

# Heroes

by

Robert Cormier

English Department

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Page numbers in this pack refer to Heinemann New Windmills edition

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**About the Author**

**Robert Cormier** was born in 1925 in French Hill, a French-Canadian neighbourhood of Leominster, Massachusetts. He lived in Leominster all his life. He had seven brothers and sisters. His family was very close and he had a happy childhood. He attended a Catholic Grammar school where some of the nuns gave him a terrible time. He once saw his house on fire from his classroom window and his teacher would not let him go home to check whether his family was safe until he had said his prayers!!

He started writing poetry while he was in school. One of the nuns read one of his early poems and said he was a writer. From that moment he knew that he would always write. While he was at college, he had a short story published in a magazine. After college he wrote commercials for a radio station, he then became a newspaper reporter and won prizes for journalism.

In 1948 he got married and he and his wife had four children. All of his children went to local catholic schools. He has written many books for young people.

Robert Cormier died in 2000.

**Revise!**

1. Why did Robert Cormier feel angry towards the nuns at his school?

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2. What made him decide to become a writer?

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3. Why is it surprising that Robert Cormier sent his children to catholic schools?

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4. How old was Robert Cormier when he died?

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# Heroes

## The Plot

The novel begins when 18 year old Francis Cassavant returns to his home town in America from World War II with a medal for bravery but no face. As the novel unfolds we discover that he had forged his birth certificate to enable him to join the army before he was old enough. The story is told in the first person and through a series of flashbacks in which Francis remembers things which happened while he was a teenager, things which led him to try to end his life and to get revenge.

## Chapter Summaries

In the spaces provided, write a short summary for each chapter, including the main details. Chapter One has been done for you as an example.

### Chapter One

### After the War / Flashback

Francis Cassavant introduces himself and describes his injuries. He finds a room to rent in Frenchtown. He goes to church to light a candle and pray for people he knows. He prays for Enrico, his friend who has been injured in the war, for Nicole who he has never stopped loving, and for Larry LaSalle. We discover that Larry must be an enemy because Francis finds it difficult to pray for him, he then remembers what a nun once told him that Jesus said we should pray for our enemies. Towards the end of the chapter we learn that he has a medal for bravery, but doesn't consider himself to be a hero.

### Chapter Two

### After the War / Flashback

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**Chapter Three**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Four**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Five**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Six**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Seven**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Eight**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Nine**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Ten**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Eleven**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Twelve**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Thirteen**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Fourteen**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Fifteen**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Sixteen**

