

Exploring the novel

Frenchtown is a section of the small town of Monument where the French Canadians have settled. Robert Cormier has based this town on a place where he lived for much of his life, renaming his hometown of Leominster (Massachusetts) as Monument. Frenchtown represents the suburb of French Hill in the town.



Consider Cormier's presentation of **Frenchtown**

- Is it a wealthy area? How do you know?
- What languages are spoken?
- What do people do for work and leisure here?
- What impression do you get of the place? Use quotations to support your ideas

Francis spends time in **France** during the invasion of Normandy in the Second World War.

- How much do you learn of France as a place?
- Only one particular event seems to make a lasting impression on Francis – have his memories of actual events of the war coloured his recollection of the setting?
- Why do you think the author gives us minimal details of the setting here?

Francis also spends time in **England** where he is recovering from his wounds.

- How much do we learn about England?
- What does Francis actually want to do when he travels to London?
- Is this setting particularly important to the plot? Explain your views.

The **Wreck Centre** is at the centre of the action in Frenchtown as it is the place where all the teenagers choose to spend their time.

- What is the significance of the name of this place? Is it ironic in any way? How is the name of the place used to give the reader clues about what might happen later in the novel?
- Is this setting viewed as important by the author? Justify your opinion.
- What details can you find that tell you what the Wreck Centre is like?

There are some other specific places described: **the church**, **the social club** and **the school**.

- How important are they to the story? Do events that happen there take the story forward?
- All these places are named after St Jude, the patron saint of lost causes. How relevant is it that Cormier has chosen this particular saint for these important places in Francis's life?

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Themes in the novel

When you are considering the themes found in a text you **must** produce evidence from the text for your views.

Use this list to make notes on the different themes and find relevant quotations.

Power	Who wields power? Who has power over other people? Who is in control? How do the actions of the powerful affect the weaker characters? Does the power balance change at all during the novel?
Religion	Frenchtown is heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, St Jude's. Consider the ways in which religion is part of everyday life and how it influences Francis and the other characters in the book.
War and its consequences	What changes does the war bring to Frenchtown and its inhabitants? How are the characters affected by their experiences of war?
Love	What is love? How many different kinds of love do you find in this story? Is Francis in love with Nicole?
Appearance and reality	Is what you see the real person? How much of themselves do people hide? What are people not prepared to talk about?
Guilt	Who is full of guilt? Which characters should feel guilty?
Revenge	Who should take revenge? Do you believe that life will pay you back for your actions? How much does this affect the characters in the story?
Secrets	Look how much we learn about people when we hear their thoughts. What are they not able to say? How much of their lives are influenced by the secrets that only they know?
Heroism	Who are the heroes in this story? What are the criteria for being a hero? Is heroism always recognised?
Wounds	Francis has physical wounds too horrific for everyone to see. Who else is wounded? Remember that wounds do not have to be physical.
Growing up	Francis was still a child when the events that affected him most happened. Does becoming an adult alter his views in any way?
Time	Think about the ways in which time has affected the characters. It is said that time heals. Is this theory true in this story?
Isolation	Who is alone? Is this important? Who feels that they are the only people who feel like this?

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Essay writing

*What are the most important themes in Heroes by Robert Cormier?
How are they presented to the reader and how do they have an impact
on the plot and the characters?*



Use these notes to help you plan and write your essay:

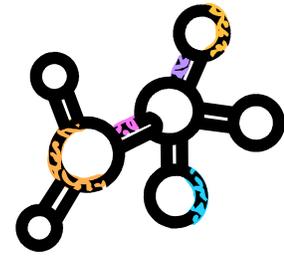
- List what you consider to be the key events and categorise them according to the themes that they deal with. This should help you to decide on the most important themes.
- Add evidence for your views. A quotation is often the most useful way to back up your views. It could also be what happens, how another character views the event or when and where the event takes place.
- Rank the themes in your order of their importance. Give each theme a 'mark out of ten'.
- In order to decide how important a particular theme is to the novel consider:
 - a) how often each particular theme is mentioned or alluded to
 - b) how important the theme is to the plot
- Sometimes one event might be relevant to several themes. Don't keep quoting the same event but link the themes together in your planning.
- Each theme will make a paragraph in your writing. You do not need to write about every theme. Choose the two or three that you consider the most important and write about them in detail.
- Has reading this story made you think about what your views are on certain issues? Has it changed your mind or reinforced the view you held before reading this book? If you can say yes, the author would feel that he had achieved what he set out to do.

