

The Chocolate Touch Study Guide

The Chocolate Touch by Patrick Skene Catling

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Plot Summary

“The Chocolate Touch” is a young adult novel by Patrick Skene Catling, based on the story of King Midas, who turned into gold everything he touched. In “The Chocolate Touch”, John Midas is a boy who is selfish, dishonest, and cannot get enough chocolate. He spends all his lunch money on chocolate, sneaks chocolate before meals, and never shares his chocolate with anyone. One Sunday afternoon, while strolling through town, John finds a peculiar silver coin on the sidewalk, with a picture of a fat boy on one side, and the initials JM on the other side. He intends to start a coin collection with it, but comes across a small candy store filled to the brim with sweets. The store owner waves John in.

The store owner explains that he only produces chocolate from the finest ingredients, and he is having a special sale that day, accepting only the kind of money that John has found on the sidewalk. John willingly exchanges the coin for a giant box of chocolates, races home, and hides the box under his bed. That night, he unwraps the box to find layers of packaging, and only one small, gold-wrapped chocolate ball, which he eats. It is the most delicious piece of chocolate he has ever eaten in his life. He then goes to sleep.

In the morning, John wakes up to brush his teeth, and is amazed to discover the toothpaste he uses is chocolate-flavored. He is thrilled at breakfast to discover that his bacon, eggs, and orange juice turn to chocolate the instant he eats them. Indeed, anything his mouth touches – from his leather gloves to his pencil in class – turn to chocolate. Unfortunately, as the morning wears on, John begins to get thirsty, but all the water he tries to drink only turns to chocolate. At orchestra practice, John’s trumpet turns into chocolate, causing him to ruin his part, and all the kids laugh at him. At Susan Buttercup’s birthday party, John ducks for apples with Susan, only to turn all the water to chocolate. Susan’s dress is ruined as a result, and John flees the party.

John meets his father on his father’s way home from work. Mr. Midas brings his son to the doctor at once, who proclaims John has a never-before-seen disease. At home, John’s mother is very upset, so John kisses her cheek, only to have her turn into a chocolate statue. John rushes back to the candy store to plead for his mother’s life. The store owner is impressed with John’s caring for others, and gives John a second chance to live life honestly and selflessly. At home, John’s mother is back to normal, and has no idea what has happened. John is overjoyed, so he rushes back to the store to say thank you, only to discover a vacant lot with a sold sign posted on it.



Chapters 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1 – John Midas is a young boy who is well-behaved and is part of a loving, secure family. His mother is kind, and his father is very intelligent. John has a younger sister, named Mary, whom he plays practical jokes on occasionally. John enjoys school, gets along with this teacher, Miss Plimsole, plays the trumpet, and is a part of the school orchestra, overseen by Mrs. Quaver. He also has a crush on Susan Buttercup, an adorable girl known for having the best collection of marbles in the neighborhood.

John's only major fault is that he loves candy, especially chocolate. He spends all of his money on it. He never shares it, either. One morning, his mother discovers red spots on the end of his nose. His mother worries he is sick with measles, but John's father suspects him of eating too much candy, to which John confesses he has, having gotten it from his friends. They are worried he has been eating too much candy, and they are upset that he has been refusing to follow the rules of no candy before meals.

They bring him to see Dr. Cranium. Dr. Cranium is a tall, thin, bald man who confirms that John has been eating too much candy. John's reflexes are not what they should be for a boy his age, and Cranium recommends less candy and a greater variety of foods. John thinks this means he should eat foods like bananas – but covered in chocolate. At home, John's father tries to reason with John, but all John wants is candy, especially chocolate. He tries to explain that there is a time and place for chocolate, but John insists that all times and places are for chocolate. John then goes out to play.

Chapter 2 – John is walking down the sidewalk on Sunday afternoon when he finds a coin on the ground with a picture of a fat boy on one side, and the initials J.M. on the other. He knows these are his own initials, so he grabs the coin and brings it to Susan to see what she thinks, for she is a collector of many things. He decides it will be the beginning of a coin collection. He decides to take a different route to get to her house.

He comes across a small corner store full of candy, and he is mesmerized through the windows. The shop owner waves at him to come in. The owner explains he uses only the finest ingredients for his chocolate, and there is a special sale on that day. In fact, he only accepts one kind of money – the kind of coin that John has. John replies that he would rather have chocolate than a coin collection. The shop owner asks if John's mother will mind him buying an entire box of chocolates, and John says that she wouldn't. The shop owner knows better, and winks at John.

John sneaks into his house, to overhear his father telling his mother that Mrs. Buttercup was sorry John couldn't come over to play that day, but that Susan is looking forward to her birthday party the following day. John's father wonders aloud where John has been. John hides the candy box under his bed, comes down the stairs, and tells his parents he has merely been playing around. John pretends to be tired so he can go to bed early.



Before bed, John is forced to take tonic prescribed by Dr. Cranium, which makes up for the vitamins and nutrients John does not take in by eating poorly. The tonic tastes horrible. John then bathes and his mother tucks him in to bed. As soon as she is gone, he pulls out his box of candy. He removes one layer after another of packaging, but there is only one small, round chocolate ball wrapped in gold at the center. He eats it, and realizes it is the best chocolate he has ever had in his life.

Chapter 3 – Morning comes, and Mrs. Midas wakes everyone up. John waits impatient for Mary to finish brushing her teeth so he can brush his. As he does, he realizes the toothpaste tastes like the chocolate from the box the night before. He asks Mary why the toothpaste is chocolate-flavored, but she tells him that it isn't as she leaves the bathroom. John then eats all the toothpaste, and is seen by Mary, who tells their mother about it. Mrs. Midas believes her daughter is joking, because her daughter insists that John says the toothpaste was chocolate. As John eats his breakfast, he realizes the eggs, bacon, and orange juice all turn to chocolate in his mouth. He is amazed, as are his parents, who don't realize that everything turns to chocolate for John. His mother tells him that if he continues to eat well, she'll give him some money for chocolates, but John tells her it won't be necessary. This puzzles his mother.

Analysis

Patrick Skene Catling's novel "The Chocolate Touch" is based on the Greek myth of King Midas, who had the ability to transform whatever he touched into gold. In Catling's novel, the ability to transform by touch is held by John Midas, and rather than gold, everything John touches turns into chocolate. Catling uses the myth of King Midas, and the story of John Midas, as a cautionary tale against unintended consequences.