**After the War / Flashback**

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**Chapter Seventeen**

**After the War / Flashback**

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# Characters

## Francis Joseph Cassavant – Aged 18

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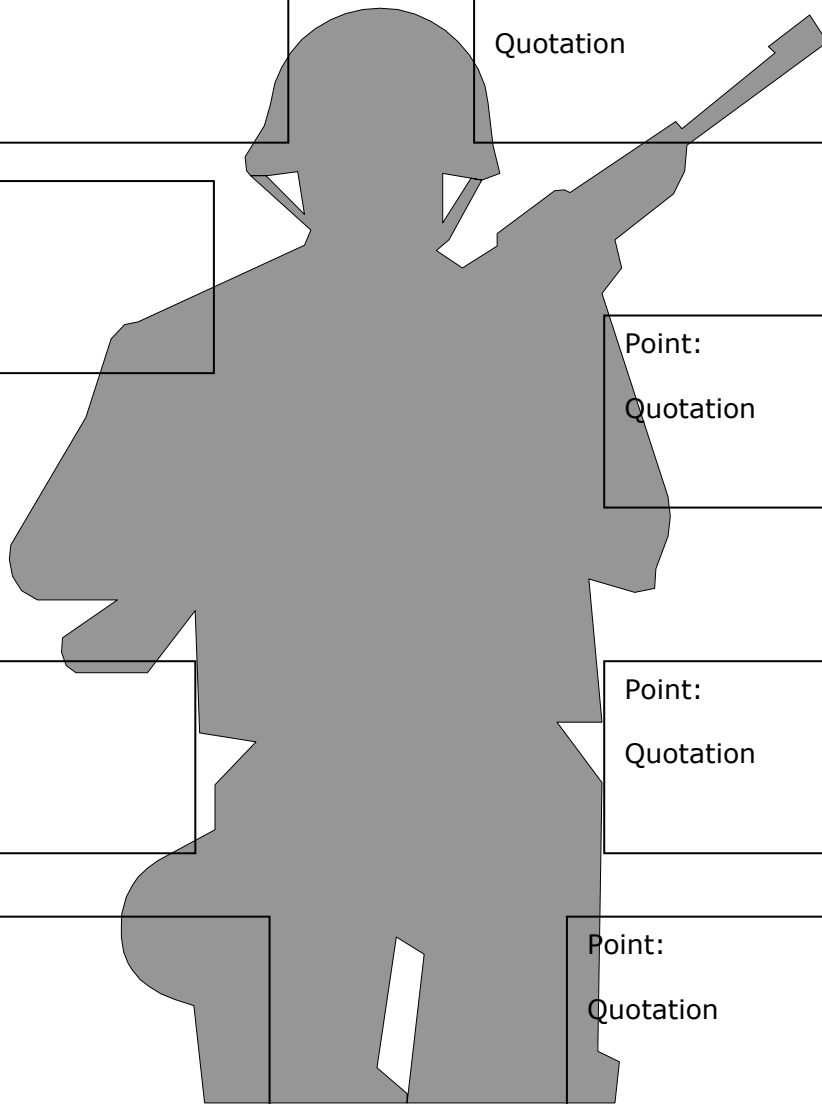
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# Larry LaSalle

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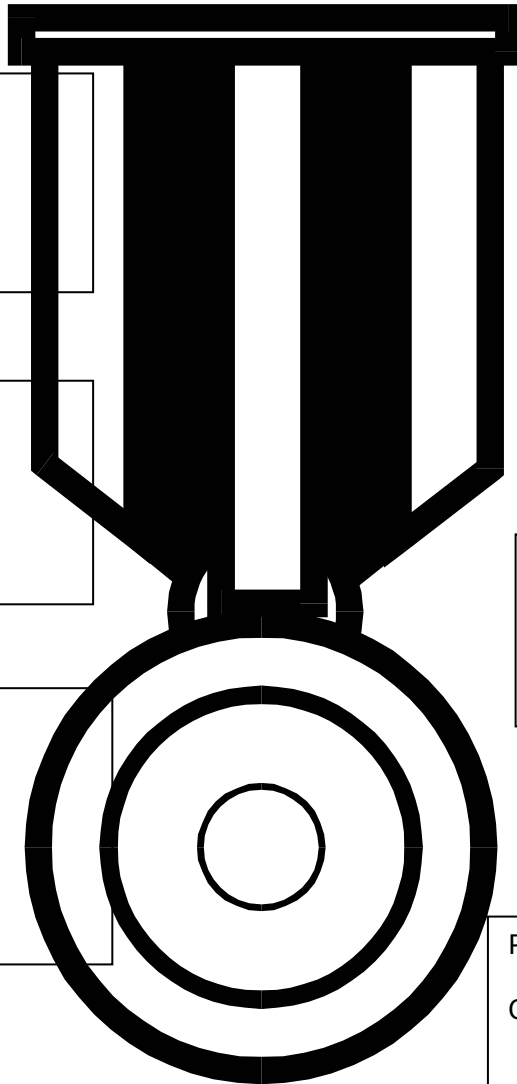
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## Nicole Renard

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## Understanding the characters

When Larry LaSalle returns home from the war the first time he is considered a hero. While on leave, he attacks Nicole. From that point on the lives of Nicole, Francis and Larry are changed forever. For each character write from their point of view their thoughts and feelings after that evening.

### Nicole

A large sheet of lined paper with a pink margin line and three hole punches on the left side, intended for writing a response.

