



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Chocolate War

Robert Cormier



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Chocolate War

Robert Cormier

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

ISBN 978-1-50203-681-0

Copyright infringement is a violation of Federal Law.

© 2020 by Novel Units, Inc., St. Louis, MO. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without prior written permission from Novel Units, Inc.

Reproduction of any part of this publication for an entire school or for a school system, by for-profit institutions and tutoring centers, or for commercial sale is strictly prohibited.

Novel Units is a registered trademark of Conn Education.

Printed in the United States of America.

To order, contact your local school supply store, or:

Toll-Free Fax: 877.716.7272

Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

novelunits.com

Table of Contents

Plot Summary	3
Background on the Novelist	4
Initiating Activities	5
Anticipation Guide, Viewing, Log, Verbal Scales, Brainstorming, Role Play, Prereading Discussion and/or Writing Questions	
Chapter-by-Chapter Chapters Contain: Vocabulary Words and Activities, Discussion Questions and Activities, Predictions	
Chapters 1-4	7
Chapters 5-8	9
Chapters 9-13	11
Chapters 14-16	13
Chapters 17-20	15
Chapters 21-24	16
Chapters 25-28	17
Chapters 29-33	19
Chapters 34-36	20
Chapters 37-39	22
Post-reading Extension Activities	24
Post-reading Discussion Questions, Suggested Further Reading, Writing, Essay Topics, Listening/ Speaking, Debate, Drama, Language Study, Art, Music, Research	
Evaluation: Rubric for Essay-Writing	29
Assessment	30

Plot Summary

The novel's central character, Jerry Renault, is a student at Trinity, a private high school run by Catholic priests. Jerry's mother died a short time before the opening of the story; communication with his hard-working father, a pharmacist, is minimal. Jerry's chief escape is on the football field, and he is anxious to make the freshman team.

When the ambitious, sadistic Brother Leon takes charge of the annual fund-raiser—a chocolate sale—he enlists the support of the Vigils, a secret society of students that the brothers neither officially recognize nor disband. Archie, the “Assigner” who is the brains behind the Vigils, despises Brother Leon but delights in making students squirm as much as Brother Leon does. Archie agrees to see that the boys sell twice as many chocolates as usual, at twice the usual price, and later learns why Brother Leon is so anxious for success: Without authorization, Brother Leon has already spent \$20,000 of school money on the chocolates.

Meanwhile, Archie summons Jerry's friend “Goober” to give him one of the Vigils' notorious “assignments.” (As with every assignment, Archie must first draw a marble from a box; if he draws the sole black marble—which has never happened—he must carry out the assignment himself.) Goober is horrified when Archie orders him to loosen the screws in all the furniture in Brother Eugene's classroom, but like most of the Trinity students, Goober is afraid to refuse a Vigil assignment. Later, the class dissolves in predictable chaos as the furniture falls apart, and Brother Eugene disappears after reportedly suffering a nervous breakdown.

Next, Archie gives Jerry an assignment: Antagonize Brother Leon by refusing to sell chocolates for two weeks. Each day tension mounts as Brother Leon calls each name for the sales count, and each day Jerry dares to answer “no.” The eleventh day arrives and for some reason even Jerry doesn't quite understand, Jerry continues to refuse to sell chocolates. Others congratulate him for showing guts, and general sales slacken off, which angers Archie and Brother Leon.

Archie meanwhile manages to humiliate an entire class by arranging a prank and then tipping off the teacher. Every time Brother Jacques says the word “environment,” the boys in his class leap up and perform a jig. The teacher uses the word repeatedly, exhausting the boys. Archie's rival, Obie, recognizes Archie's duplicity and his hatred for Archie intensifies. Obie demands that Archie do something about Jerry's defiance and is annoyed when Archie merely orders Jerry to sell the candy. Heartened by Jerry's refusal to conform, Frankie Rollo refuses an assignment. This time, however, Obie's supporter, Carter, defies Archie—who eschews physical violence—by giving Rollo a beating, to the delight of the other members.

Jerry becomes the victim of several anonymous attacks: his favorite poster is vandalized, he is struck viciously from behind during football practice, his landscape watercolor assignment is taken, and he gets harassing phone calls. Chocolate sales rise as public sentiment shifts against Jerry. Upset by his role in Brother Eugene's breakdown, Goober quits the football team and begs Jerry to start selling chocolates before the others break him as they have broken Goober and Brother Eugene.

Archie has had the dangerous Emile Janza more or less under his thumb ever since the day Archie pretended to take an embarrassing picture of Emile Janza masturbating in the men's room. He has told Janza that someday he will give the picture to him in exchange for a favor. When Archie tells Janza to get Jerry, Janza provokes Jerry by calling him a “queer” and then attacks Jerry with the help of several small, vicious boys.

