and that you couldn't trust anybody, not even yourself. (Chapter 16 paragraph 109)

At the bottom of the poster, these words appeared—Do I dare disturb the universe? (Chapter 19 paragraph 123)

My name is Jerry Renault and I'm not going to sell the chocolates," he said to the empty apartment. The words and his voice sounded strong and noble. (Chapter 26 paragraph 168)



Jerry suddenly understood the poster—the solitary man on the beach standing upright and alone and unafraid, poised at the moment of making himself heard and known in the world, the universe. (Chapter 28 paragraph 186)

Mainly, he didn't want to fight for the same reason he wasn't selling the chocolates—he wanted to make his own decisions, do his own thing, like they said. (Chapter 31 paragraph 201)

Ignoring him, as if he wasn't there. And he realized that he really wasn't there, as far as they were concerned. (Chapter 33 paragraph 211)

He had successfully conned Renault and Leon and The Vigils and the whole damn school. I can con anybody. I am Archie. (Chapter 35 paragraph 223)

What could he say? After the phone calls and the beating. After the desecration of his locker. The silent treatment. Pushed downstairs. What they did to Goober, to Brother Eugene. What guys like Archie and Janza did to the school. What they would do to the world when they left Trinity. (Chapter 35 paragraph 225)

A new sickness invaded Jerry, the sickness of knowing what he had become, another animal, another beast, another violent person in a violent world, inflicting damage, not disturbing the universe but damaging it. (Chapter 37 paragraph 242)

They tell you to do your own thing but they don't mean it. They don't want you to do your think, not unless it happens to be their thing, too. It's a laugh, Goober, a fake. Don't disturb the universe, Goober, no matter what the posters say. (Chapter 38 paragraph 248)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Why does everyone go along with Archie? Why doesn't anyone in The Vigils defy him? How does Archie retain control of The Vigils?

Topic 2

How does Brother Leon exert his authority? Is it similar to how Archie exerts his authority?

Topic 3

Why does Obie describe the goal posts as crucifixes in chapter one? He references this again at the end, but he can't quite see the connection. What does this signify?

Topic 4

During the dismantling of Room 19, why does Obie say completing a Vigils' assignment is the "most important thing of all"?

Topic 5

Why does Jerry decide to "disturb the universe"? What factors led to this decision for him? Why doesn't Jerry just concede and sell the chocolates?

Topic 6

Why does The Goober quit football and track? How is The Goober affected by his assignment? Why does he want Jerry to sell the chocolates? Why doesn't The Goober get help when he sees Jerry fighting Emile Janza?

Topic 7

What is Cormier trying to say by having Jerry plead with The Goober at the end to just go along with everything, to no disturb the universe?