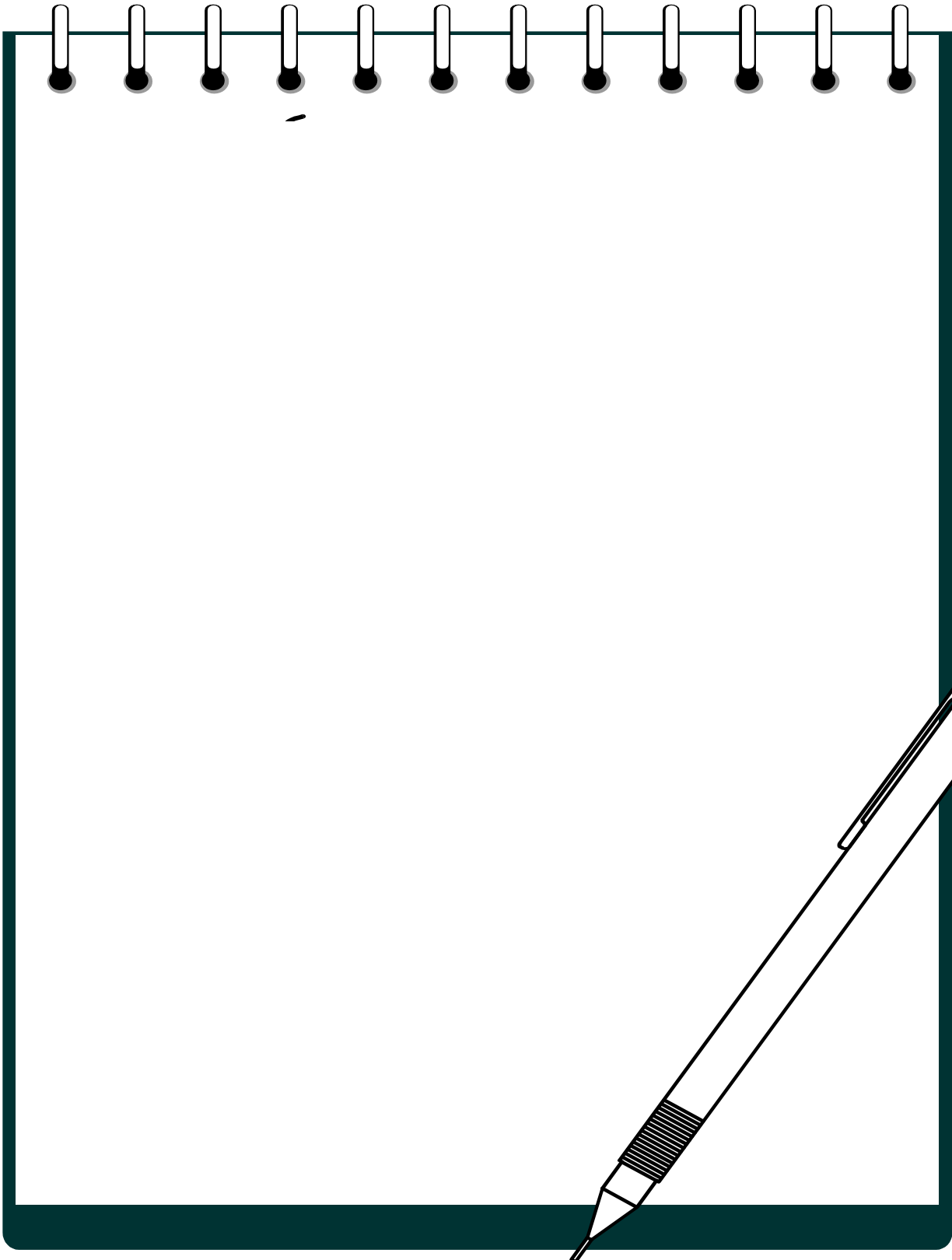
## Francis

How do you think Francis would feel after he failed to do anything to stop Larry attacking Nicole? Why didn't he do anything?