Chapter-by-Chapter Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Activities

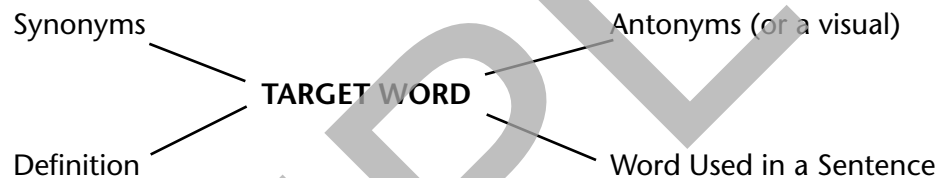
Chapters 1-4

Vocabulary

grotesque 7	lassitude 8	benevolently 11	languidly 14
surreptitiously 18	contemptuous 20	confrontation 20	ingratiating 23
incapacitated 25	feigning 25		

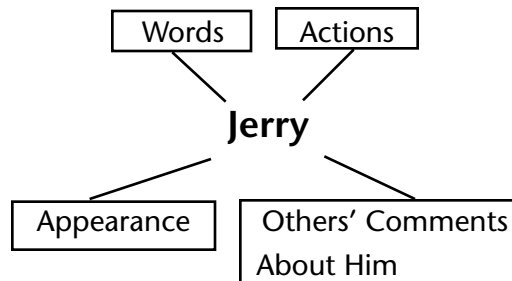
Vocabulary Activity

Word mapping is an activity that lends itself to any vocabulary list. For words that have no antonyms, students provide a picture or symbol that captures the word meaning.



Discussion Questions

- As the story opens, who has “murdered” whom? What is making Jerry sick? (*Jerry’s opponents on the football field have tackled him hard.*) Why do you think he chooses to put himself through all of this? (*He wants to be on the freshman team. Maybe focusing on football—and even on pain—helps him cope with his mother’s death.*)
- What is the connection between what happens in chapter one and what happens in chapter two? How are they connected in time and place? (*Archie and Obie have been observing Jerry on the football field; Archie decides that Jerry is tough and needs an “assignment.”*)
- What are your impressions of Jerry so far? Would he be a friend of yours? (Draw the following attribute web on the board; have students suggest Jerry’s characteristics and locate supportive evidence in the text as you jot these down on the board.) (*He acts like a fighter who doesn’t give up on the football field; from what Obie and Archie say, we gather that he is 14, the son of a pharmacist. The narrator tells us that Jerry feels guilty when he looks at Playboy. He wears a tie. From the stranger’s taunts, we gather that he looks pretty conservative; from his response to the stranger, we infer that he backs off from confrontation.*)



-
4. What is the coach like? (*He looks like a gangster, curses, spits, yells at his players.*) What do you think of him? Why do you think he is so gruff? Does Jerry mind the coach's attitude? (*He doesn't like to be spat on, but wants the coach's approval.*) Do you think a good coach needs to act that way?
 5. Why is Obie annoyed with Archie? (*Obie resents being ordered around by Archie and is angry that Archie is making him late to work.*) Why do you think Archie is holding Obie up? Why doesn't Obie just leave?
 6. Why does Obie admire Archie? (*Obie admires Archie's cleverness at coming up with cruel "assignments" and Archie's ability to manipulate people.*) Is Archie someone you would admire? Would you be intimidated by him?
 7. Why do you think Archie says that maybe he should "assign someone to the store"? (*Maybe he is trying to control Obie by letting him know he could arrange a prank that might get Obie in trouble at work.*) What sort of assignment do you think he is thinking of?
 8. Have students reread the description on page 14: "The shadows of the goal posts sprawled on the field like grotesque crosses." Why do you think Cormier compares the goal posts to crosses on page 14 and again on page 17? (*Maybe Cormier underlining how "un-Christian" the behavior of these boys is, despite their attendance at a parochial school.*) What do you see as you imagine Obie and Archie talking?
 9. What do you learn about Jerry's mother? How do you learn this? (*The narrator reveals Jerry's thoughts about how drugged his mother was at the end; Obie reads in his notebook that Jerry's mother died the past spring of cancer.*) What does Archie have to say about her death? (*He is falsely solicitous, then suggests that Jerry needs the "therapy" of an assignment.*) What does that show you about Archie? (*his uncompromising cruelty*)
 10. Why does the fellow with the moustache confront Jerry? (*He has noticed Jerry staring at him and his friends.*) What tone of voice do you think he and Jerry use? (*The stranger is belligerent; Jerry is conciliatory.*) Why do you suppose Jerry doesn't just walk away? What do you think the stranger wanted from Jerry? Why does Cormier include the detail that Jerry yanks off his tie once he is on the bus? (*probably to show you that what the stranger has said about Jerry's being "square" has hit home*)
 11. What is Archie's opinion of Brother Leon? (*Archie admires Brother Leon's intelligence and ability to be calm under pressure.*) Do you think Archie's thoughts are a reliable source of information about Brother Leon? What does Brother Leon's opinion of Archie seem to be? (*The teacher doesn't seem to like Archie much, but he realizes that Archie wields power among the students.*) How can you tell that neither wants the other to know what is really going on in his mind? (*Brother Leon is nervous, as evidenced by his sweaty upper lip, but he keeps his voice casual; Archie is excited to realize that Brother Leon is nervous, but hopes that his thumping heart doesn't give him away.*)
 12. Why has Brother Leon called Archie in to talk about the chocolate sale? (*Brother Leon, who has ordered twice the usual number of chocolates, wants Archie to get the Vigils behind the sale.*) Why do you think Cormier includes the detail that the chocolates are actually Mother's Day chocolates? (*maybe to show how unscrupulous Brother Leon is*) According to Brother Leon, why is selling the chocolates so important? (*Trinity is a private school that needs the money to pay for items like the football and boxing programs.*) Which reasons do you think are most important to him?