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Study Guide

for

The Chosen

by Chaim Potok



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Meet Chaim Potok



When you write about one person or set of people, if you dig deeply enough, you will ultimately uncover basic humanity.

—Chaim Potok

For Chaim Potok (pronounced hīəm pō 'täk), creating a link between one particular group and the rest of humanity has been a lifelong challenge. He became a novelist because he believed storytelling would help him explore the relationship between individuals and the larger society around them. Like many other writers, he chose a setting familiar to him—the deeply religious Jewish communities of his own youth.

Potok was born in the Bronx, a New York City neighborhood much like the Brooklyn community in *The Chosen*. The son of a poor Polish immigrant, Chaim remembers his father's shame the day the family went on public assistance. But he also remembers a vibrant community, made up not only of Jews but also of immigrants from many nations.

Potok was raised in an Orthodox Jewish family and attended a Jewish parochial school that focused on the study of the Talmud, or Jewish law. For Potok, whose interest in fiction and literature was growing, this emphasis on the Talmud presented the first of many conflicts between the religious and the secular,

or nonreligious, aspects of his life. His teachers and parents did not approve of his interests because to them literature was a distraction from the Talmud.

At about the age of his main characters in *The Chosen*, Chaim read *Brideshead Revisited* by British writer Evelyn Waugh, which drew him forever to the power of storytelling. Using his training in Talmudic study, Potok systematically read through the works of different authors in an attempt to understand and absorb literature more thoroughly. He also began writing fiction.

After attending Yeshiva University, Potok was ordained a Conservative rabbi, and later served as a military chaplain during the Korean War. While in Asia, he learned of cultures entirely different from Judaism. Not long after returning from Korea, Potok married Adena Mosevitsky, with whom he has three children. It was his experiences in Korea that led Potok to write *The Book of Lights*. Although this was his first novel, it went unpublished until 1981. *The Chosen*, published in 1967, was actually his second novel. As a best-seller, it established his popular reputation. *The Promise*, published two years later, continues the story begun in *The Chosen*. A later novel, *Davita's Harp*, in which Reuven Malter appears as a minor character, revolves around a young girl caught between her family's politics and the Jewish world of her school.

Potok himself strives for balance in his life. In addition to writing novels, he has continued to study Judaism. Potok has taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary and has edited Jewish books and periodicals. His nonfiction book *Wanderings: Chaim Potok's History of the Jews* (1978) presents four centuries of Jewish history and was well received by critics. Potok's goal has never been to write solely about Judaism but rather to examine the constant tension between cultures that he feels and sees around him:

I have spent [my life] in an evolving reshaping of my faith. I have done this by writing novels . . . about certain kinds of culture conflicts in the present.

Introducing the Novel

. . . His speech rhythms are sometimes awkward, and the imagery blurred. And yet, while Reuven talks we listen because of the story he has to tell; and, long afterwards, it remains in the mind, and delights.

—Hugh Nissenson, *New York Times Book Review*

It was, above all, a story which cracked barriers so that we were made to look each other full in the face and see—not stereotypes and shadow but flesh and blood.

—Caroline Salvatore, *Book World, Chicago Tribune*

The Chosen received mixed reviews from critics. Nonetheless, the novel has appealed to many readers over the years. Describing an America deeply entrenched in World War II, the story is told in the first-person by 15-year-old Reuven Malter. Reuven lives with his father in an Orthodox Jewish community in Brooklyn. Mr. Malter is a scholar and writer who studies the Talmud. Reuven is enrolled at the local yeshiva, or Jewish parochial school.

An accident during a baseball game brings Reuven together with Danny Saunders, a player on the opposing team and the son of a Hasidic rabbi. The story unfolds as friendship develops between the two boys. Despite the differences in their basic views of Judaism, they share many interests, especially a keen interest in learning. As they mature toward adulthood, both must make difficult choices and redefine their relationships to their fathers and to their faith. Both must also make sense of the momentous events around them—the end of World War II, the horror of Adolf Hitler's crimes against Jews, and the controversy about whether to create a nation for Jews in Israel. Both must decide what is most important to them and be willing to make sacrifices for it. Like most of Potok's other novels, *The Chosen* explores the issue of balancing personal values with values one finds in the surrounding world. Potok calls this a "core-to-core culture confrontation." Danny, in particular, finds his core value system at odds with the new world he encounters. As they stand poised on

the brink of adulthood, Reuven and Danny must build bridges to each other and to the world around them. They must learn to look for what people share, rather than for what separates them.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The Chosen is set in Brooklyn, New York, during the 1940s. World War II had been raging since 1939. The United States, following the bombing of its naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, had already been drawn into the war. Europe struggled to withstand Adolf Hitler's tyranny while Asia faced aggression from Japan. Most Americans, including the deeply religious Jews who lived in a somewhat isolated manner in Brooklyn, were in some way affected by the war effort.