When the novel begins, John is a decent boy, but he is very selfish and very greedy when it comes to candy, especially when it comes to chocolate. He absolutely loves chocolate. He will eat it any chance he gets, even if it means not getting a healthy meal, or spending all his money. He never shares with anyone else, and goes through great lengths not to have to share it. This is very clear when he buys what he believes is a massive box of chocolates, only to sneak it back into his house and hide it under his bed so he doesn't have to share with anyone. Between his love of chocolate, and his refusal to share with anyone (greed and putting himself first, always), John's character as a person is flawed and in need of improvement. This will serve as the deficiency in which John will come of age, becoming an important theme in the novel.

John's insistence on eating chocolate as a main dietary source ultimately compromises his health, leading to spots on his nose and requiring a doctor's appointment, where Dr. Cranium tells him that he is eating too much chocolate, and needs to diversify what he eats. But John is so obsessed with chocolate that he can only imagine the doctor means he should eat something like chocolate-covered bananas. John's parents attempt to reason with him, but to no avail. The situation has gotten to the point that a vitamin tonic must be prescribed for John, which he absolutely hates taking.



John is absentminded and self-absorbed enough as well not to make sense of things that others might easily recognize as somehow not right – such as eating too much chocolate. This is quite clear when John finds a coin with a fat boy on one side, and the initials JM on the other, and it turns out to be a kind of coin he has never seen before, yet is the only kind of money the store owner accepts for his products. John readily surrenders the coin for the chocolate, believing that he is the recipient of nothing more than good luck. But rather than sharing his good luck with his family – who clearly do all they can for him and love him unconditionally – John decides to keep the chocolate to himself, again repeating the deficiency in John's character which must be overcome.

The results of John's actions do not become apparent until the next morning, when he goes to brush his teeth. The toothpaste turns to chocolate in his mouth, and he is overjoyed at this. When his breakfast food turns to chocolate in his mouth as well, he is still thrilled about the power that he seemingly now has. John, however, does not even share news of his newfound talent with his family, though his attempts to tell his sister about the toothpaste only lead to her telling on him for eating the toothpaste. As was the case with finding the exact kind of coin that is the only currency accepted by the store owner, John doesn't yet put too much thought into what is happening. John has not carefully thought out any of his actions, too consumed by greed. The consequences of those actions, unintended, will become clear in the course of the novel -and will form the theme of unintended consequences, of being careful what one wishes for.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the character of John Midas. What are his strengths, and what are his weaknesses? Does he have any major flaws? If so, what are those? Why do they exist?

Discussion Question 2

What is John's relationship like with his family? What are the attitudes and actions of each toward the other? How do you believe John truly feels about his family? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does John not think twice about the coin and it being the only kind of money the store owner will accept?

Vocabulary

practical, brigands, anxiously, reproved, complications, absentmindedly, beckoning, heartily, hastily, coaxing, crossly



Chapters 4-6

Summary

Chapter 4 – One of John's bad habits is chewing on things when he thinks. He wonders why everything – from toothpaste to breakfast – has tasted like chocolate. As he thinks, he chews on his old leather gloves, only to have them turn into chocolate. He eats his glove. Spider Wilson, a bully one grade up from John, sees him, and begins to make fun of him. John shows Spider the glove, and Spider demands it from him. John gives it up and goes to school. Spider begins to eat the glove, but it tastes like leather, and he spits it out angrily. At school, Susan shows John a silver dollar given to her from her parents for her birthday. John asks her whether or not it is an actual coin, or a chocolate-wrapped coin. Susan insists John bite the coin to see for himself, but John doesn't want to. Susan insists again, so he complies only to have the part he bites off turn to chocolate in his mouth. He gives Susan back half the coin, and she starts crying, telling him she hates him.

Chapter 5 – Miss Plimsole arrives to teach class, and the students take their seats. She announces a pop quiz on the subject of math, and writes four problems on the blackboard to be solved. John is nervous, and his mouth is dry and tastes of chocolate. He asks to go get a drink, and Miss Plimsole allows him to go quickly. But John discovers the water he drinks from the water fountain turns to chocolate in his mouth, and he tries several other fountains with no difference. Back in class, John sets to work on the math problems, putting the tip of his pencil in his mouth without thinking. As soon as it turns to chocolate, he pulls it out, but this time, the pencil continues to turn chocolate, which makes him believe the power he has to turn things chocolate is getting stronger. His pencil becomes useless, and John asks Miss Plimsole for more time, for his pencil has turned to chocolate. Instead, Miss Plimsole tells him to be quiet and that she will speak to him after the bell rings.

Chapter 6 – While John's classmates are out playing, Miss Plimsole lectures him on making up stories to excuse his failures. He tells her that it isn't a story, and shows her the pencil. She notices that John looks pale, puts the pencil in her desk, and allows him to go out and play while she decides to talk to the school nurse. John seeks out Susan, who is jumping rope with Betty and Ellen. He decides to offer to jump rope as a sacrifice for hurting her over the dollar, but is ignored. Susan announces that whoever jumps the most times gets the first slice of her birthday cake, and the girls whisper and laugh at John. John apologizes again, explaining the magic he has to turn things into chocolate. They do not believe him, so he says he'll prove it, but the bell rings first, and the children must go back inside. As the day goes on, John gets thirstier and thirstier, and no matter how many times he tries to drink water, all he can drink is chocolate. He feels horribly about his gloves, Susan's coin, messing up on the pop quiz, and being unable to satisfy his thirst.



Analysis

Only once he is out of his house and on the way toward school does John begin to consider what is happening to him, and what the implications might be. He is stunned to discover that things beyond food and toothpaste, such as his leather gloves, also turn to chocolate in his mouth. But the encounter with Spider Wilson demonstrates that, at least for the time being, the things that he turns into chocolate do not stay chocolate for long, as Spider finds out the hard way by attempting to eat John's glove. John is thrilled at having a victory over a school bully, but also begins to become thirsty, an issue that will plague John for nearly the rest of the novel. Each time John attempts to drink water to alleviate his thirst, the water he drinks turns to chocolate instantly. Many of the unintended consequences of John's new ability seem not to bother him at first -for example, where John brushes his teeth. Breakfast is also delightful -but that anything that touches John's mouth will turn to chocolate is certainly cause for concern.

