

Chapter 1 - Francis

1. The first sentence ends with the words 'the war is over and I have no face.'

Find a quotation for each of the following aspects of Francis's appearance:

- ears
- eyebrows
- hair
- nose
- cheeks
- mouth
- larynx

Explain what each quotation tells the reader about Francis's appearance.

2. Francis's false teeth do not fit him because his gums have shrunk which make his teeth clatter and click and slip around his mouth - this will affect talking and eating. How have the rest of his injuries affected the way his body works?
3. How does he attempt to hide his injuries from the world? Why does he say 'I don't know what I am going to do when summer comes'?
4. 'People glance at me in surprise and look away quickly or cross the street when they see me coming.' Why does this happen?
5. 'I am like the Hunchback of Notre Dame, my face like a gargoyle and the duffel bag like a lump on my back.' What is a gargoyle? What do you know about the Hunchback of Notre Dame and why does Francis choose him as a way to view himself?
6. We make the assumption from the first paragraph that Francis was injured in the war. Find evidence for this assumption.
7. Can you empathise with Francis? Why does he choose to embrace the anonymity his injuries bring him? Is it possible for the reader to truly appreciate just how he must feel about himself? Choose the most appropriate quotation which you think demonstrates his real feelings in Chapter 1.



Chapter 2 - Nicole Renard

1. Francis is on his knees when Nicole enters the classroom. Later he mentions that she reminds him of the statue of St Therese in church. In what way might you connect these two ideas?
2. In the following quotation Francis refers to a sword. What would the sword be used for? '... I knelt there like a knight at her feet, her sword having touched my shoulder. I silently pledged her my love and loyalty for ever.'
3. What exactly does 'pledge' mean? Would the word 'promise' have the same overtones?
4. Francis and Nicole do not say a single word to each other. How do they communicate?
5. 'Like a knight ... like a sentry on lonely guard duty'. Why are these military terms relevant? What do they foreshadow?
6. As soon as Francis sees Nicole he tells himself that this is love. Is this love? Or infatuation? Or what else might it be?

**Writing task**

Either:

Write an agony aunt letter that advises Francis how best to approach the girl he loves from a distance.

Or:

Imagine that Francis plucks up the courage to write to Nicole and tell her how he feels - write his letter.



Chapter-by-chapter study guide

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Chapter 3 - dreams and nightmares

1. 'It scares me, how easy it is to lie.' Why do you think that Francis does not wish to reveal his true identity?
2. Francis talks about dreams that will come when he goes to sleep. Would you call these dreams or nightmares? What phrases from the text reinforce your view?
3. '... every night the recitation begins, like a litany, the names of the GIs like beads on a rosary.' Find out the meanings of the underlined words in this quotation.
4. In this chapter, you are given a graphic vision of what was a small piece of action. How many soldiers were there? What happened? How many survived? What did Francis actually do? Why is the 'sudden silence ... even more terrible than exploding shells'?

Francis's experiences of war

Think about the dream that Francis experiences every night.

'I have survived another night, endured the dreams and the memories again, although I'm not sure any more which are the dreams and which are the memories.'

1. How did he feel after killing the German soldiers? What does he say that leads you to your view?
2. Do you think that soldiers who experience fighting an enemy will be changed in some way? Do you think that this might be a permanent change or will time passing make a difference to how they feel?
3. Does a moral viewpoint make a difference? If you feel that you are fighting for a just cause does that make what you do better in some way?

Research task

A number of people have formulated 'rules' for what should be considered as a 'just war' (and a 'just peace'). Find out what these rules are and produce a well-structured and convincing argument either for or against the concept of a 'just war'.



Chapter 4 - heroes

'Before he enlisted in the army, Arthur Rivier had been a star first baseman for the Frenchtown Tigers and hit booming home runs over the fence at Cartier's Field. I remember when he returned on furlough in his khaki uniform with the corporal stripes, along with the other servicemen home temporarily from the war. I wanted to be like them, these heroes, fighting the Japs and the Germans, going of to battles on land and sea. I was impatient to reach the age when I could join them in that great crusade for freedom.'