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Considering the structure of the novel

Narrative framework - how is the story told?

- Who tells the story? Is it told in the first or third person?
- Why does the author do this? What effect does it have?



How does the author use time?

- Is the story told in chronological order?
- Does the author use flashbacks or other techniques to switch between timeframes?
- Are the flashbacks in chronological order?
- In what order are the events revealed? Does this create tension?

How does the author organise the words?

Consider the use of the following:

- sentence length
- paragraph length
- amount of dialogue
- amount of description
- use of verbs, adverbs and adjectives.

Does the writer use any other literary devices?

- similes
- metaphors
- symbolism
- onomatopoeia
- alliteration or assonance.

What tone does the author use?

- How does the author use these techniques together to create a certain tone or mood?

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Cormier's presentation of Characters

Francis

- How does Cormier use events from Francis's past to build up an impression of his character?
- Identify the main events in his past which add to our understanding of his character and try to explain their significance. You could start with:
 - the death of his mother when he was six
 - being told he was good at writing stories when he was at school
 - experiencing war when he was too young to fight.



Find evidence from the text that could suggest that Francis is:

- kind to other people
- a gentle person
- a romantic person
- obsessive.

Other characters

- Now make lists of statements and supporting evidence for Larry and Nicole.

Once again, you only have Francis's view of the other characters but you should be able to find enough evidence to build up a profile of each character.

Sympathy vs. empathy

- How does Cormier create sympathy or empathy through his presentation of the characters?
- Which characters inspire sympathy in the reader and why?
- Do you find that you can empathise with some of the characters even if you do not feel sympathy for them?

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Which characters might say the following things? Match up the words with the speakers.

I thought I would win the table tennis match but Francis beat me fair and square. After he'd won he beat Larry too. What a champion!	Larry La Salle
I have a new lodger, poor boy. He has been wounded in the war. I'll make him some soup to build him up.	Norman Rocheleau
Monument celebrates when our boys come home as heroes. It's the town's responsibility to recognise their heroism.	Arthur Rivier
It's men like me who have to patch them up when they come home wounded. It's a long term job rebuilding faces.	Nicole Renard
The world's a small place. Resting in Rouen and I bump into a boy from Frenchtown!	Mrs Belander
Francis is a good boy. He is no trouble at all living with me. I'm all the family he has left now.	Sister Mathilde
I know who he is - that masked guy. I looked into his eyes and saw Francis looking back at me. What a hero he is! Why won't he tell everyone he's back?	Mayor Harry Burnham
Oh those sweet young things.	Louis Arabelle
Pray for those who do you wrong. They need those prayers.	Uncle Louis
Dancing in the dark is going to be my favourite song forever!	Dr Abrams

Discussion activity

- Consider the point in the action at which the character might say each line. (You might like to plot it onto a time line of events from Francis's childhood up to his final departure on the train.)
- Would the character still say the same thing at the end of the novel?

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Character matching activity answers

I thought I would win the table tennis match but Francis beat me fair and square. After he'd won he beat Larry too. What a champion!	Louis Arabelle
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Monument celebrates when our boys come home as heroes. It's the town's responsibility to recognise their heroism.	Mayor Harry Burnham
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Francis is a good boy. He is no trouble at all living with me. I'm all the family he has left now.	Uncle Louis
I know who he is - that masked guy. I looked into his eyes and saw Francis looking back at me. What a hero he is! Why won't he tell everyone he's back?	Arthur Rivier
Oh those sweet young things.	Larry La Salle
Pray for those who do you wrong. They need those prayers.	Sister Mathilde
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