A large sheet of lined paper with three binder holes on the left side, intended for writing an answer to the question above. The paper is tilted slightly to the right and has a dark grey shadow on its right edge. It features a vertical pink margin line on the left and horizontal light blue lines for writing.

# Larry

What made Larry behave as he did? Did he give any thought to how it would affect Nicole? Did he know that Francis had not left the building? How long had he been planning the attack for?



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## The Setting

### Time

The story is set during the Second World War. Larry LaSalle joined the army to fight in the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbour. Use the internet to find out when the Americans became involved in the war and why the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour.

### Find the answers to these questions.

In what year did World War II start? \_\_\_\_\_

When did the Americans get involved? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbour? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why did so many young Americans rush to join the army after Pearl Harbour?

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Try this website.

[www.library.thinkquest.org](http://www.library.thinkquest.org)



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## Place

### The Wreck Centre

Before the war, the “wreck” centre is the centre of the lives of Larry, Nicole and Francis.

Larry LaSalle is an inspiration to the young people; they look up to him as a role model and a hero even before his war time bravery. He is sophisticated and confident. He helps Francis to believe in himself and teaches him to play table tennis although he “fixes” the championship so that Francis wins. He encourages Nicole’s dancing.

At the end, he tries to defend himself with the memory of all the good things he did for the kids at the centre. He wonders, “Does that one sin of mine wipe away the good things?” **What do you think?**

The name of the centre is a pun. Shortened from ‘Recreation Centre’ to ‘Rec Centre’ and then ‘Wreck Centre’. The lives of the three main characters are wrecked because of their association with the centre.

The building has a history – a rejected lover shot his love and his rival at their wedding reception. How does this foreshadow what happens in the novel?



**Francis Cassavant – Hero?**

Francis says he feels a fake because he wanted to die but was “too much of a coward to kill himself”. When he jumped on the grenade he did not do it to save his platoon but to kill himself. In doing so though, he did save the lives of many soldiers. Is a heroic act still heroic even if it’s done for the wrong reasons?

Arthur Rivier says “We weren’t heroes. We were only there”. Why do you think heroes in war don’t think of themselves as heroes? Look on page 89, Francis lists the people he thinks are heroes, do you agree with him?

What makes a true hero? Is Francis a hero?

## Religion, Sin and Forgiveness

In Chapter 1, Francis goes to St. Jude’s Church to pray for the souls of his parents, his wounded friend Enrico, Nicole, and Larry LaSalle, the man he intends to kill.

In Chapter 2, we learn that Francis attended a Catholic school and was taught by nuns (like Robert Cormier himself).

In Chapter 12 Francis goes to Confession in the church and then climbs the steeple intending to kill himself, *“the worst sin of all”*.

In Chapter 14, Francis tells Larry to say his prayers before he shoots him.

In Chapter 15, Francis goes to see the nuns to ask where Nicole is. Sister Mathilde says she will pray for him.

**The church** is often referred to in the descriptions of the town. Why do you think it’s always there in the background?  
(p5, p8, p31, p32, p51, p53, p58. )

