

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

# *I Am the Cheese*

by Robert Cormier

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# *I Am the Cheese*

## Objectives

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

1. follow a plot, which is non-linear, and point out the merits of this type of novel.
2. place events along a timeline.
3. explain how a novel, which has at its center, mystery, false clues, and disguised characters and motives, can come to a sudden conclusion.
4. point out the difference between the flashbacks and the actual evolving events.
5. define the following terms and point out how they apply to *I Am the Cheese*:
  - omniscient narration
  - limited first person narration
  - past tense narration
  - present tense narration
6. define and identify examples of:
  - theme
  - simile
  - metaphor
  - irony
  - personification
7. discuss the literary devices authors sometimes use in order to convey the themes of books. An examples might be: past and present tense which intertwine and literary terms which evoke and contribute to the central idea of the novel.
8. relate the way in which the title of a novel pertains to and fits the novel itself.
9. trace and discuss the role that suspense plays in a psychological novel.
10. discuss how the author manipulates suspense in order to achieve tension.
11. infer events and meanings not explicitly stated.
12. cite incidents from the story to support the following statement of theme: In order for children to mature into adults they must understand themselves.

# *I Am the Cheese*

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Usually a novel moves along in time with the events of the story, more or less chronologically. *I Am the Cheese* does not. Its events are jumbled together, and this non-linear style of writing is frequently difficult to follow. In *I Am the Cheese* the author switches from present tense to past tense and back many times. What effect did this style of writing have on you? Was it easier or more difficult than the usual novels you read? How did it help or hurt the actual story itself? Why do you think Cormier wrote this way?
2. A mystery novel leaves clues and hints to get the reader interested; it causes misinterpretations, and in the end, it resolves the mysteries. What was the mystery, how were you misled, and how did the novel solve the problems?
3. One theme of *I Am the Cheese* might be the confusion of leaving childhood and attaining adulthood. However, at the end of the novel Adam has not arrived at his maturity. Instead, he is still a teenager and still confused. Discuss in detail Adam's confusion, insecurities, and their causes.
4. The title of the novel refers to a nursery rhyme. Discuss two different ways the rhyme fits both the title and the story.
5. Give at least three examples of how Adam/Paul's false memories conflict with reality. Compare and contrast what he believes truth to be with actuality.
6. *I Am the Cheese* should be a novel about Adam's ability to find his true self after years of constant lies about everything. He can not find himself because of his "mental problems," which were directly caused by years of his parents' deceit. Adam confuses reality with memory, truth with lies, and past with present. He does not understand the situations in which he finds himself. Explain how these falsities, which Adam grew up with and believes to be true, make the *inability* to discover one's true identity a theme in the novel instead.
7. A psychological novel delves into the thoughts, hopes, weaknesses, and fears of the main character. Psychology, combined with suspense and danger, can create a novel that is very mysterious. Describe the events Cormier uses to reveal Adam's fragile psyche and how that contributes to the mystery and suspense.
8. Put any five of the following major events of *I Am the Cheese* on a timeline in correct chronological order:
  - Mother dies
  - Family put under protection
  - Car crash
  - Father reports story
  - Adam is institutionalized
  - Adam overhears his parents
  - Adam finds birth certificates

# *I Am the Cheese*

## Study Guide Student Copy

### PAGES 1 – 11

#### VOCABULARY

furiously – rapidly

slithering – sliding

Thomas Wolfe – American author, wrote *You Can't Go Home Again*

dreary – dull, dark

claustrophobic – fear of closed-in places

resolve – decide

provisions – food

reckless – careless

omen – a sign about the future

wavered – swayed

1. What is the setting of *I Am the Cheese*?
2. What is the narrator searching for?
3. What are three things he remembers?
4. Who is introduced in the beginning of the taping?
5. How can Adam be in bed and be telling the story of the bike journey at the same time?

## PAGES 29 – 38

### VOCABULARY

sanitarium – asylum

wary – cautious

intensity – in a state of excitement

implacable – unbothered

loping – running easily

stalk – to move threateningly

camaraderie – friendship

apparition – ghost-like

overshadowed – was more important than

1. What makes it appear that Brint is a doctor? Is he?
2. What is the first clue Adam gives?
3. In the long flashback, what two characters walked together?
4. What did they encounter before reaching their destination?



## PAGES 152 - 163

### VOCABULARY

**sacraments** – religious symbols

**paranoid** – distrust of others

**afflicted** – diseased, affected

**acutely** – seriously

**monotonous** – boring, repetitive

**contemptuously** – scornful

**compliant** – obedient

**wispy** – thin, frail

**flimsy** – insubstantial

**pathetically** – pitifully

**quizzically** – questioningly

**agitation** – emotional disturbance

1. What did Adam want Brint to talk about?

2. What did Adam want to discuss with his mother?

3. What was his mother concerned about?

## PAGES 193 – 203

### VOCABULARY

subdued – calmed

exhilaration – excitement

toyed – played with

lingering – remaining

reminiscing – remembering fondly

encompassing – including

engulfed – swallowed up

1. In the past tense, Adam and the family were “escaping” according to Gray’s orders. What happened after the night in the motel?
2. What figure of speech is used in “...the edge of a roadway like a balcony...”? (Pg. 198)
3. What occurred next on the road?
4. Who died?
5. What phrase did Adam hear regarding his mother?
6. What happened to Adam?
7. What happened to Adam’s father?