

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Chocolate War

by Robert Cormier

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ISBN: 978-1-58049-995-8

Item No. 200945

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Chapter One

1. As Jerry battles to make the football team, he feels like the other people around him look “grotesque” and like “creatures from another world.” As Cormier puts it, Jerry has “never felt so lonely in his life, abandoned, defenseless.” In one or two paragraphs, write either about a specific time when you felt this way or about a situation that *always* makes you feel this way.
2. Jerry is “stunned by the knowledge that pain isn’t just one thing—it is cunning and various, sharp here and sickening there, burning here and clawing there.” Write a poem about at least three different types of pain you have felt. If possible, make all three types of *physical* pain (like Jerry’s), not emotional suffering.
3. Jerry is always betraying himself: “thinking one thing and saying another, planning one thing and doing another.” Write two descriptive paragraphs—one about something you thought about saying and regret not having had the courage to say, the other about the one thing you most regret not having done after planning to do it.
4. Describe something you have wanted badly and striven hard to get, as Jerry wants and strives for a position on the team. Why did you want the thing? Did you end up getting it?

Response Journal

Chapter Two

5. Obie alternately hates and admires Archie. In two paragraphs, describe someone who produces mixed emotions in you (the emotions need not be hate and admiration; they could be love and pity or any other combination). In the first paragraph, describe the first emotion the person kindles in you and why; in the second, describe the conflicting emotion and the reason for it.
6. Obie feels that it is essential to stay on Archie's "good side" in order to avoid Archie's wrath. Write a paragraph about someone whose good side you feel you need to stay on, whether it is a teacher, relative, or friend. How does it feel to have to constantly watch what you do and say around this person? What do you think would happen if you got on his or her bad side? If you don't currently have such a person in your life, write about someone from your past.

Chapter Three

7. Of Jerry, Cormier writes, "[t]he one devastating sorrow he carried within him was the fear that he would die before holding a girl's breast in his hand." Write a paragraph about the one thing that you most fear you won't have the opportunity to do before you die. Why do you think you might not get to do it?
8. The "hippie" takes one look at the way Jerry is dressed and concludes that Jerry is "middle-aged at fourteen" and "missing a lot of things in the world." What conclusions have you made about people based on their outward appearances? Write three paragraphs about three groups of people with a very distinctive style of dress (for ex: people who only wear black, people who only wear brand names, nuns, etc.). What do their outward appearances lead you to imagine about their personalities and lives? Do you think your conclusions are correct?

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Chapter Four

9. Archie has always suspected that most adults are vulnerable and “running scared.” What are your feelings about adults? In general, do they seem wiser, more sure of themselves, and less vulnerable than teenagers? **Should** adults be these things? Leaving aside concrete factors like having a job instead of going to school, how do you think you will be different from the way you are now when you are an adult? Will you have the same insecurities, different ones, or none at all? Freewrite for five minutes on this general topic. It is okay if you don’t get to address all of these questions; likewise, feel free to make up and answer some of your own questions on this subject.

10. Archie is annoyed when Brother Leon uses the slang of the younger generation, saying “put down” as though he were a teenager himself. How do you feel when adults use “your” slang—annoyed, like Archie, or touched that they are trying to learn and speak to you in “your” language? Explain your answer.

Chapter Five

11. Although he enjoys what he does, Archie feels as if he is constantly under pressure; he is expected to always be able to come up with brilliant Vigil assignments. Think of something you feel pressured to consistently do well because it’s expected of you. Write a poem about how that pressure feels.

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Chapter Six

12. How do you think you would have reacted if you had been in Brother Leon's classroom when Leon was accusing Bailey of cheating? Would you have stood up for Bailey, laughed, or remained silent? Answer in terms of what you think you *would* have done, not what you think one *should* do in such a situation, and explain why you think you would have reacted in that manner.

Chapter Seven

13. Which would bother you more: to be picked on physically (for example, being pushed or having your lunch money taken from you by force) or to be publicly humiliated? Explain your answer.

Chapter Eight

14. When the Goober runs, he forgets all of his self-consciousness and awkwardness; everything seems beautiful and nothing seems impossible. Write a descriptive paragraph about an action or activity that does for you what running does for the Goober. If you prefer, write about the difficulty of "forgetting" yourself and your concerns no matter what activity you're engaged in.

Chapter Nine

15. On the football field, Jerry feels as if he is “part of” something and wonders what his father is “part of.” Write a poem in the form of a list about the things you truly feel you are part of. You may choose concrete things (“I am part of a band; I am part of a world-wide network of arrogant Leos; I am part of a television audience every Tuesday night at 8:00”), but try to include some abstract things as well (“I am part of the dust; I am part of a sigh”). Name at least ten things you are part of in your poem. Try for twenty.
16. As Jerry wonders what his father is “part of,” consider what one of your parents, grandparents, teachers, or the other adults in your life is part of and write a poem similar to the one above as if you were that person. For this poem, you need only include a minimum of *five* things, but *all* must be abstract (no “I am a football coach; I am a mother” poems). Put yourself in your chosen adult’s shoes and think deeply about what “you” [as that person] are part of before writing.
17. Would you describe, as Jerry’s father does, the majority of your days as “fine”? Do other members of your family say “fine” when you ask how their days were? Why do you think we tend to say “fine” or “okay” when describing our days? Think of a “fine” day at school you have had recently and write a detailed paragraph describing it in other words. (Was it “uninspiring”? Was it “soul-crushing”? Was it “a relief”?)
18. The idea that finishing school, getting married, getting an occupation, and having a family might be all there is to life depresses Jerry. Does it depress you? In supposed contrast to this kind of life, Jerry wants to “do something, be somebody.” Do you? Write a few paragraphs about your expectations for your own life—what would please you, what would disappoint you. Stay away from an “It would please me to have millions of dollars and ten cars” kind of response. Focus instead upon what you want to get out of and do with the years allotted you.