Brooklyn is one of New York City's five boroughs, or sections. Settled by Europeans as early as 1660, Brooklyn is home to more than two million people. The borough is characterized by long blocks of row houses and tree-lined streets. Some of the older neighborhoods have carefully preserved houses that are more than a hundred years old. In the middle of Brooklyn is Prospect Park, which is designed so that its features look bigger than they really are. Coney Island, whose beaches are popular with New Yorkers in the summer, is located at the southern end of Brooklyn.

Many Jewish immigrants came to Brooklyn in the 1880s to escape persecution in Germany and eastern Europe. They founded enduring communities in Brooklyn, such as Williamsburg (where *The Chosen* is set), Crown Heights, and Boro Park. Many of the Jews living in Williamsburg are Hasidic. On Friday evenings, large groups of Hasidim clothed in black overcoats and fur-trimmed hats make their way to the synagogues off Bedford Avenue.

Did You Know?

Judaism is one of the oldest of the world's religions. It dates back about 4,000 years and was the first faith to worship one God rather than many gods. Judaism has much in common with the religions that grew out of it— Islam and Christianity. All three faiths teach that God is a guide and ultimately a judge. All three faiths have a day of rest and worship, which for Jews is from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday.

Three texts are considered holy in the Jewish tradition: the Torah, the Hebrew Bible, and the Talmud. The Torah includes the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. Christians refer to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament. The Talmud contains Jewish law.

Except in Israel, where Hebrew is the main language, most modern Jews speak the language of the nation where they live. Many Orthodox Jews in the United States use Hebrew for prayer and religious study and English for everyday conversation.

Over the years, different branches of Judaism have emerged. The four main branches of Judaism include the Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Conservative, and Reform movements. Only a small percentage of Jews practice Orthodox Judaism.

The way that Orthodox Jews practice their faith has changed very little over time. Orthodox Jews believe that the Torah, or first five books of the Bible, was given by God to Moses. They

apply their interpretation of the Torah's laws very literally to their everyday lives. During the Sabbath, they follow strict rules about not using any electricity, telephones, or cars; and they do no work of any kind. The Sabbath is also a day for Orthodox Jews to spend time with their families, to pray, and to study their sacred texts.

Even within the Orthodox branch there are different divisions. One group of Orthodox Jews is called Hasidim. This sect dates back to eighteenth-century eastern Europe, when strong leaders with inspiring personalities began to look at Judaism in a new way. These leaders, called tzaddiks, wanted to reshape their religion to focus more on the kind of heartfelt worship in which even an uneducated person could participate. Hasidim also wanted to protect Judaism from becoming too modernized. As a result, they kept their communities more separate than did other Orthodox Jews. People responded with great feeling and intense loyalty to the early Hasidic spiritual leaders. These rabbis gained great power over their people—a power they then passed on to their sons. Reb Saunders's character in *The Chosen* is based on the image of such a leader. Today, Hasidic men dress as did their Hasidic ancestors in eastern Europe. They wear black coats, black hats, and beards. In addition to Hebrew, many Hasidim also speak Yiddish, a folk language that evolved in eastern Europe.

Before You Read

The Chosen Book 1

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How do you choose your friends? Have you ever thought you wouldn't like someone only to find out later that the person was very different from what you had expected?

Journal

In your journal, briefly write about a friend, teammate, or other peer who surprised you once you got to know him or her better. Think about how you formed your first impression of him or her. Write about how these impressions proved to be true or false as you got to know the person better.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Reuven and Danny form, and then revise, their impressions of each other.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Religion affects Reuven's daily life in many ways. For example, he and his teammates wear small skullcaps called *kippah* (Hebrew) or *yarmulke* (Yiddish) as a sign of respect toward God. Reuven also eats a kosher diet that forbids certain kinds of meat, including pork and shellfish. Animals that are acceptable for consumption must be slaughtered in a humane way according to kosher practices. Finally, as an Orthodox Jew, Reuven prays daily. When praying, he puts on *tefillin*, also called phylacteries, which are two small black boxes attached to leather straps. One of the boxes is attached to the forehead; the other, to the left arm. Inside the boxes are Bible verses written on parchment. These verses remind the wearer of God's unity, God's providence, and Israel's release from captivity.