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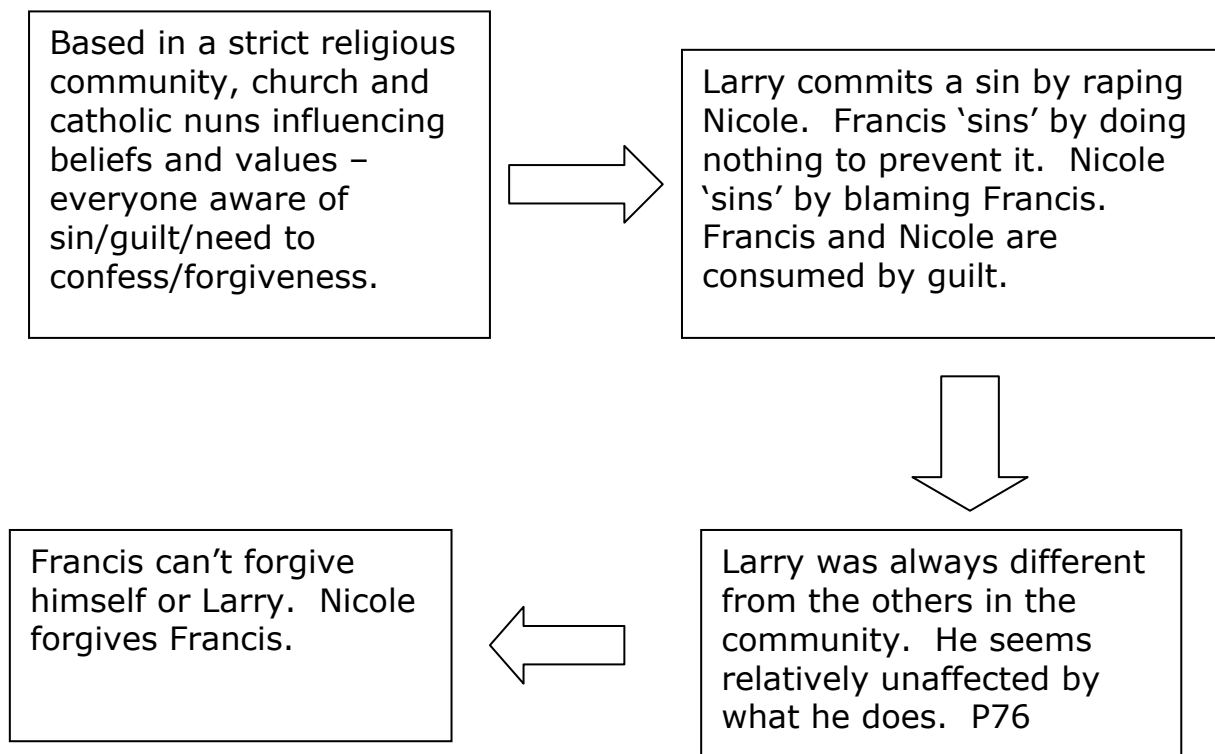
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## **Past and Future**

Francis and Nicole find it hard to deal with the events that have happened in their pasts. Draw a flow chart for each character showing how they deal with the past and face the future.