The downside of John's chocolate touch soon manifests. John ruins Susan's birthday present, and is unable to complete a math quiz in class. His attempts to explain his inability to complete the test only earn disapproval from Miss Plimsole. John's attempts to apologize and explain to Susan the cause for the ruining of her birthday present also don't pan out. Instead, the girls with Susan only make fun of John. The worst part for John, it seems, apart from the problems that his chocolate touch is giving him, is that he is becoming very, very thirsty, and is unable to handle the thirst. There seems to be no solution to it -relaying the idea that all actions have consequences, unintended or not. John's chocolate touch was phenomenal at first, but what is he to do about it now?

John does not realize how complicated he has made life for others, and is only belatedly realizing the difficulties his obsession with chocolate is causing. John has excluded his family and friends from his good luck, from the chocolate that he buys, and from much of his life because of his desire to keep all the chocolate he has to himself. Now, the chocolate touch he has is forcing others away when he needs them most. He is fast becoming an outcast among his friends, and most hurtful is that Susan seems to want nothing to do with him now.

Discussion Question 1

How does John first react to the chocolate touch? How does he react when he begins to consider what the implications might be? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the consequences of John's chocolate touch so far? How do the others treat John as a result? How does this make John feel?



Discussion Question 3

What is important about John's pencil turning to chocolate? What does this mean for John?

Vocabulary

devouring, scuffling, dismay, sacrifice, protested, reproachfully, retorted, regretted



Chapters 7-8

Summary

Chapter 7 – As the period for art ends, Miss Plimsole announces it is time for lunch. The children rush to the cafeteria, but John is not looking forward to it. He is jealous of a boy he sees drinking cold, refreshing milk, and some girls eating cherries. At the lunch line, John wonders aloud if he doesn't allow the food to touch his lips, it might not turn into chocolate. A boy overhears him, and hopes it is the day the lunch ladies serve chocolate cream pie for dessert, and thinking of chocolate makes John's stomach queasy. John chooses a meal for lunch that his mother would be proud of, with everything from chicken to fresh fruit. He eats carefully, trying to avoid touching his lips –but still the food and drink turn to chocolate. Even the glass he drinks out of and the utensils he uses to eat all turn to chocolate.

Chapter 8 – In English, Miss Plimsole hands out new vocabulary word lists. The words all seem to John to have something to do with food and John's overindulgence of chocolate, such as 'digestibility' and 'moderation'. Time comes for activities, and John and Susan make their way to the auditorium for orchestra rehearsal. Mrs. Quaver explains the music they are practicing, "A Boy's Song" by James Hogg. She explains each of the students' parts, and reminds John that his part is meant to sound happy and upbeat. The orchestra and chorus then begin practicing the music. When it comes time for John's part, the mouthpiece of his trumpet instantly turns to chocolate. His performance is horrible, and everybody laughs. A boy points out that John's trumpet is chocolate, and everyone laughs more. John runs home.

Analysis

The chocolate situation for John only continues to get worse. His growing thirst, and his inability to quench his thirst, speak to the desperation he is facing to find a solution to the problem of the chocolate touch. It is in the seventh chapter that John begins to understand just what he is missing by having refused to eat regular food in favor of sweets, especially in favor of chocolate. He looks with great envy on kids eating cherries, drinking milk, and actually longs to eat the food being served in the cafeteria. John is afflicted by the age old problem of wanting the most what he cannot have. In this case, what John needs the most is what he cannot have, and what he has always wanted - chocolate - he is having too much of. Such is yet another unintended consequence -and indeed, irony of, John's new chocolate touch: What mattered most to John before - chocolate - is now what is beginning to matter least to him. In effect, this forms another unintended consequence, in which something John loves the most, becomes not only something he cannot stand, but something he cannot escape, either. Interestingly enough, John is thirstiest for water - which he fails to secure from any water fountain throughout the day. Often, water is equated with life, and is necessary for



sustaining life. John's obsession with chocolate has removed him from being able to drink water - from having a life.

Everything that John does or goes through ultimately seems to reflect on his chocolate problem. Even the vocabulary words assigned in class seem to reflect on his issues, from digestion to moderation. These words are carefully selected by the author of the novel as well, to reflect not only the situation that John now faces, such as indigestion and chocolate being high in acidic content in large doses, but what his life should be like – in terms of moderation. But again, the lesson is lost on John. It is only during orchestra practice that John's chocolate touch truly affects him socially, as he is embarrassed in front of everyone, causing him to run home. John is going through a character transformation before the reader's eyes, by way of unintended consequences. His greed has come back to haunt him, a flaw which has deeply driven his character's desires, and need for improvement. This will prove pivotal to the theme of coming of age, as John's greed for chocolate, and selfishness in always putting himself ahead of others, will soon force him to make a serious choice.

Discussion Question 1

What is the major problem so far that John faces as a result of the chocolate touch? How does he attempt to handle this? Is he successful? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What reaction does John have toward chocolate in the cafeteria? Why? How does this differ with the past?

Discussion Question 3

How do the vocabulary words in John's class reflect John's situation? Pick three words, define them, and explain how they relate to John's situation.

Vocabulary

throng, spacious, enviously, quenching, persuade, cutlery, unquestionably, avarice, acidity, digestibility, moderation, nimbly, poised, warbled, uproarious, flustered, derisively



Chapter 9-10

Summary

Chapter 9 – John cries as he runs home, thinking the world has turned against him. John's mother tells him he will get chocolate as a reward after dinner for being home early, and John shouts that he hates it. He says he doesn't want to go to Susan's birthday party, but Mrs. Midas tells him that he doesn't really mean it, and Mrs. Buttercup herself is coming to pick John up at four. John forgets for chocolate for a little while at Susan's birthday party, and even plays games with the other kids. Susan looks especially pretty, and she tells John she is glad he came. When it comes time to duck for apples, Susan and the girls square off against John and the boys. Susan and John are the first to go –and as John goes after an apple, the water turns to chocolate. It gets all over Susan's face and dress, and she runs away from John. John then heads home.