The Beginning of the End of World War II in Europe

The invasion of Europe, which Reuven and others follow so carefully, was a huge operation. An enormous military force gathered in England—including American, Canadian, and British soldiers. The Germans had some idea that an Allied invasion was coming and built a wall of protection and defensive artillery along the French coast. The invasion, which took place on June 6, 1944, was a combined air and sea assault on five different beaches in Normandy, France. While the battles were incredibly costly, the Allies succeeded. This operation was named Operation Overlord but is commonly called D day. It marked the beginning of the end of World War II.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

accentuate [ak sen'chōō āt'] v. to emphasize

barrage [bā rāzh'] v. to deliver rapidly, one after another

disheveled [di shev'əld] adj. messy, disordered

emancipate [i man'sə pāt'] v. to free

fervently [fur'vənt lē] adv. with great feeling

gentile [jen'tīl] n. a person who is not a Jew

harangue [hə rang'] n. a ranting speech

interim [in'tər im] n. time in between; interval

silhouette [sil'ōō et'] v. to project on a background, showing only the outline

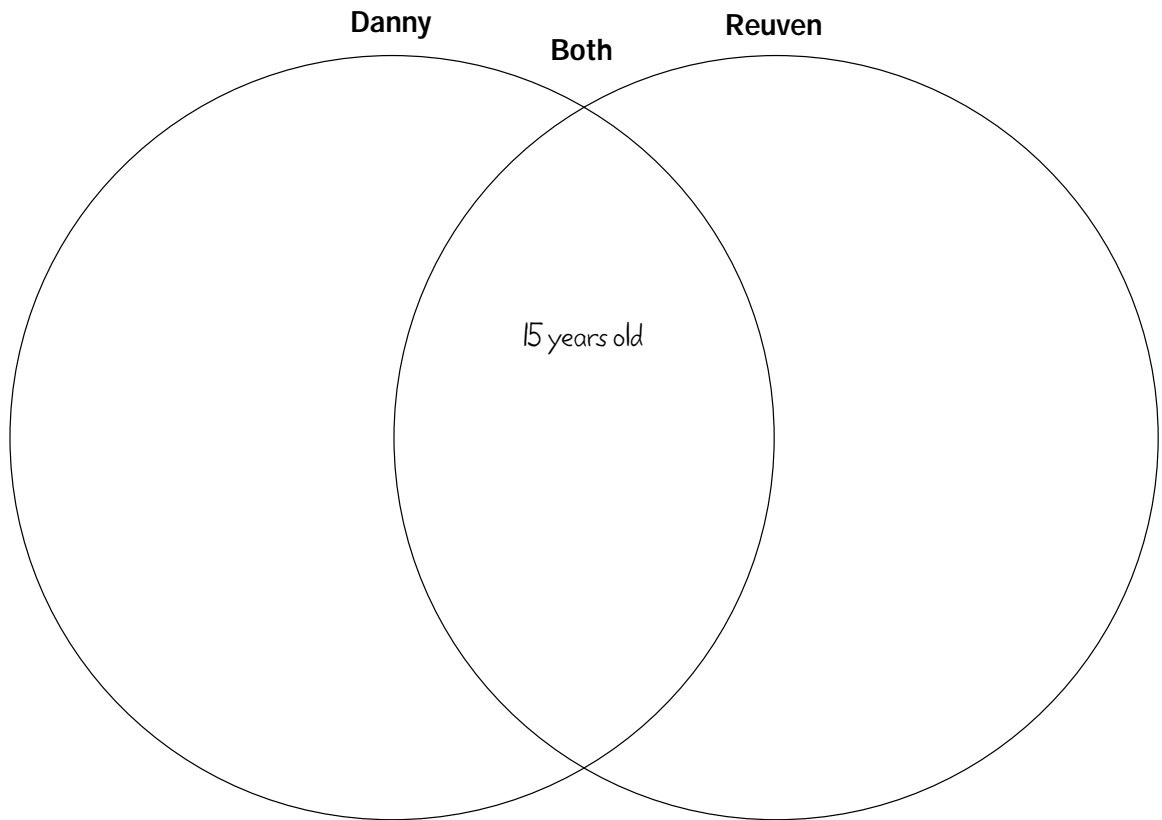
zealousness [zel'əs nəs] n. eagerness to pursue something



Active Reading

The Chosen Book 1

Danny and Reuven view each other as being very different. In fact, they have much in common. As you read Book 1, complete the Venn diagram below by listing ways that the two boys are similar and ways that they are different.