**Francis**

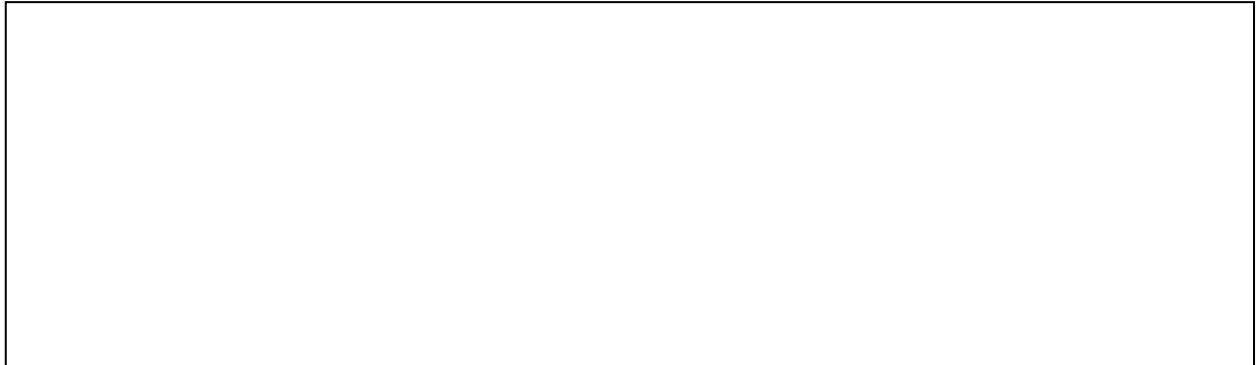
**Nicole**



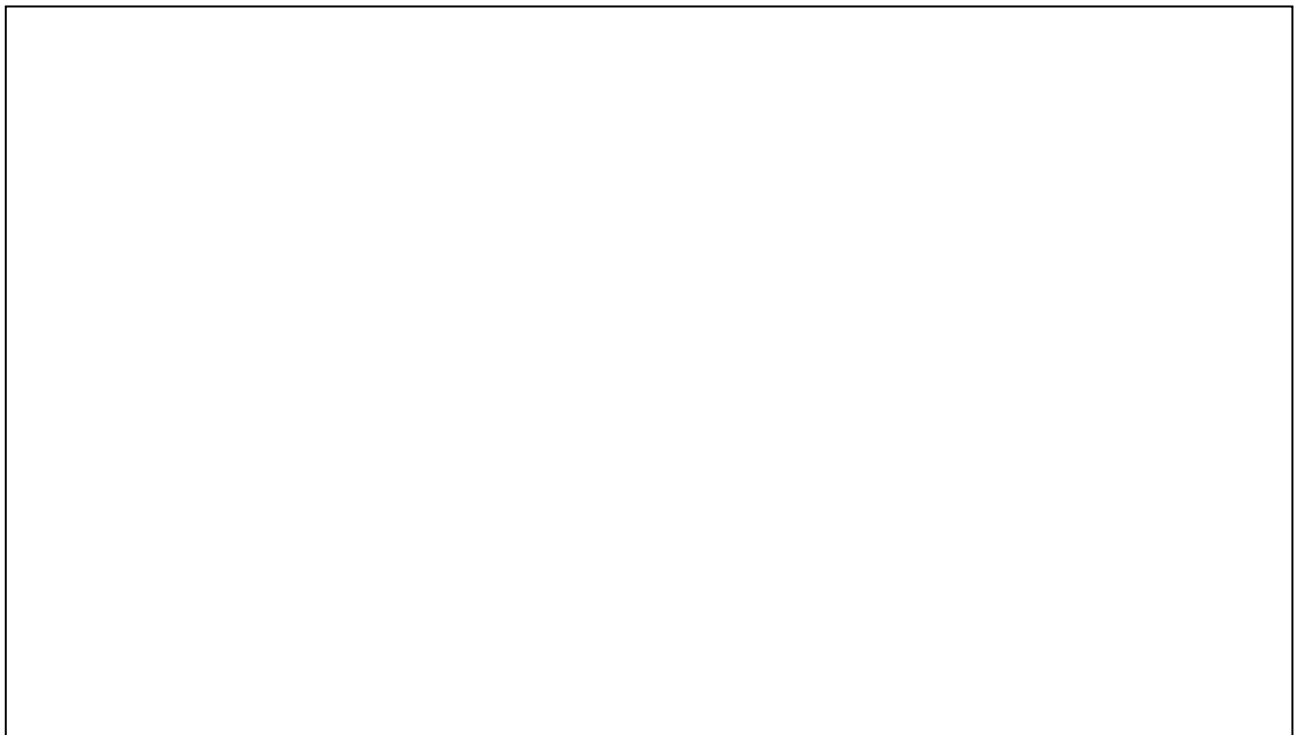
## Identity – facing up to who you are

The scarf that Francis uses to hide his face is symbolic. Francis hides who he is from the public, but he also hides who he is from himself. He finds it hard to face up to the things that have made him the person he is. On his return to Monument, he wants to remain anonymous so that he can get revenge on Larry LaSalle.

Francis is not the only character who has a hidden identity. Think about Larry LaSalle. How is his true identity hidden and then slowly revealed to the reader?



1. What do we know about Larry LaSalle's background?
2. What was his occupation before he worked at the "wreck" centre?
3. Where did he come from?
4. What do we learn about him in his conversation with Francis in chapter 14?



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**Love**

*"The terrible thing is that we love our sins. We love the thing that makes us evil. I love the sweet young things."*

*'That isn't love,' I say.*

*'There's all kinds of love, Francis.'*

*'Then didn't you know that we loved you?' I say. 'You were our hero, even before you went to war. You made us better than we were...'" p76*

What kinds of love are there in the novel? Find evidence of as many kinds of love as you can.

