“Human language is like a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, when all the time we are longing to move the stars to pity.”

~ Gustave Flaubert
**Tunes for Bears to Dance to by Robert Cormier**

Plot Analysis: As you read your book, title each chapter. This will help you be an active reader and analyze plot development.

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<tr>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
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<td>96-101</td>
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Chapters One - Three (1-18):

Literary Element Analysis:

- Setting (pages 3, 6 and 7):

- Protagonist:

- Point of View: Is a character telling the story or a narrator? Does the narrator follow one character or several?

1. Narrative Hook: “The old man came out of the crazy house” (1). How does Cormier hook the reader?

NARRATIVE HOOK:

2. Who is Eddie? What do we learn about his relationship with Henry?

3. “Henry felt guilty because he could go, oh, three or four hours without thinking about Eddie, but his mother and father seemed to be thinking of him every minute of the day, walking wearily and sorrowfully through the hours, seldom talking except when necessary” (3). What conflicts are established in this passage?

4. “Henry didn’t want to say what he said next. But he had to say it… He didn’t want Jackie to take his job away from him. He had promised Jackie that he would ask, although he did not particularly care for Jackie, who liked to fight. His family was poor, Jackie said, and could use the money. But everybody in that section of Wickburg was poor and could use the money” (4). Why does Henry still ask about the job for Jackie? What does this tell us about him?
5. “Mr. Hairston’s favorite pastime was standing at the window near the big brass cash register, watching people passing by on the street, and making comments about them” (5). What does Mr. Hairston say about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Comments: Examples of…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
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<td>Selsky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. O’Brien</td>
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<td>Mrs. Karminski</td>
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6. How does Henry react to Mr. Hairston’s comments about Mrs. Karminski at the bottom of page 5? What does this show the reader about him?

7. Notice how Cormier create suspense at the beginning of chapter nine Reread pages 9-11. As you read, pay attention to Cormier’s word choice, called diction. What words help develop imagery (use of description that uses the senses)?

IMAGERY:

DICTION:

8. When we are first introduced to George Graham, Cormier explains “…his voice, like the wind of a hurricane…bulging muscles… his legs like tree trunks…” but then “his voice suddenly gentle…soft brown eyes that were full of regret” (11-12). What do these descriptions suggest about George Graham?

9. What is Henry afraid of in the cellar? Does anything scare you?
10. Reread the description of Mr. Hairston on page 14. What does this tell us about him?

11. “Doris was a whisper of a girl, slender, with long black curls that reached her shoulders, a bow in her hair. It looked like always the same bow but the colors were different, read and yellow and blue, bright and vivid colors in contrast with her pale white face, and dark eyes deep in their sockets, like the windows of a haunted house” (15). Underline the simile in this passage. Authors use similes to capture feelings. In this case, Cormier uses this simile to help the reader understand Henry’s impression of Doris? What does this specific choice of simile suggest?

12. What happened to Doris’ cheek? What is the explanation Mr. Hairston gives? What do you think?

13. What do we learn about Henry’s family from his prayer on page 17?

14. **Figurative Language:**

<table>
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<th>Example:</th>
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<th>Type:</th>
<th>Why?</th>
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<tr>
<td>[Mr. Levine’s] moustache was a wedge of frost.</td>
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<td>…although [Mr. Levine’s] cheeks were still smooth,</td>
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<td>like stones worn away by years of rain.</td>
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<td>His father, in fact, was swallowed in his sorrow.</td>
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<td>[Mr. Hairston’s] expression [was] as sour as the pickles in the</td>
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<td>wooden barrel near the cash register.</td>
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<td>Curiosity itched him, like a mosquito bite.</td>
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<td>The giant [George Graham] bellowed, his voice like the wind of a</td>
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<td>hurricane...his legs like tree trunks.</td>
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<td>I was like a dictator, the way they [his customers] treated me</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>[Mr. Hairston]. I was a dictator. Because I had control over them.</td>
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<td>She [Doris] usually came and went like a ghost…</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Hairston’s voice was like thunder.</td>
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Chapters Four – Eight (19-44):

- Chapters Five, Six and Eight: Eddie and Grief

15. In the beginning of chapter five, Henry explains why they never go back to their old neighborhood. “Too many sad memories. Eddie’s death had obliterated all the good times they had known in Frenchtown” (27). Why? Why can sad things overshadow good things? Have you ever had this happen to you? What does this tell us about Henry’s life right now?

