



Plot notes and activities

Chapter 1: My name is Francis Joseph Cassavant

(from start of chapter to 'a lump on my back', p. 3)

- Francis Joseph Cassavant returns to his home town after the war.
- He has horrific facial injuries caused by a grenade blowing up in his face.

Read the first few pages of the chapter. Notice how the opening sentence packs in information: in one line we learn Francis's name, that he has returned to his home town after the war, and, most dramatically, that he has no face. As the passage continues, we receive details of his appearance and facial injuries, and how he hides his damaged face from the public. We also learn that he has received hospital treatment for his injuries.

1 Answer these quick questions on the novel's opening.

a With which three items does Francis hide his face?

.....

b What is the name of the doctor who treated Francis?

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c What is the name of Francis's home town?

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d What is the month, and what is the weather like?

.....

e In which country did Francis fight?

.....

f Where was Francis in hospital?

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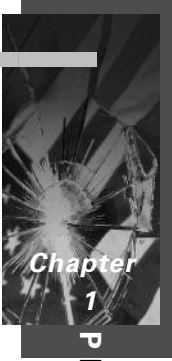
2 The narrative is in the first person. What is the effect of this?

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3 The narrative is in the present tense. What effect does this create?

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4 Write a description of Francis's injuries.

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5 Find three similes that describe Francis's appearance. What effects do they create?

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6 What impression have you gained of Dr Abrams?

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Extension activity

Find out what these names refer to:

- the Red Sox
- Fort Delta
- the Hunchback of Notre Dame



Plot notes and activities

Chapter 1: Francis's mission

(from p. 3, 'I am staying', to 'was about to begin', p. 5)

- Francis rents a tenement in Mrs Belander's house.
- Nicole Renard is previewed.
- Francis has a gun and a mission.

Francis takes a third-storey apartment in Mrs Belander's tenement house. She does not recognise him, even though she knew him when he was a young boy who did errands for her, and baked him a cake on his thirteenth birthday. Francis's voice is damaged, so she cannot recognise him from the way he speaks. He reveals that he has a gun hidden in his duffel bag and a mission that he is about to begin.

1 Answer these quick questions.

a What two purposes are served by Francis's disguise?

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b What is the name of Francis's friend in the hospital?

.....

c Which item in Mrs Belander's house reminds him of his childhood?

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d How old is Francis now?

.....

e Whom does he think of as he looks at the church?

.....

f Find three adjectives that describe the tenement that Francis rents.

.....

2 Circle the words and phrases that describe Mrs Belander as seen in this passage.

suspicious trusting kind thoughtful good businesswoman

efficient shocked compassionate easy-going

3 What is the effect of Francis's reference to his hidden gun and his mission?

.....

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Plot notes and activities

Chapter 1: Francis visits the church

(from p. 5, 'Later, I light a candle', to end of chapter)

- Francis visits St Jude's Church and prays.
- We learn something about his childhood.
- Francis's mission is to kill Larry LaSalle.
- We learn that Francis gained an award for heroism in the war.

We learn about Francis's war experiences. He was awarded a Silver Star medal for heroism, but he does not consider himself to be a hero. We also learn a little about his childhood. His mother died when he was six years old, giving birth to a baby boy who also died, and his father died when Francis was 13. His Uncle Louis gave him a home until he joined the army. Francis was brought up a Catholic, educated by nuns, and was an altar boy at St Jude's Church. There is a conflict between what Francis has been taught about the obligation to pray for your enemies and the conviction that he actually intends to kill someone.

1 Answer these quick questions.

a Whom does Francis pray for in the church?

.....

b Why does he feel guilty about the last person he prays for?

.....

c How did Francis's mother die?

.....

d How did Francis's father die?

.....

e Why did Dr Abrams give Francis his address?

.....

2 What is the effect of the reference to Francis's Silver Star and his response to the award?

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3 In this chapter we have a preview of Nicole and Larry. Why do you think Cormier uses this previewing technique?

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4 In this chapter the narrator refers to people and events without giving us all the information we would like. Make a list of the questions that are raised by this technique.

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5 Imagine that Mrs Belander tells a neighbour about her new tenant. Write what she might say.

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6 What impression have you gained of Enrico? Make notes in the table below.

His injuries	
How he copes with his injuries	
His relationship with Francis	
His personal characteristics	



Plot notes and activities

Chapter 2: Francis meets Nicole

- There is a flashback to Francis's childhood.
- We see Francis and Nicole's first meeting.
- The way of life in Frenchtown is described.

This chapter takes us back to the first meeting of Francis and Nicole. Nicole was a new student at school who arrived in the seventh grade, having moved from Albany, New York. Their eyes met and he fell for her immediately. Francis thought he sensed a connection between them, but Nicole ignored him for some time. He had a chance to catch glimpses of Nicole when she became friendly with Marie LaCroix, Francis's neighbour and classmate. He eventually told Marie, in confidence, that he liked Nicole. Possibly Marie broke the confidence because shortly afterwards Nicole spoke to Francis using his name. Late one summer evening, she waved to Francis and a group of his friends. We see his insecurity and self-doubt as he wonders if Nicole was waving to him or to Joey LeBlanc.