1. Do you think that this extract might explain to some extent why Francis joined the army? Did he want to be a hero? Does he feel like a hero now?
2. Was he influenced by the fact that the older boys who he knew when he was at school had joined the armed services?
3. How might injured veterans feel when they meet other veterans who emerged from the war unscathed? Might it alter your view of the rightness of 'that great crusade for freedom'?
4. If Francis had revealed his true identity to the people who had known him well and who had shared his fighting experiences, what would you expect their responses to him to have been?
5. Arthur had only to look at him to guess what had happened to him. How does he view Francis?
6. All the veterans meeting in the St Jude Club are talking about their futures. What will they do now that the war is over?
7. What does Arthur mean when he says that Francis has 'earned the right not to talk'?
8. As Francis leaves the club he tells the reader that he is not the hero that Arthur thinks he is. Why might he feel that way and more importantly do you think that Arthur would agree with him?

Writing task



Write your definition of a hero and explain exactly who your heroes are. Justify your views.

Chapter-by-chapter study guide

**Chapter 5 - Grenier's Hall and Larry LaSalle**

Francis tells the history of 'The Wreck Centre', officially the Frenchtown Rec. Centre.

1. What tragedy happened at Grenier's Hall?
2. Why has Francis told us this story? It happened long before the events that Francis is involved with. Think of a reason why this story is included in this chapter.

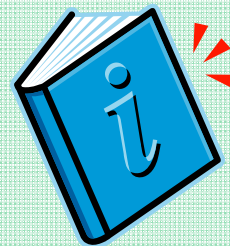
A bit later in the chapter you are introduced to Larry LaSalle.

3. Start an information page about Larry LaSalle (physical description, talents, job etc). Leave enough room to keep adding details as you read on through the story.
4. Francis also reveals more of his past history - living with his uncle after his father died and the people he spent time with from school. Was Francis happy living with his uncle? Find evidence for your decision.
5. It is here that Nicole speaks to Francis. Francis no longer thinks of her in saintly terms. What effect has she had on him?
6. Finally Joey LeBlanc says he could 'feel that old doom hanging over the place'. Why do you think he says this?
7. At the end of the chapter we learn that Joey died at Iwo Jima and Francis tells us that he had been 'right, after all'. What conclusions does the reader draw at the end of this chapter?

**The importance of Chapter 5**

In this chapter we have been given a great deal of information about a number of things. It is no accident that all this information has been placed in one chapter:

- the Grenier Hall with its tragic history
- the transformation of the building
- the arrival of Larry LaSalle
- Nicole talking to Francis
- Joey LeBlanc
- Francis's life with uncle Louis.



Are these different events connected?

Chapter 6 - Francis discovered

1. When Francis is walking about in Frenchtown, where does he go and what does he do?
2. Francis, with his new identity has now been accepted into the community. How do we know this?
3. '... this is the pause between one life and another'. What are these two lives?
4. Why do you think that the veterans talk about the past so much?
5. Francis now feels secure enough to ask the question he needs the answer to and to mention Larry LaSalle's name. How does he feel when he does this?
6. What is the response from the roomful of people?
7. What are their views of Larry LaSalle?
8. Who are the Frenchtown Warriors?
9. What is a Silver Star?
10. We now learn that Francis is a hero and he also has a Silver Star. Frenchtown regards him as a hero too. What did Francis do to be awarded this honour?
11. Consider again what Francis is doing. Can you understand why a person who is recognised by his nation as being a hero would choose to remain anonymous in a society that would honour him for his actions? Explain your view.



Research task

- The Silver Star is an American military award. Find out which is the most prestigious British military medal for bravery.
- Find out how many people have won this medal and some of the actions which led to them being honoured in this way.

Chapter-by-chapter study guide

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Chapter 7 - Larry LaSalle: catalyst for change

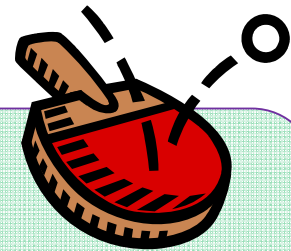
This chapter starts with Francis feeling that happiness is not for him. It finishes with a totally different Francis.

1. How does Francis change in this chapter? Who makes this change happen in Francis?
2. How does Nicole change in this chapter? Who brings about this change in Nicole?
3. 'For the first time in my life a tide of confidence swept through me. Why does a 'tide of confidence' sweep through Francis? Is this 'tide of confidence' justified?
4. For the first time we hear Larry LaSalle being addressed as 'La-ree'. What does this tell us about the way the children now see Larry? Why has this change taken place?
5. 'Two games were being played at the same time, the sharp, take-no-prisoners game the hushed audience were observing and the subtle tender game in which Larry LaSalle was letting me win.' Why do you think that Larry LaSalle is playing in this manner?