16. What habit did Henry’s father have before Eddie died? What does Henry say about this habit now?

17. Henry’s mom says of Henry’s father, “‘When sadness becomes too much to bear it becomes a sickness. As if your father’s standing in the shadows’” (29). What does this mean?

18. In chapter five, Henry reveals his secret thoughts that he does not share with anyone. Let’s read this passage on page 29. Why do you think Henry keeps these thoughts hidden? On the bottom of page 31, Henry reveals a possible reason why. Have you ever felt this way?

19. What does Henry want to do to help remember his brother? Who, surprisingly, is willing to help?

20. What happens between Henry and Jackie? Why?

Chapters Four and Seven:

22. Where does Mr. Levine go every day? What does he do there?

23. What does Henry learn about Mr. Levine’s past? How does the reader learn this?

24. George Graham explains Mr. Levine is “not as old as he looks…the camp made him old.” How? What other experiences might make people old?

25. Why does Mr. Levine tip his hat all the time? Why is he in the crazy house?

26. Reread page 38. As we read, identify the simile. What effect does this simile have on the reader?

27. At the end of chapter seven, Cormier writes, “the three of them sat like that for a long time [looking at the village] until someone called that is was time to close the center for the day.” Why did they sit in silence staring at the village? Why is the village important?

28. Chapters four-eight flip-flop between Henry’s story and Mr. Levine’s story? How are Henry and Mr. Levine alike?

29. Why do you think Cormier structures his plot this way, flip-flopping between these two subjects: Henry and his family’s grief and Mr. Levine’s tragedy?

PLOT STRUCTURE:
Connecting setting to character:
The setting of post-World War II is important. In historical fiction, authors will often establish parallels between actual people or events in history and the fictional story and characters to help develop characterization. This can also help establish theme – what is Cormier suggesting about people and life through his choices?

- Does anyone remember what dream Henry has? It is on page 29. What does this reveal about the effect of the war on Henry?

- Also, why did Mr. Hairston like the war? This is on page 14. What does this reveal about his character?

- Who was a dictator in the war?

- What similarities can you identify between Hitler and Mr. Hairston?

Foreshadowing: is a technique used by authors to hint at an event later in the story. Often, a reader cannot effectively identify foreshadowing until a book is finished, but it should be obvious in chapter nine Cormier’s use of foreshadowing.

- After telling Mr. Hairston about Mr. Levine, Henry “was uneasy as he resumed his work, as if somehow he had betrayed the old man” (47).

  This should make the reader uneasy, too. What is the conflict at this point in the story?

  The use of foreshadowing allows the reader to understand conflict will come, and suspense is heightened because we wonder what the conflict will be. If the reader is unable to recognize the use of foreshadowing here, he or she might become bored with the story, since there is no obvious conflict that exists except the ones associated with Henry’s family, who are minor characters at this point.

30. Reread pages 48-50. What similes can you find? What do these similes help reveal?

31. What does Doris warn Henry about? What literary technique is this?
Chapters Eleven – Twelve (51-57):

32. What does Mr. Hairston show Henry? Why does Henry find his behavior odd?

33. Where is Henry’s dad going? Why is he going there?

**Language Analysis:**

Early in the novel, Cormier explores people’s use of language:

➢ “‘You shouldn’t call it a crazy house...It’s an institution for the insane’” (2). Is there a difference between being crazy and being insane? Discuss.