Francis's narrative reveals details of life in Frenchtown — what the houses were like; the daily routines of the inhabitants; the importance to the town of baseball and their team. We build up a picture of Francis's schooldays. The nuns were strict. They punished bad behaviour and wrote poor marks on report cards. References to St Jude's Church highlight the importance of religion in Francis's life.

The use of a flashback chapter at this point in the narrative adds to our understanding and knowledge of Francis. The contrast between the past and the present is poignant, as we compare the innocence of those days with the darkness of the present.

1 Answer these quick questions.

a What was Francis doing when he first saw Nicole?

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b What is the name of the Frenchtown baseball team?

.....

c Which two baseball players are mentioned by name?

.....

d Nicole had a brother and a sister. True or false?

.....

e What made Francis think he could become a writer?

.....



2 Find two similes that describe how Francis behaves and feels when he is around Nicole.

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.....

3 Describe Francis's feelings when Nicole spoke to him.

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4 Suggest why Nicole and Marie are friends. How are they different from each other? Do they have anything in common?

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Extension activities

- 1** On a separate sheet of paper or in your exercise book, draw the outline of a map of Frenchtown. Label the streets and mark the places referred to so far in the story. Add to the map as you work through the book.
- 2** Francis is reading *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway. Find out what this book is about and prepare a report for your group. If you wish, you could read the novel.



Plot notes and activities

Chapter 3: Looking for Nicole

(from start of chapter to 'And I had not yet killed anybody', p. 15)

- Francis visits Nicole's old home.
- In a flashback to the war, he describes speaking to a soldier from Frenchtown about Nicole.

Now in the present, Francis goes to the house where Nicole and her parents used to live. He knows that they have moved, but he needs to make this visit. At the window he sees a child's face, which disappears as he smiles at her.

In a flashback sequence, Francis recollects being told that Nicole and her parents had simply disappeared one night. He received this information in France during the war, when he met Norman, an older boy from Frenchtown who was in another platoon. Norman told Francis that Nicole had become like a hermit, not going out at all, and that the family had left Frenchtown without saying a word. Norman is surprised that 15-year-old Francis got into the army, and we learn that he forged his birth certificate. As the two friends part, we see them as innocent and inexperienced young soldiers, not yet used to the role, and — in Francis's case — not yet killers.

1 Answer these quick questions.

a What was the Renards' address?

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b What was the name of the Frenchtown boy whom Francis met in France?

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c Which town was the French village near?

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d Why did the two boys salute each other in a half-joking way?

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e What does the boy tell Francis about how Nicole's behaviour changed?

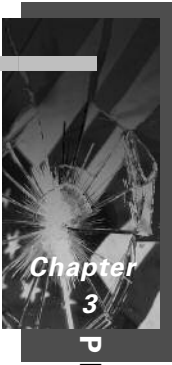
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2 Find some words and phrases that suggest how quickly the Renards left town.

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3 How does the information about the nature of the Renards' departure affect your view of Nicole?

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4 What is the effect of the final sentence of this passage?

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Plot notes and activities

Chapter 3: The horrors of war

(from p. 15, 'As I turn to go back', to end of chapter)

- One of the Renards' neighbours tells Francis that the family has gone.
- Francis gives Mrs Belander a false name and story about himself.
- He dreams about his wartime experiences.
- He describes killing two German soldiers.
- He refers to the grenade blowing up in his face.

The Renards' neighbour confirms that the family has left town, and we feel that Francis's feelings of loss are intensified. He gives Mrs Belander a fictional account of his life. He makes up a false name and says his parents are waiting for him in Canada.

He goes to bed and, half awake and half asleep, recites the names of the soldiers in his old platoon. He dreams of the war. He describes how his comrades behave as they advance through the French village, and we feel the tension as they move nervously, jumpily through the late-afternoon shadows. The description focuses on the unglamorous reality of the situation, and the lack of bravado and heroism. Francis has a vivid dream about killing two young German soldiers, and when he wakes up suddenly, he remembers the actual details of the event. The matter-of-fact tone in which he describes his actions and the fate of the rest of the platoon during this attack emphasise the horror of fighting in war. The lasting effects of the experience are seen in the dreams that haunt him.

Tension is generated as events are previewed. Francis refers to the grenade that destroyed his face, and he anticipates the day when Larry will appear on the streets of Frenchtown.

1 Answer these quick questions.

a What does Francis tell Mrs Belander his name is?

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b Which soldier asks 'What the hell are we doing here, anyway?'

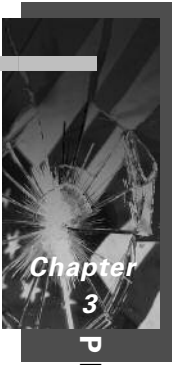
.....

c What are we told about the age of the soldiers Francis killed?

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d Which members of the platoon were killed in this attack?

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2 We hear that Francis forged his birth certificate to join the army aged 15. How do you react to this information?

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3 Explain how Cormier creates tension and drama in this section.

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4 Reread the description of the attack from 'I close my eyes and see them advancing' (p. 18) to 'and we never see him again' (p. 20). Imagine you are Eddie Richards. On a separate sheet of paper or in your exercise book, write an account of what happened from your point of view.

Extension activity

Imagine you are the scriptwriter for a film or stage version of the novel. Write the script for the scene given in Activity 4. You will need to:

- use actual dialogue
- give directions for the movements of the characters
- give directions for camera shots or describe what effects you want to achieve