Responding

The Chosen Book 1

Personal Response

What did you think of Danny during the baseball game? What did you think of him after his visit to Reuven in the hospital?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Explain who Reuven and Danny are and how they meet. What do you learn about each character in the novel's opening chapter?

2. What happens to change the relationship between Reuven and Danny? How do the boys feel about each other before and after this event?

3. What is the relationship between Danny and Mr. Malter? How does Reuven learn of the relationship? Why might the author have chosen to reveal this relationship to readers and to Reuven in this way?

Responding

The Chosen Book 1

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How does Danny explain his actions at the baseball game? Do you find Danny’s explanation acceptable? Would you forgive him if you were Reuven? Why or why not?

5. Think back to Potok’s description of the baseball game in the beginning of Book 1. Is Potok successful in drawing the reader into the novel’s opening pages? As you read, did you find yourself wondering about the outcome of the “holy war” between the two teams? Evaluate Potok’s ability to engage the reader, using examples from the novel to support your answer.

Literature and Writing

Talmud Teachings

Mr. Malter reminds Reuven that the Talmud urges people to find a teacher and choose a friend. He urges Reuven to make Danny Saunders his friend. List some of the reasons that teachers and friends are valuable assets. Given what the novel reveals about Danny Saunders’s life, why do you think he might especially need a friend? Using Danny as your example, write a short essay supporting or rejecting the Talmud’s idea.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Danny and Reuven jump to many conclusions about each other simply because they make their assumptions in ignorance. In your group, divide the chapters in Book 1. Then skim the sections to find language that suggests the boys’ assumptions, as well as their ignorance and even bias about each other’s lives. Review what you wrote in the **Focus Activity** to prompt your thinking.

Learning for Life

Just as Mr. Malter keeps Danny’s confidence about his library reading, you may sometimes be asked to keep information private. Receiving someone’s confidence is a great responsibility. Sometimes revealing the information confided to you can hurt someone. Work with a partner to develop a list of guidelines for keeping confidences.

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Before You Read

The Chosen Book 2

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How do you show friends and family that you care about them?

Web It

With a small group, brainstorm ways people show their love for one another. Create a web with the words “Ways to Show Love” in the center. List some of your brainstorming ideas in the outer circles.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Danny Saunders and his father show their love for each other.

BACKGROUND

Victory in Sight

The war in Europe ended nearly a year after D day June 16, 1944, the day on which the Allied invasion of Normandy began. Throughout the rest of 1944, the Allies advanced steadily across Europe toward Germany. In late 1944, Hitler took a final desperate stand along the French and Belgian border. This battle in the Ardennes, a plateau in northeast France, is known as the Battle of the Bulge, and the Allies nearly lost it. It also cost Hitler’s armies the last of their energy, however, and ultimately helped the Allied cause. As the war in Europe came to a close, American Jews like Reuven and Danny began to think about the Jews of Europe. Where would the remaining few feel safe? Some Jews began to call for a Jewish state in Israel.

Did You Know?

The Sabbath, or day of rest and worship, is at the very center of Jewish religious life. It is a time for religious Jews to step aside from their worldly cares and cherish their spiritual selves. Families generally gather together and share a special meal, with fine linens and dishes. Blessings are recited over wine and a type of bread called challah. Saturday morning is spent in worship at a synagogue, and there may be a second afternoon service. Sabbath ends back at home with a short ceremony called the haddalah. In Danny’s home, another Sabbath tradition is observed—the discussion of the Talmud. Danny and his father, and frequently other guests, study by conversing with each other and by reading the commentaries of rabbis and scholars from Jewish history.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