**Some things to think about:**

<b>Question</b>	Why did Francis stand by while Nicole was being raped?
<b>Answer</b>	
<b>Detail</b>	
<b>Source</b>	

<b>Question</b>	Why does Francis walk away from Larry in the end without killing him?
<b>Answer</b>	
<b>Detail</b>	
<b>Source</b>	



<b>Question</b>	Why did Francis burn Dr Abrams' and Enrico's addresses?
<b>Answer</b>	
<b>Detail</b>	
<b>Source</b>	
<b>Question</b>	Did he feel any differently at the end?
<b>Answer</b>	
<b>Detail</b>	
<b>Source</b>	

<b>Question</b>	Is Francis a hero?
<b>Answer</b>	
<b>Detail</b>	
<b>Source</b>	

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## GCSE Questions

Questions on Literature texts fall broadly into three categories:

- ☆ PLOT
- ☆ CHARACTER
- ☆ THEMES/IDEAS

although sometimes you will need to refer to **plot** to answer a **character** question and sometimes you will need to refer to **character** to answer a question on **theme**.

The most important thing to remember is:

YOU WILL **NEVER** BE ASKED TO WRITE EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT A BOOK.

**FOCUS** ON THE QUESTION YOU'RE BEING ASKED AND **ANSWER IT** CLEARLY.

You should plan your answer carefully. Spend about 5 minutes thinking about what you want to say and jot your ideas down. There are two good reasons why you should plan:

1. So that you don't panic, forget what you wanted to say and start waffling.
2. So that if you do run out of time the examiner can see what you would have written and give you some credit.

Try planning some of the answers to the following GCSE style questions.

1. Larry LaSalle is a powerful man. In what ways does the author show his power throughout the novel?
2. Francis is awarded a medal for heroism. Do you think he deserves to be known as a hero? Give reasons for your answer.
3. 'It is harder to forgive someone else than yourself'. Show how each of the characters cope with forgiveness. Think about:
  - How they forgive each other
  - How they forgive themselves
  - How they are affected when forgiveness is withheld or granted.
4. Francis's disability goes deeper than the physical injuries to his face. Explain how his facial disfigurement symbolises how he has been disabled inside.

5. How does the author use characters and settings to foreshadow the events that take place? Think about:
  - The characters' backgrounds
  - The settings – the wreck centre and the church
  - The backdrop of the war.
6. "The gun is like a tumour on my thigh" p72. Why do you think Cormier used this image to describe the gun?
7. What does the novel have to say about what it is to be courageous?
8. How does the author prepare the reader for the shocking truth about Larry LaSalle? Think about:
  - Where he has come from
  - The way he behaves
  - The way he treats the young people at the 'wreck' centre
  - His actions after the rape
  - His reaction to Francis at the end of the book
9. What are the things that motivate Francis to want to kill Larry LaSalle?
10. Choose **two** incidents in the novel that you think reveal a lot about **one** of the main characters and explain how they are used to develop character.
11. When Francis meets Nicole several days after the attack, he wants to ask her if she is torn apart. Show how the incident at Larry's party affects Nicole and Francis.
12. *"Don't say it Francis,. I know what he (Larry) was. For a while there he made me feel special. Made us all feel special. Made me think I was a ballerina. Now I'm starting to find out what I am, who I really am."* P85. Which character in the novel do you think learns the most about themselves. Explain what that person learns.
13. *Why* is the structure of the novel important to its impact on the reader?
14. At the end of the novel, Nicole forgives Francis and says he is her "Silver Star hero". Why does she consider him a hero after all that has happened?

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## Word Bank

Attack  
Bravery  
Character  
Confession  
Courage  
Courageous  
Coward  
Cowardice  
Disfigured  
First person  
Flashback  
Forgiveness  
Friendship  
Grenade  
Guilt  
Hero  
Heroes  
Heroic  
Heroism  
Horrific  
Injured  
Inspiration  
Loyalty  
Marines  
Memories  
Memory  
Narrative  
Pearl Harbour  
Platoon  
Point of view  
Role-model  
Setting  
Structure