Words have power. Certain words have more power than others. Consider the following paired sentences. For each pair, identify which sentence is positive (+) and negative (-).

Robert is sneaky.          Harry is crooked.
Robert moves quietly.      Harry is clever.
 Pete is a bum.            Mary is gabby.
Pete is a wanderer.        Mary is talkative.

The first sentence in each pair makes you feel less friendly toward the person being described. The second sentence makes you feel more sympathetic toward the person described. You have been influenced by the tone of the language used.

Many words have a tone, a kind of feeling built into them. That is why you would rather be called plump than fat. It doesn’t sound as bad.

**Words have dictionary definitions. This is called DENOTATION. Words also have emotional meaning, positive or negative associations based on how the culture actually uses the word. This is called CONNOTATION.**

Recognizing connotation can be difficult because it requires an understanding of how your culture and fellow English speakers view the word. Sometimes, our culture calls using more favorable terms for certain groups of people being *politically correct.* Circle the word that has a more favorable connotation:

1. custodian       janitor
2. grease monkey   mechanic
3. salesman        peddler
4. cook            chef
5. veterinarian     horse doctor
More practice:

Which sentence contains the more favorable connotation?

1. Senator Smith is a politician.
   Senator Smith is a political hack.
   Senator Smith is a statesman.

2. Sally blubbered.
   Sally whimpered.
   Sally wept quietly.

3. Harriet is tall.
   Harriet is gawky.
   Harriet is overgrown.

4. Major Gray was an intelligence officer.
   Major Gray was a spy.
   Major Gray was a snooper.

5. Mr. Goode is a labor boss.
   Mr. Goode is a union official.
   Mr. Goode is a union dictator.

Robert Cormier explores people’s use of language immediately in the epigram (the quote at the beginning of the book). Let’s read it.

“Human language is like a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to when all the time we are longing to move the stars to pity.” ~ Gustave Flaubert

So, here’s a simile about human language. Let’s break it down:

- cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to… What is with the bears?

- when all the time we are longing to move the stars to pity… So, if you were able to move the stars to feel pity with your language, it would mean you…?

34. What has happened in the novel so far that is too shocking for words?
Cormier further develops the idea that language has limitations with his frequent use of figurative language: simile, metaphor, hyperbole and personification.

And then in chapters eleven and twelve, Cormier begins making some direct comments about language and its power. He writes:

- “Henry’s throat tightened. He had no words to describe such a thing of beauty” (52).
- “He mumbled something that Henry did not catch” (53).
- “Henry had been about to turn away when Mr. Hairston’s response struck him like a lightning bolt. Struck was exactly the word. There was no thunder and no storm, only *maybe we can work something out*” (53).
- “Magic words, *we’ll see*. What his mother and father said when they did not want to say *yes* right away. *We’ll see* meaning not *no*. Not *yes*, either, of course, but in the country of *maybe and perhaps*, where everything was possible. *We’ll see* words of hope a breath away from *yes*” (53).
- “ ‘Therapy.’ An ominous word, with rumblings, mysterious threatening” (56).
- “*His own good*. These were also ominous words…” (56).

**Chapters Thirteen – Fourteen (pages 58-65):**

35. When Henry returns to the store the next morning, how does Mr. Hairston treat him?

36. “Henry stalled, in sweet agony, wanting to glance at the sketch but filled with guilt at the prospect of acting behind the grocer’s back” (60). What does this show us about Henry? What would you do?

37. What is Mr. Hairston’s motivation for placing the X on the picture of the tombstone?

38. Mr. Hairston’s explains to Henry that he has “‘outlived [his] usefulness’ “ (62). Why does this confuse Henry? Why do you think Mr. Hairston fires Henry?
39. Why is being fired a disaster for Henry?