Chapter 10 – John is halfway home when his father, on the way home from work, comes across him. He wonders why John left the party early, and sees the chocolate all over John. John bursts into tears again and confesses everything to his father. Mr. Midas wonders if maybe John had imagined it all, but John says he did not. Mr. Midas, still skeptical, suggests going to the candy shop to see what the owner has to say. But there is only a vacant lot with a for sale sign where the store should be. Worried about his son, Mr. Midas brings John to see Dr. Cranium. Mr. Midas explains everything his son has told him, and Dr. Cranium dismisses it as fantasy. He gives John some elixir to help clear John's stomach, but the spoon and elixir turn to chocolate instantly. Dr. Cranium is stunned but excited to have discovered a disease he plans to name after himself. He wants to study John. Mr. Midas is stunned as well, but more concerned for his son than anything else, and brings him home.

Analysis

If the humiliation that John faces during orchestra practice was not enough, things only get worse at Susan's birthday party. Though John does not want to attend the party, his mother, and Susan's mother, ensure that he does. The party goes well enough at first, and John is even able to forget about chocolate for a while, but when it comes time to duck for apples, John turns the bin in which they bob into a chocolaty mess. Susan's dress is ruined, and she turns away from him. This especially hits John hard, for Susan is the girl that he has a crush on. He ends up running away once again: another character flaw that will be changed by the end of the novel as John comes of age.

When everyone else seems to have shut John out, those whom he has taken most for granted – his family – are there for him. He runs into his father, who is on his way home from work after a long day. Mr. Midas drops everything in order to bring his son over to see Dr. Cranium. Cranium confirms that John does indeed have a serious chocolate problem, but it will require study. Rather than allow John to be subjected to tests, Mr.



Midas protectively brings his son home instead. Family and loyalty mean more to Mr. Midas than do scientific advancement or Dr. Cranium's desire for fame for discovering a new disease and naming it after himself. As such, the theme of family is on clear display here: John's father is far more worried about his son than himself, even given that his father is just getting home from a hard day at work.

Discussion Question 1

What is worse for John: the incident at orchestra practice, or the incident at Susan's birthday party? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Who does John finally turn to about his chocolate problem? What is different about John's telling this person, rather than his attempts to tell others?

Discussion Question 3

How does Dr. Cranium react to John's chocolate touch? Why do you believe this is? How does Mr. Midas react to Dr. Cranium? Why?

Vocabulary

humiliation, indignant, doubtful, dully, elixir, unprecedented



Chapters 11-12

Summary

Chapter 11 – Mrs. Midas is very upset to learn about John and his condition of Cranium’s Disease, chocolatitis. John is very sad to see his mother so upset, and realizes he has only been thinking of himself and how the disease might affect him. He kisses his mother’s cheek, only for her to turn into a chocolate statue. John runs out of the house, panicked. All he wants is to bring his mother back to life.

He runs back to where the candy store had been, and John discovers the store is back once again. In the window, instead of candy, are his chocolate trumpet, pencil, silver dollar, and all the other things he has turned into chocolate. He heads into the store to confront the owner about everything that has happened. The store owner looks satisfied. John is worried about his mother and blames the store owner, but the store owner responds that he is glad John is thinking about somebody other than himself, but that he must also be honest to be helped. John says he’ll do anything to get his mother back. The store owner says that only the greediest people can find the kind of money that John found. John implores the store owner to help his mother, and the store owner gives John a choice: he will either lose the chocolate touch, or his mother will be restored to life. John chooses his mother without hesitation. The store owner says everything that turned to chocolate will turn back, because John will have a second chance. John is mostly anxious about his mother, so the store owner tells him to run home and find out what has become of her.

Chapter 12 – Running back home, John is thrilled to see his mother back to normal. Neither his father nor mother have any idea what had happened. Mrs. Midas believes John looks thirsty, so she gives him a glass of milk, which he drinks nervously. It does not turn to chocolate as before, and John is thrilled. He runs back to thank the store owner, but only finds an empty lot with a sold sign on it.

Analysis

John only belatedly comes to recognize just how important his family is to him, when he sees how much his mother is suffering, worried for him. Her unconditional love for John moves John greatly, but John’s display of affection for his mother –a kiss on the cheek – turns his mother into a chocolate statue. John is terrified of what he has done, and scared to death for his mother. He wants his mother back, and this longing for his mother to return is unlike anything he has ever felt, even for chocolate. It causes him to rush out of the house, to seek out what he believes to be the source of all of his problems, the store owner at the candy store. The store owner serves to be a source of great conscientious wisdom for John, explaining that John’s problem is of his own making. Indeed, in many ways, the store owner can be considered John’s conscience, getting him to realize that he cannot externalize blame, but must accept blame for the



things he has himself done. As such, he comes of age in this instance by seeking not to run away from his problems, but by confronting them head on. The theme of family becomes especially strong here, but not on the part of the unconditional love that John's parents have toward him. It is the other way around. John has finally come to not only put others before himself, but has come to realize the importance of family. He is willing to do anything to get his mother back.

Upon John's accepting of blame for what he has done, his mother is restored to life, happy and healthy, and John's own chocolate touch is dispensed with. He becomes incredibly grateful not only just for his family, but for the ability to eat normal food and drink normal things. As his father cautions earlier in the novel, chocolate has its time and place, as do most things. John returns to thank the store owner in the end, only to discover that the store is gone – for the lesson John needed to learn has been learned.

Discussion Question 1

Why is John's mother turning to chocolate so horrifying to him? What does he do as a result?

Discussion Question 2

John blames the store owner for all of his problems. Is this an accurate summation by John? Why or why not? Use evidence from the novel to support your claim.

Discussion Question 3

When given the chance to choose between himself and his mother, what does John choose? Why? What is the result?

Vocabulary

proprietor, pleasantries, murmured, frantically



Characters

John Midas

John Midas is the main character in the novel “The Chocolate Touch” by Patrick Skene Catling. John lives with his mother, father, and little sister, Mary, in a warm and friendly town. He lives a good life. He is respectful and happy, but his major flaw is that he loves candy - especially chocolate - to a fault. John will eat chocolate any chance he gets, even if it means ruining his appetite or sneaking it when his parents aren’t looking. He even uses all of his lunch money on chocolate at school. His parents and Dr. Cranium attempt to reason with John, telling him that all the chocolate he eats is affecting his health in a poor way, but John refuses to listen to reason. All he wants his more chocolate.