Task

Winning at table tennis enables Francis to change in several ways.

- Write about the ways in which Francis changes in this chapter.
- Explain what brings about these changes and use quotations to illustrate your points.



Chapter 8 - Arthur Rivier

1. Why is Francis walking around Frenchtown at midnight?
2. 'Nobody talks about the war.' Why do you think that nobody talks about the war?
3. "The scared war," he says, closing his eyes. "God, but I was scared, Francis. I messed my pants. One day, running across an open field, so scared I shit my pants, bullets at my feet and everything let go ..." Opening his eyes, he asks: "Weren't you scared?" Why do you think that Arthur needs to talk about the war?
4. All people cope differently with traumatic events. The four men in this scene have all been in combat situations. How are these four men responding to what the war has done to them? You will need to look back at previous chapters to be able to answer this question fully.



The nature of war

Here are some quotations by soldiers from different eras. Which quotation would help Arthur most? Which might be a quotation for Francis? Explain your views.

- **George S. Patton (1885-1945):** 'If a man does his best, what else is there?'
- **The Duke of Wellington (1769-1852):** 'Next to a battle lost, the greatest misery is a battle gained.'
- **Philip Sidney (1554-1586):** 'A true knight is fuller of bravery in the midst, than in the beginning of danger.'
- **Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941):** 'We never fail when we try to do our duty, we always fail when we neglect to do it.'
- **Wilfred Owen (1893-1918):** 'My subject is War, and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity.'

Can you find a quotation which sums up your feelings about war?



## Chapter-by-chapter study guide

## Chapter 9 - war is declared

War brings changes to Frenchtown.

1. Look at the first six paragraphs in this chapter. How many ways can you find that show the changes in Frenchtown? Make a list of them.
2. Larry LaSalle enlists as a Marine and goes to fight in the Pacific. How does this affect Francis, Nicole and the other teenagers in Frenchtown?
3. Larry LaSalle is in the Movietone News at the cinema. How has Larry LaSalle changed?
4. What award does Larry LaSalle receive for his heroic action?
5. What did Larry actually do?
6. "“Amazing,” Mr Laurier said. “A kid graduates from high school, gets six weeks of basic training with guns and grenades, then overseas he goes on a troop-ship and five months later - five months later! - he’s fighting the Japs or the Germans.”” Do you think that ‘amazing’ is the right word to use? Explain your answer.
7. Do you think that six weeks training is enough preparation to be ready to go and fight the enemy? Explain your answer.



In Israel everyone has to do national service. At the age of 18 everyone is 'called-up' and will be on active service. Boys do three years, girls do just under two. This used to happen in the UK. Men at 18 used to do two years in the army, navy or air force.

- Do you think the boys in Frenchtown would have found military life easier if they had done national service like this?
- In the UK, national service lasted from 1949 until 1960. Find out why it was introduced and also why it was scrapped.

#### Speaking and listening task

- Prepare an argument for a debate about whether we should bring back military service in the UK.

Chapter-by-chapter study guide

Chapter 10 - England

Francis spent some time in England before returning to the USA.

1. Why was he in England?
2. Why hadn't he looked at himself in a mirror?
3. Why do you think that the staff at the hospital had not warned Francis of what might happen when he left hospital and went out into the outside world?
4. 'I saw what the boy had seen - my face. No face at all, actually, the nostrils like the snout of an animal, the peeling cheeks, the toothless gums, my jaws and mouth jammed together as if by invisible clamps.' Do you think that it shows courage being able to describe yourself in this way? Explain your answer.
5. Francis's face has changed. What else about him has changed too?
6. 'The smell of ashes fills the air, a damp incense burning for Larry LaSalle's home-coming.' Think about this sentence. Can you decide what hidden message the author is giving you? Explain your thoughts.



In this chapter Francis comes to London as a tourist and he wants to see the sights.

### Writing to inform

Imagine that you are a British soldier who met Francis while fighting in France. You have corresponded with him by letter since the war and now want to give him some 'local knowledge' about London. Write a letter to Francis giving him information about the sights of London that he might want to visit.

You will need to do some research about London after the war ...