40. How does Cormier help reveal the importance of Henry in Mr. Levine’s life on page 64?

41. “‘This village,’ the giant said, ‘will be a reminder for everybody about what happened in the war. But also about survival. And how good can overcome evil. That’s what this village symbolizes’ “ (64). George Graham explains the symbol for the reader. Why does the village represent these things?

42. “Mr. Levine came forward, his eyes dancing with delight, and Henry forgot for a few minutes about being fired and his father receiving therapy in the hospital” (65). Why do you think this made Henry forget the bad stuff going on for a moment?

43. Mr. Levine’s village encourages people to remember the Holocaust. What other object is a symbol of remembrance to Henry?
Chapters fifteen–sixteen (pages 66-78):

44. Mr. Hairston explains to Henry, “’You only appreciate something when you think you have lost it. I wanted you to appreciate it’...But I did appreciate it, Henry thought, wondering why Mr. Hairston would do a thing like that” (68). What do you think of this explanation? Do you think Henry appreciated Mr. Hairston’s initial offer to help?

45. Mr. Hairston offers to give Henry his job back, but Henry must first do what?

46. How does Henry react?

47. When analyzing character, identifying a character’s motivation is important. Why do you think Mr. Hairston wants Henry to do this?

48. As Mr. Hairston is explaining to Henry what he wants him to do, Cormier describes the environment. He says “he late afternoon sun blazed through the window, exposing dust motes in the air, dust that would later settle on the shelves” (68). This is symbolic. What do the light and the dust symbolize?

49. Reread pages 75 and 76. Sometimes, writers will create imagery by repeating images that have a common mood. If repeated enough, we call this a MOTIF, or pattern in literature. What image dominates Cormier’s description? This imagery helps to establish how Henry feels. How does Henry feel?

50. Read the bottom of page 77 to the end of the chapter. Write down some phrases and words that help develop the mood, or the feeling created for the reader by the author.
## What Would You Do?

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<th>Disadvantages</th>
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51. What would you do?

### Chapters Seventeen – Nineteen (pages 79-95):

52. How does Mr. Hairston make Henry’s dilemma more complicated?

53. As Mr. Hairston continues to convince Henry to destroy Mr. Levine’s village, Henry avoids his eye contact. Instead, he “[concentrates] on the buttons of [Mr. Hairston’s] white coat” (80). After Mr. Hairston mentions he knows Henry’s mom’s boss, “Henry did not reply, looked briefly into the grocer’s dark eyes and then went back to the buttons, noticing for the first time one cracked button, second from the top” (81). What does the cracked button symbolize, especially at this point in the novel?
54. At the end of chapter seventeen, Cormier writes “Henry turned, stepped aside, curious to see the expression on the grocer’s face after issuing such a terrible order. He was surprised to see, not something ugly or repulsive, but the bland everyday face of Mr. Hairston. But he shuddered, opening the door, as if he had just touched the glistening skin of a snake” (83). What do you think Cormier is trying to establish with Henry’s reaction to Mr. Hairston’s expression? What does the simile help convey?

55. What happens to Mr. Levine’s village? Describe Henry’s actions and reactions.

56. Setting can often change to reflect the events in the story or the mood of the characters. Describe the weather as Henry leaves the arts and crafts center.

57. Mr. Hairston is waiting for Henry outside. When Henry sees him, Cormier writes Henry “had never seen the grocer outside of the store before. He was smaller, thinner, shivering with the chill of the rain” (92). Why do you think Cormier creates this observation for Henry? What does Cormier want the reader to realize?

58. Reread the bottom of page 92 – 95. What do you think of Henry’s actions here?

59. What so you think of Mr. Hairston’s response? Why did he want Henry to destroy the village?
Chapter Twenty (96-101): A Close Reading:

Let’s reread the last chapter. As we read, look for all the literary elements and techniques we have discussed in class. Let’s make a list below to guide our reading:

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60. What did you think of the novel?

61. What is the theme of this novel? What is Cormier trying to show us about people and/or life?