On Sunday afternoon, he is walking around town, and discovers a silver coin on the sidewalk. On one side are the initials JM, and on the other side, a picture of a fat boy. John decides he will begin a coin collection with the money, and show it to Susan. But on the way to her house, John is distracted by a candy shop he has never noticed before, full of chocolate. He goes in, and the owner explains there is a special sale on chocolates, and that he only accepts a special kind of currency – the kind that John has just found. John gladly buys what he believes is a large box of chocolates, and then hides it under his bed so no one else will find it. That night, he opens the box to discover layers of packaging, and only one small gold-wrapped chocolate ball, which he quickly eats. It is the best chocolate he has ever tasted.

Beginning with the toothpaste he uses the next morning, and following with what he eats and drinks for breakfast, everything turns to chocolate in John’s mouth. As the day wears on, all the water he drinks, the lunch food he eats, and even his leather gloves and trumpet turn into chocolate. At first, John is thrilled with the turn of events, but as the day wears on, he becomes very thirsty and very hungry but can’t satisfy either urge. At Susan Buttercup’s birthday party, John ruins bobbing for apples by turning the water into chocolate, and causing a mess of Susan’s dress. Running home in humiliation, John comes across his father returning from work, and John confides the truth of everything in him. Mr. Midas then brings John to the doctor, who confirms that John must have some kind of unprecedented disease. He wants to study John, but Mr. Midas brings John home instead.

At home, John’s mother is horrified about what is happening to her son. John feels bad that his mother is worried, and he wants her to feel better. He tries to console her with a kiss, but it turns her into a giant chocolate statue instead. Terrified, he rushes from the house to the candy store, where he confronts the store owner. The store owner tells John that his problems are of his own making, and John has a choice: he can either have his mother back, or will lose the ability to turn anything into chocolate. John gladly puts his mother before himself, which impresses the store owner, who tells John to go home. At home, John is overjoyed to see his mother alive once more, and he no longer



has the chocolate touch. He runs back to thank the store owner, only to find a vacant lot with a sold sign on it.

Mr. Midas

Mr. Midas is the father of John Midas and Mary Midas, and is the husband of Mrs. Midas. Mr. Midas is a kind, loving, and very intelligent father who puts his family before else, and commutes to work by way of the train station every day. It is to Mr. Midas that John first confesses his chocolate touch, and Mr. Midas brings John to the doctor at once. Rather than allow Dr. Cranium to exploit John for his own notoriety, Mr. Midas brings John back home.

Mrs. Midas

Mrs. Midas is the mother of John Midas and Mary Midas, and the wife of Mr. Midas. Mrs. Midas is a very sweet, loyal, and loving woman who puts her family before all else. She is very practical as well, and constantly worries about the amount of chocolate John eats. When she discovers the affliction that plagues John, she is heartbroken. She is turned to chocolate when John kisses her. But following John's visit to the candy store owner, she is restored to life with no memory of her time as chocolate.

Mary Midas

Mary Midas is the younger sister of John Midas. She is a typical younger sister who enjoys telling on John and believes that John is playing tricks on her by telling her that the toothpaste he is using turns into chocolate.

Susan Buttercup

Susan Buttercup is a pretty young girl whom John has a crush on. She has blonde hair and a very kind mother. She has a birthday party on Monday, and looks forward to John attending. At school, she shows John a silver dollar she received from her parents, which she encourages John to bite to see that it is real. When he eats half the dollar, Susan is sad and runs away from John in tears. At recess, Susan and some other girls make fun of John in revenge, but Susan seems to come around by the time of her birthday party, for she is happy to see John there. But during bobbing for apples with John, the water turns to chocolate and ruins her dress. Once again, she runs away from John in tears.

Mrs. Buttercup

Mrs. Buttercup is the mother of Susan Buttercup. She is very warm and affectionate. Mrs. Buttercup and her husband are friends with the Midases. She picks up John for



Susan's birthday party, and later offers to clean the chocolate from bobbing for apples off him.

Miss Plimsole

Miss Plimsole is John's teacher at school. She is strict but kind, and intelligent. She does not believe John's stories about being unable to finish his pop quiz because his pencil has turned into chocolate, and tells him not to make excuses for his own shortcomings and failures.

Dr. Cranium

Dr. Cranium is a lean, tall, bald, and mustached doctor who runs a very successful practice in town. He does regular check-ups and appointments for the Midas family. He expresses his concerns about John eating so much chocolate, and how it is affecting his health. Dr. Cranium sees John and Mr. Midas later in the novel, when John confesses the chocolate touch to his father. Dr. Cranium is stunned to see the spoon and medicine he gives John turn to chocolate. Dr. Cranium says it is an unprecedented disease, which he will call Cranium's Disease in honor of himself, and will dub it chocolatitis. Cranium endeavors to study John, but Mr. Midas brings John home instead.

Spider Wilson

Spider Wilson is a bully at school who is one year older than John. When John tells him about the chocolate touch, Spider demands that John surrender his leather glove, recently turned to chocolate. Spider is stunned to discover the chocolate glove reverting to leather in his own mouth, which causes John to head to school in glee.

Store Owner

The never-named store owner owns operates the candy store where John buys the chocolate that gives him the ability to turn all he touches with his mouth into chocolate. The store owner serves as a moral reminder about John's behavior – both his selfishness and his greediness. John thinks only of himself, and will not share his good fortune with his friends, especially when it comes to chocolate. In many ways, the store owner can be viewed metaphorically as John's conscience, which confronts him about his actions. The store owner gives John the choice between getting his mother back, and losing the chocolate touch. By unhesitatingly choosing his mom, John earns his mother's life back, and loses the chocolate touch as well. When John goes to thank the store owner, both he and his shop have vanished.