- What kind of a place was it?
- Had any of the main tourist attractions been destroyed in the bombing?
- You could also add some imaginative touches such as recommending a certain restaurant or café.

Chapter 11 - Larry LaSalle, the hero, returns to Monument.

Larry is a celebrity and he is coming back to his home town of Monument. Every one turns out to welcome him, impatient for his arrival.

1. How has Larry LaSalle changed from the person that the Frenchtown teenagers knew?
2. How does the town of Monument acknowledge Larry LaSalle?
3. Larry makes a speech to the town. He ends by saying that he wants to spend time with the 'Wreck Centre Gang' and finishes with the words 'We have to keep the world safe for these young people'. Why is this statement ironic? Does it give you a sense of what is going to happen?

Everyone drifts away until only Nicole and Francis are left with Larry. He asks Nicole to put on a record. He tells Francis that it is time to go home.

"Nicole and I are going to have one last dance," he said. "Just her and me alone. It's important, Francis." ... His face was flushed and his eyes shone with excitement.'

4. Why does Francis do what Larry LaSalle tells him to and not what Nicole asks?
5. Nicole appears. How does she now feel about Francis? How is all this communicated without using words?
6. Pick out your own key quotations for this scene. Which lines are the most important for revealing more about Francis and Nicole?
7. Why does Francis hide from Larry LaSalle?
8. How does Larry LaSalle leave the Wreck Centre? What does this tell you about him?
9. What does Francis know for certain at the end of this chapter?

Discussion



- Do you think that this event was always part of Larry LaSalle's thinking?
- Do you think that the whole event was planned for this outcome? What evidence do you have for your opinion?
- Larry LaSalle left New York under a cloud but we are never told precisely what happened. Do you think that this might have happened before?

Chapter 12 - the aftermath

1. The weather is very hot. What effect does it have on the reader that Cormier has chosen to make the weather so hot? Look at the way he describes the heat - does it in some way reflect the events of the novel?
2. Francis needs to see Nicole. Why does he haunt the street where she lives? Why doesn't he just knock on her door? Consider Cormier's use of the word 'haunted'.
3. Why can't Francis say the words, even to himself, of exactly what has happened to Nicole?
4. Write down the words that Nicole and Francis actually say. The conversation is actually very short. Is either person saying what needs to be said? Why do you think they talk like this?
5. What does Nicole really mean when she says 'Poor Francis'?
6. Think about how Francis must now feel. List all the emotions that you would expect him to experience.
7. What does Francis plan to do at the church tower and what makes him change his mind?
8. Francis leaves home without telling anyone that he is leaving or where he is going. Who will be affected by his leaving?
9. Do you think he owes anyone an explanation of why he is doing this?



Task

- Re-write the conversation between Francis and Nicole but also include their unspoken thoughts.
- You could perform this conversation to the rest of the class in small groups - think about how you will show which lines are their thoughts and which are their actual words.

Chapter 13 - Larry LaSalle returns

1. How does Francis learn that Larry LaSalle has returned to Frenchtown?
2. Francis is physically affected by this news. How does his body react to what he overhears?
3. Write down all the information that Francis overhears about Larry LaSalle. What has happened to him?



**Writing task**

You are now well aware of the plans that Francis has made and his reasons for them. He has reached the end of his search for Larry and intends to kill him.


However, there are four more chapters to read until the end of the book.

**Predict what will happen in the remaining chapters of the book.**

- Will Francis kill Larry LaSalle?
- Will he be caught? If so, will this be before or after the killing?
- Will he find himself unable to fire the gun in cold blood?
- Remember that Francis has killed people in the war. How will this be different?
- Think about what you know about Francis - remember that the thought of killing Larry has been his only motivation for some time.
- Use what you know about the characters and the circumstances to justify your predictions.
- Make sure you fully explain the reasons for all your predictions.