abominations [ə bom´ə nā´shəns] *n.* objects of extreme hatred

acquiesce [ak´wē es´] *v.* to accept without argument

adherents [ad hēr´ənts] *n.* followers, believers

cajole [kə jōl´] *v.* to persuade with flattery

degenerate [di jen´ə rāt´] *v.* to decline in quality

gesticulate [jes tik´yə lāt´] *v.* to gesture while speaking

luminous [lōō´mə nəs] *adj.* full of light

marauding [mə rōd´ing] *adj.* killing and raiding

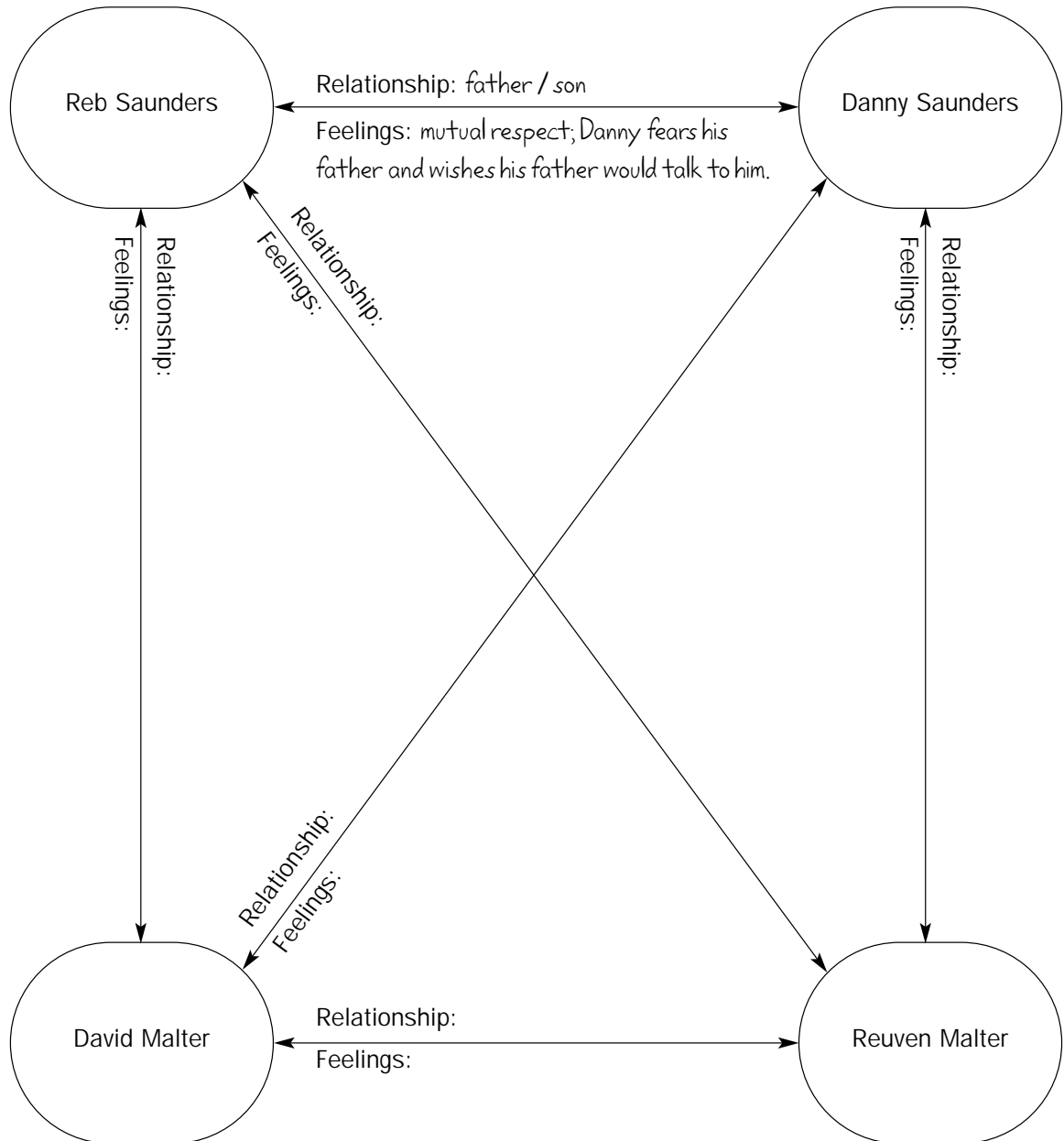
phenomenon [fe nom´ə non´] *n.* an unusual fact or occurrence

subconscious [sub kon´shəs] *n.* thinking process of which a person is unaware

Active Reading

The Chosen Book 2

The novel is primarily about four characters—Danny Saunders, Reuven Malter, Mr. David Malter, and Reb Saunders. Each of the four characters is connected to the others through personal contact and through ideas. As you read Book 2, focus on these relationships. In the graphic organizer below, define the relationships and then describe the major feelings that exist between each pair of characters.