Symbols and Symbolism

Chocolate

Chocolate is a kind of candy that proves to be the absolute favorite of John Midas. John Midas loves chocolate more than anything else, doing everything from ruining his appetite by eating chocolate before meals to spending all his lunch money on chocolate cream pie. He refuses to share his chocolate, even with his family. When John enters the candy shop, it is in the hopes of buying chocolate. When John discovers he has the chocolate touch, turning into chocolate all that which touches his mouth, he is initially thrilled, but it soon becomes a burden as he cannot slake his thirst or eat regular food to handle his hunger. John comes to declare his hate for chocolate by the end of the novel. While in school, John's obsession with chocolate, by way of the chocolate touch, prevents him from drinking water, often considered essential for, or symbolic of, life: chocolate gets in the way of John having a normal life.

Gold Chocolate Ball

A small, gold-wrapped chocolate ball serves to be the only piece of candy in the large box that John buys from the candy store. It is the best kind of chocolate he has ever had in his life, and proves to be the trigger for his ensuing chocolate touch.

Silver Coin

A silver coin, with the initials J.M. on one side (John Midas's initials) and a depiction of a fat boy on the other side, is discovered by John on the sidewalk. He picks up the coin, intending to use it to begin a collection. Instead, he uses it to buy what he believes is a large box of chocolates from the store owner at the candy shop, for it is the only kind of money the store owner says he accepts.

Toothpaste

John's toothpaste is his first inclination that something magical has happened to him. The toothpaste he uses on Monday morning turns to chocolate in his mouth, so he ends up eating the entire tube of toothpaste. He is overseen by Mary, who tells on him, but their parents do not believe her.

Water

Following the chocolate touch, John is desperate to handle his thirst, but each time he tries to drink water throughout the day at school, it turns to chocolate instead. Water is often seen as symbolic of life, and becomes what John most seeks to drink throughout



the school day, but his chocolate touch prevents him from drinking water -and thus, having a normal life.

Silver Dollar

A silver dollar is given to Susan on her birthday by her parents. She shows the silver dollar to John and insists he bite it in order to see that it is real. John does so reluctantly, biting off half the dollar, which turns to chocolate instantly in his mouth. Susan is wildly upset at what John has done and runs off from him.

Trumpet

John plays the trumpet in orchestra at school. During orchestra practice, John's trumpet transforms into chocolate as he attempts to play it during his part, causing him to mess up. This causes all of the other students to laugh, and one of them to hold up and make fun of the chocolate trumpet.

Leather Gloves

Leather gloves are the first non-edible object that John turns into chocolate through his ability. This occurs while he ponders his ability walking to school on Monday morning. One of the gloves is taken by Spider Wilson, only to revert to leather when Spider attempts to eat them.

Pencil

During math lessons, John attempts to complete a math quiz. He places his pencil in his mouth in thought, and ends up turning it to chocolate. He cannot reverse the changing, and as a result, he is unable to finish his quiz. When John attempts to reveal the truth of the quiz and pencil to the teacher, the teacher tells John not to blame other things for his own failures.

Apple

Apples are the kind of fruit that are bobbed for in a tank of water at Susan's birthday party. When John goes to bob for apples, all of the apples, as well as the water, turn into chocolate. As a result, a great mess is made, including of Susan's dress, which causes her to cry and believe her birthday is ruined. It is also the apple incident which causes John to run away from the party.



Settings

Town

John, Susan, and their families live in a town that is never named in the novel. It is a warm, safe, and friendly town, for the children in the town play about without fear, and parents look after one another's kids as if they are their own. It also appears to be something of a bedroom community or commuter town, for John's father goes to work by way of the town's train station. The town is where the school and candy shop are located, as well as Dr. Cranium's office.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks are located along the streets that run throughout the town. They serve as a way for pedestrians to get from place to place, and are followed by John absentmindedly as he wanders around town on Sunday afternoon. It is on the sidewalk that John first discovers the special silver coin that he will come to spend at the candy shop, leading to all his chocolate troubles.

Candy Shop

The candy shop that John visits in the novel is located on a corner in town. It is a small, brick building that is packed with candies of all kinds, including chocolates. The candy shop is owned and operated by the store owner, who sells only the finest candy made from the finest ingredients, especially when it comes to chocolates. John buys the box of chocolates that will change his life from the candy shop. When he later brings his father to see the shop, there is only an empty lot with a for sale sign on it. When John's mother turns to chocolate, John returns to the shop, which has reappeared, to secure his mother's life. When John later returns to the shop to thank the owner for freeing his mother and taking away the chocolate touch, the store is gone again, replaced by an empty lot with a sold sign.

School

School is where John, Susan, Spider, and the other children attend classes. It is within walking distance of John's house, and is where Miss Plimsole teaches. School is where John's chocolate touch really begins to hit home against him, for it is at school that all the water he attempts to drink turns to chocolate, and his trumpet turns to chocolate at orchestra practice. At the end of the day, John runs home from school, for he cannot bear to be there any longer.



Dr. Cranium's Office

Doctor Cranium's office is where Dr. Cranium carries out his medical practice. It is a successful and well-respected business. It is where John Midas and his family go for checkups, and where Mr. Midas brings John when John claims that all he touches with his mouth turns to chocolate. It is at the office that Cranium diagnoses John with the brand new disease of chocolatitis, also known as Cranium's Disease.

Susan's Birthday Party

Susan's birthday party occurs at Susan's house. Many of the kids from school attend, including John. John has such a good time at Susan's birthday party that he forgets about his chocolate touch. When he goes to bob for apples, John's chocolate touch turns the apples and the water into chocolate - which causes Susan's birthday dress to be ruined, and John to be humiliated. As a result, John flees from the birthday party.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

Coming of age is a major and overarching theme in the novel “The Chocolate Touch” by Patrick Skene Catling. Coming of age involves the personal, spiritual, moral, or emotional growth and maturation of an individual often based on real world experiences. In the novel, coming of age affects the character of John Midas. John Midas is not a bad kid. He is respectful and relatively well-behaved, but he has one major flaw which brings about two negative character traits.

John’s major flaw is his love of chocolate. This brings out his selfishness and his greediness. When the novel begins, John will do anything to get chocolate; he will sneak it before meals, spend all his lunch money on chocolate, will get it from his friends. When John does come into possession of chocolate, he will not share it with anyone else. He puts himself first when it comes to chocolate and always refuses to share. His selfishness and greediness are clear. Even after he finds a rare silver coin, he would rather have chocolate – purchased without the permission of his mother – than to keep such a special coin.