## Chapter 14 - Francis meets Larry LaSalle again

1. 'The gun is like a tumour on my thigh'. Why is this simile so effective? How might you compare a gun to a tumour?
2. Why do you think that Francis is calm? When he found out that Larry LaSalle had returned to Frenchtown he was not calm at all. What do you think has changed?
3. 'What's one more death after the others in the villages and fields of France?' Do you think that one more death matters? Is there a difference between killing someone when you are at war as a soldier and killing someone when you are back at home?
4. Francis sees Larry LaSalle. How has Larry changed?
5. 'I had always wanted to be a hero, like Larry LaSalle and all the others, but had been a fake all along. And now I am tired of the deception and have to rid myself of the fakery.' List all the reasons why Francis feels that he is a fake. Do you think that this is true? Does Francis see clearly what he truly is?
6. Larry does not know that anyone realises what he did to Nicole. How does he react to the fact that Francis knows what he has done?
7. What part of Larry's body does Francis decide to shoot at? Why there in particular?
8. Larry already has a gun. He has thought about killing himself. Do you think his reasons for committing suicide are for the same reasons as Francis wants to kill him? Is it for what he has done, for what he is, or for what he has become? Justify your views.



### Discussion

This story deals with some big questions. They are the kind of questions that you have to work out the answers for yourself and then to decide if you will live in that way.

**'Does that one sin of mine wipe away all the good things?'**

- Is it just one sin?
- Does it matter?
- How big is the sin?
- How do you measure sins?
- Can you say that one sin is worse than another or are all sins the same?
- Is doing anything you know to be wrong equally bad?

Chapter 15 - searching for Nicole

1. Francis has to tell Sister Mathilde who he is. What is her response to him?
2. 'But, then, we all have secrets, eh, Francis?' Notice that this is a question - not a statement about Nicole. What is Sister Mathilde actually saying to Francis? Is Sister Mathilde correct?
3. Francis suddenly wonders if Nicole has gone away to become a nun. Why would this be of real concern to him?
4. 'Life is not that simple, Francis, and neither is a calling to God'. Explain exactly what Sister Mathilde is telling Francis here.
5. Sister Mathilde goes to find Nicole's address for Francis. Why does she think that it is a good idea for Nicole and Francis to make contact?
6. How do you know that Sister Mathilde is concerned for Francis?
7. Will Francis ever be 'as good as new'? Why does he lie to Sister Mathilde?

Writing task



Francis could have his eyes shut and yet still know he is in the convent: he recognises its aroma.

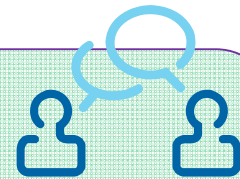
How does Cormier create the setting of the convent by using a range of senses?

Use quotations and PEE to answer this question.

Chapter 16 - Nicole

1. 'You've come a long way'. A phrase with more than one meaning here. In what ways has Francis come a long way?
2. Notice how no-one in the entire book ever says exactly what happened between Nicole and Larry. Why do you think this is?
3. Nicole wonders why Francis has come to see her. Should her question warn Francis about how she relates to him now? He has spent almost every waking moment thinking about Nicole - has she been doing the same?
4. 'To see if maybe you could still be my girl? Which could maybe change my mind about the gun in my duffel bag.' These are the words that Francis cannot say - he can only think them. Would Francis do better by being totally truthful to Nicole?
5. What does Nicole plan to do with her life? What else do she and Francis talk about?
6. Nicole kisses Francis on the lips. What emotions is Francis now feeling?
7. 'She looks at me with affection. But affection is not love. I knew all the time we were talking that we were filling up the empty spaces between us with words. I knew I had lost her, had lost her a long time ago ... "Can I come again sometimes?" I ask, hating myself for asking because I knew the answer. "Oh Francis" she says.' Why doesn't Nicole feel the same way about Francis as he feels about her?

Discussion



What advice would you give Francis so he is able to move on and not feel guilty about Nicole anymore?



Chapter-by-chapter study guide

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Chapter 17 - the final chapter

1. Here Francis decides who the 'real heroes' were. Find the words and write down Francis's definition of heroism.
2. What options does Francis have for the rest of his life?
3. 'I pick up the duffel bag and sling it over my shoulder. The weight is nice and comfortable on my back as I cross the lobby, heading for the exit, and the next train to leave the station.' These are the last lines of the book. What do they mean to you? Why is the weight 'comfortable'? Why is he looking for the exit? Where will the next train be going?

Chapter 18 - what happens next?

**Final tasks**

**Discussion**

This story has not yet come to an end.

- What do you think happens to Francis now?
- What will he do?
- Why will he do it?
- Will he ever see Nicole again?



**Writing task**

Finish this story by writing an additional chapter in the same style as the rest of the novel. You need to decide from what you have learned of Francis what you think will be the most appropriate ending to this story.