John’s purchase and consumption of the chocolate from the candy store proves to be a set of real world experiences that humble and transform him. The chocolate touch causes Susan’s silver dollar to be ruined, John’s trumpet to turn into chocolate, and John to unsuccessfully complete a pop quiz in math. Likewise, the incident with the trumpet causes everyone in the orchestra to laugh at John.

When John is diagnosed with Cranium’s Disease, John’s mother is horrified and cries – and this causes John to feel bad for her rather than himself. For the first time in the novel, John thinks of someone before himself. When his mother turns to chocolate, John would rather his mother come back to life than be free of the chocolate touch. In so doing, John loses both his greed and his selfishness in putting his mother first; as a result, he is rewarded with not only the life of his mother, but freedom from the chocolate touch.

Another flaw in John's character that is addressed by his coming of age is his consistent refusal to confront problems, but rather, run away from them. For example, when John turns Susan's birthday party apple tank into chocolate, rather than stay to explain or apologize, he takes off running, leaving behind a mess. He even refuses Susan's mother's offer to help clean him up. However, when the tragedy of John's chocolate touch hits home and his mother turns to chocolate, John summons up courage to finally face down his problems by going to their source. Rather than running away from his problems, he runs to them: the candy shop owner, and ultimately, John himself.



Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “The Chocolate Touch” by Patrick Skene Catling. Thematically, family includes emotional, moral, and even physical and spiritual support of and loyalty towards others who may or may not be blood related, but still act in accordance with the traditional family unit. The theme of family can most be clearly seen in the Midas family, which is a blood-related group and which does behave in the way of a traditional family.

That Mr. and Mrs. Midas love their children can easily be seen. While Mrs. Midas looks after the physical and emotional health and welfare of her family, and handles household affairs as a stay-at-home mom, Mr. Midas provides for his family financially, intellectually, and emotionally. Their children come first to them, always, even before themselves. For example, Mr. Midas, who has just finished a difficult day of work, nevertheless willingly stops to hear out what John has to say about having a chocolate touch, even though Mr. Midas is at first skeptical of such a story. Concerned for his son, he takes John to the doctor immediately.

As John comes of age, and his greediness and selfishness are put aside, the love he has for his family becomes quite apparent – especially when it comes to his parents. John’s relationship with his father allows him to open to his father about the chocolate touch in a complete way before he opens up to anyone else about it in the same fashion. When John’s mother turns to chocolate, it is for her safety and life above all else – even himself – that John seeks to find a cure. Given the choice between his own freedom and his mother’s life, John chooses his mother without a second’s hesitation. He is so grateful for his mother’s return to life that he races all the way to the store owner to thank him, only to discover the store and its owner have vanished.

Obsession

Obsession is a major and dominant theme in the novel “The Chocolate Touch” by Patrick Skene Catling. It serves as the catalyst for the actions and events of the novel through the character of John Midas. John Midas’s obsession in the novel is candy, especially chocolate. It is the main thing he eats, and he can never seem to get enough of it until receiving the chocolate touch.

When the novel begins, John will eat chocolate whenever he feels like it, including before meals, often ruining his appetite. He will get chocolate from his friends to eat, but will never share any of the chocolate that he has himself. He will spend all of his lunch money on chocolate cream pies instead of regular food at school. He willingly trades a newfound coin for a box of chocolates, despite the strange coincidence of having just found the only kind of currency the store accepts, and currency with his own initials on it. When Dr. Cranium tells John to eat foods other than chocolate, John believes this means he should eat foods, like bananas - covered in chocolate.



Obsessions are unhealthy things, as John comes to find out. His love of chocolate is adversely affecting his health, causing him to have poor reflexes and red spots on his nose. He is forced to take a horrible-tasting tonic to supply the vitamins and nutrients he is not getting from chocolate. When John receives the chocolate touch, he is very excited and thrilled, for everything he puts in his mouth, from toothpaste to breakfast foods, turn to chocolate. But soon after, John's thirst and hunger grow, and he cannot satisfy them. Too much chocolate becomes too much chocolate, and he even ends up declaring that he hates chocolate on Monday afternoon.

Conscience

Conscience is a major, underlying theme in the novel "The Chocolate Touch" by Patrick Skene Catling. Conscience is a mental or emotional understanding about that which is morally right or wrong. Conscience, thematically, revolves around the character of John, and evolves as John comes of age throughout the novel.

When the novel begins, John does not use his conscience at all when it comes to chocolate. His obsession with chocolate dominates both his conscience, and his common sense. John does things that he knows he should not do, but does them anyways, such as eating chocolate before meals and buying chocolate without his mother's permission. He refuses to share any chocolate he has with anyone else, and thinks of himself before all others. As such, he is greedy and selfish, ignoring his conscience in the process.

When John's chocolate touch becomes too much to handle, and his mother becomes a chocolate statue, John blames the candy store owner for all of his troubles. But the candy store owner tells John that his problems are of his own causing. In a way, the owner becomes John's conscience in physical form, reminding him of what is right and wrong. It is when listening to his conscience at last that John decides he would rather save his mother than himself. As a result of finally listening to his conscience, both John's mother, and John himself, are freed of the effects of the chocolate touch.

Unintended Consequences

Unintended consequences, thematically, is very important in the novel "The Chocolate Touch" by Patrick Skene Catling. Unintended consequences are the results of an action that are either unconsidered, not wanted, not intended, or initially unknown to the individual or situation. Unintended consequences come about by way of thinking too little, and bring to mind the old idea that one should be careful about for what one wishes - it just might come true, and have unintended consequences. These come in two forms.

The first form of unintended consequences comes by way of direct action. John Midas's life revolves around candy, and specifically, around chocolate. He will rarely eat anything else, and only when he is forced to do so by his parents. He even ignores the warnings of Dr. Cranium about his chocolate consumption. Here, the direct action is



John's love of chocolate. The unintended consequences include a decline in John's overall health (certainly something he does not intend), and the inability to get closer with his friends (scoring candy from them rather than wanting to hang out with them).

The second form of unintended consequence comes by way of indirect action, of cause and consequence. The love of chocolate compels John to spend a rare coin on a special chocolate which gives him the chocolate touch. This in turn prevents John from living a normal life: everything he eats, drinks, and touches with his mouth turns to chocolate from food to water to his mother. As a result, he is unable to eat or drink anything normal, even though he wants to. Additionally, chocolate becomes something that John no longer loves, but ends up hating -something he never intended, or could have possibly imagined in the beginning. Ironically, what brings about his hatred of chocolate is exactly what he wanted in the first place: to only eat and drink chocolate. Now, he wants nothing to do with it at all.



Styles

Point of View

Patrick Skene Catling tells his novel "The Chocolate Touch" from the point of view of the third-person limited-omniscient perspective, in which a narrator, not personally involved in the story somehow, tells the story. The third-person perspective allows the writer to comment on John and his actions from time to time. For example, when John decides to go left instead of right to take a different route to visit Susan in Chapter 2, the narrator comments that John did not stop to consider that one cannot go east by going west unless one crosses the entire globe.

The third-person narrative mode also allows insights into the thoughts and actions of other characters that might not be apparent to other characters. For example, Mr. Midas first approaches John's story with a dose of skepticism not readily obvious to John. Likewise, the limited-omniscient perspective lends a sense of mystery to the novel, for the reader learns things only as the characters, especially John, learns them. The reader, for example, does not know whether or not the candy store will be there when John goes to save his mother's life.

Language and Meaning

Patrick Skene Catling tells his novel "The Chocolate Touch" in language that is very simple and straightforward. The audience Catling is writing for is that of young adults and middle-grade readers, so the language he uses is fitting to their education. Catling's language in the book also accurately reflects the vocabulary of a young boy, the main character John.

Catling also uses names for his characters that evoke particular comparisons and thoughts. For example, John's last name is Midas, in reference to King Midas and the myth of the Greek king Midas who could turn things to gold by touching them. John shares a similar malady, but turns things into chocolate with his mouth.

Structure

Patrick Skene Catling divides his novel "The Chocolate Touch" into twelve chronological, linear, and successive chapters. Each chapter begins with a small illustration, and has a full-page illustration present within the chapter. The simple and straightforward approach Catling takes to his novel is based on at least two primary reasons. First, he is writing for a younger audience, and the chronological, linear format is much easier to follow along. Secondly, the straightforward approach to the novel allows Catling to focus effort on the story itself, and allows the reader to focus on not only the story, but the moral of the story contained therein, about the need for honesty, selflessness, and responsibility.



Quotes

John Midas was candy mad.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 8)

Importance: The narrator, describing the character of John Midas, provides John's biggest flaw. That flaw coalesces around candy, especially chocolate. This candy madness that John has will become central to the novel's plot.

Each one of these things had felt the way it had always felt before... But everything had tasted like the chocolate he had eaten in bed last night.

-- Narrator (Chapter 4 paragraph 2)

Importance: Between brushing his teeth and eating breakfast, John discovers that everything tastes like delicious chocolate, though the things that he eats retain their feel and texture. Bacon still crunches like bacon, but it tastes like chocolate. Toothpaste still feels like toothpaste, but it tastes like chocolate.

The magic – for John now knew that his power must be magic – was apparently getting stronger.

-- Narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph 17)

Importance: Traveling to school, John is stunned to see that his leather glove also turns to chocolate. In class, John is further stunned to discover that his pencil turns to chocolate, and he realizes that whatever magic must have come over him is getting stronger as non-edible things are turning to chocolate before his eyes.

Once during geography and once during art he was excused to get a drink of water. Both times, however, he swallowed nothing but sweet chocolate. His mouth was getting stickier and drier by the minute.

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 24)

Importance: Here, the narrator explains that as the day is going on, John is getting thirstier and thirstier, but he cannot satisfy his thirst. Every time John tries to drink water, it turns into chocolate, and so does not slake his thirst. It is a growing problem for John which seems to have no solution.

The thought of four pieces of chocolate cream pie now suddenly made his stomach feel as though he were on a roller coaster – an uneasy, flibberty-jibberty sensation.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 10)

Importance: By lunch, John is starting to lose his desire for chocolate. In the past, on chocolate cream pie day, he would spend all his lunch money on the dessert. Now, the thought of chocolate at all makes him queasy. He has had way too much chocolate, and it is affecting him very negatively now.



What am I going to do?" he asked himself miserably. "Oh, dear, oh, dear! What is going to happen to me?"

-- John (Chapter 7 paragraph 19)

Importance: As the gravity of John's problem becomes clear and apparent to him, he realizes he is in for some serious trouble. He is worried, because he does not know what will happen to him between turning things into chocolate, being unable to get any of the nutrients, vitamins, and water he actually needs.

I've never seen anything like it! The boy's whole system seems to be so chocolated that it chocolates everything it touches!

-- Dr. Cranium (Chapter 10 paragraph 25)

Importance: Here, Dr. Cranium confirms that John is indeed suffering from some sort of malady, which he ultimately terms chocolatitis. Cranium, however, is more thrilled that he has discovered a new disease than he is with John's health, and so he terms the disease Cranium's Disease.

I hate it! John shouted.

-- John (Chapter 9 paragraph 5)

Importance: For the first time in the novel, John declares that he hates chocolate. This is significant because it shows just how far John has come from his previous self, of sneaking home candy to eat at night in bed. Now, he is flatly rejecting offers of chocolate and declaring he hates it.

It's magic. It all started after I ate that chocolate... I'm scared.

-- John (Chapter 11 paragraph 3)

Importance: Here, John begins to take responsibility for his actions. He admits to his parents that everything began after he ate a certain kind of chocolate from the candy shop. This is important because John has not taken responsibility for what has happened before conversing with his parents after getting home from the doctor's office.

John had been so busy feeling sorry for himself that he had not realized how his mother and father would feel about his chocolate disease.

-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 6)

Importance: In his first departure from selfishness, John begins to think outside of himself. In his darkest hour, he actually thinks about others, especially about his parents, and how they might feel about his chocolate touch. He is genuinely worried about them for once, instead of just himself.

Unselfishness is important. But honesty is also important. If you'll be truthful, perhaps I can help you.

-- Store Owner (Chapter 11 paragraph 16)



Importance: Here, the store owner provides much of the moral of the story. He imparts upon John the importance of honesty and selflessness. In a way, the store owner becomes a mirror of, or even representative of, John's own conscience, reminding him of the importance and moral importance of honesty.