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Responding

The Chosen Book 2

Personal Response

What do you think of the relationship between Danny Saunders and his father? If you were Danny, how might you feel about this father/son relationship? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What history does Mr. Malter give to Reuven about the Hasidim? How does this history help Mr. Malter explain Danny Saunders's life?

2. Describe the events at the Saunderses' on Sabbath afternoon. How do Danny and his father interact? What do these events suggest to Reuven about Danny's relationship with his father?

3. What is Danny Saunders studying at the library? Who else might know about these studies? How do these studies relate to Danny's religious studies?

Responding

The Chosen Book 2

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Do you think Reb Saunders is a good father? Why or why not?

5. Why do you think the author ends Book 2 with Danny's revelation of the possibility of his brother's becoming the tzaddik in Danny's place? What do you think will happen? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Summaries

Reb Saunders makes a speech during the Sabbath Talmud study about the relationship between religious Jews and the rest of the world. Later, when Mr. Malter hears of Reb Saunders's position, he recognizes its value but believes its costs are high. Write a summary of these two men's positions, stating each man's main idea and using examples from the novel to add detail.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In Book 2, Danny becomes increasingly torn between his religious upbringing and his intellectual hunger. In your group, trace his struggle by identifying and then reading aloud appropriate sections of the novel. Look for evidence of how the conflict is affecting Danny mentally, emotionally, and physically. Discuss and predict how you think the struggle will end.

Science Connection

According to Mr. Malter, Danny Saunders is a genius. Even Danny admits that he has a photographic memory. Find out what these terms really mean. How does a photographic memory work? What is a genius? Find out about other geniuses in history. Have any of these geniuses had a photographic memory? What might be the results—both positive and negative—of such brilliance? Research these topics through library and Internet sources. Present your findings to the class in a brief oral report.

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Before You Read

The Chosen Book 3

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Think of a time when you felt torn between two ideas or goals. Were you able to resolve these conflicts? If so, how?

Discuss

In a small group, explore conflicts that teenagers in your community might face. Set up related but opposing ideas for resolving a conflict, such as keeping a friend's secret/revealing a friend's secret to keep that friend from making a serious mistake. Talk about the pros and cons of each idea. How might other people be affected? From the two ideas, choose the most reasonable resolution.

Setting a Purpose

Read to learn how Danny resolves his conflict between family relationships and personal goals.

BACKGROUND

A New Battle Begins

The debate over Israeli statehood was not new at the end of World War II. Hungarian Theodor Herzl began the Zionist movement in the late 1800s to help European Jews escape persecution. He chose Palestine as the Jewish homeland because he believed its prominent place in Jewish history would help him gain support. The Turks maintained control of Palestine until 1918, when the British took over. As Jewish immigration to Palestine grew, the British attempted to balance the needs of Jews with those of Muslim and Christian Arabs who also lived in the region. Violence between Jews and Arabs erupted regularly, however, from 1918 until the outbreak of World War II. Because of the Holocaust, many people felt Jews had a greater need for the land than the Arab Palestinians. At the request of the British, the United Nations voted in 1947 to divide Palestine into Arab and Jewish sections. War broke out as Arabs and Jews alike protested elements of the decision. Modern Israel was born in 1948 with the withdrawal of British forces from the area.

Did You Know?

Danny is a great admirer of Sigmund Freud, a Jewish physician from Austria whose theories revolutionized the way people thought about human behavior, particularly mental illness. Freud suggested that people's behavior was most influenced by their unconscious urges. Even though people were unaware of their urges, they were driven to try to fulfill them—often in destructive ways.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

desecration [des'ə krā'shən] *n.* violation, destruction

disputant [dis pū'tənt] *n.* person in an argument

dogmatic [dôg mat'ik] *adj.* believing in ideas despite lack of evidence

emendation [ē'mən dā'shən] *n.* correction

empiricist [em pir'ə sist] *n.* one who forms theories through experience rather than formal study

excommunicate [eks'kə mū'nə kāt'] *v.* to cut off or ban, especially from a group or religion

lament [lə ment'] *v.* to complain

renaissance [ren'ə zāns'] *n.* rebirth, renewal

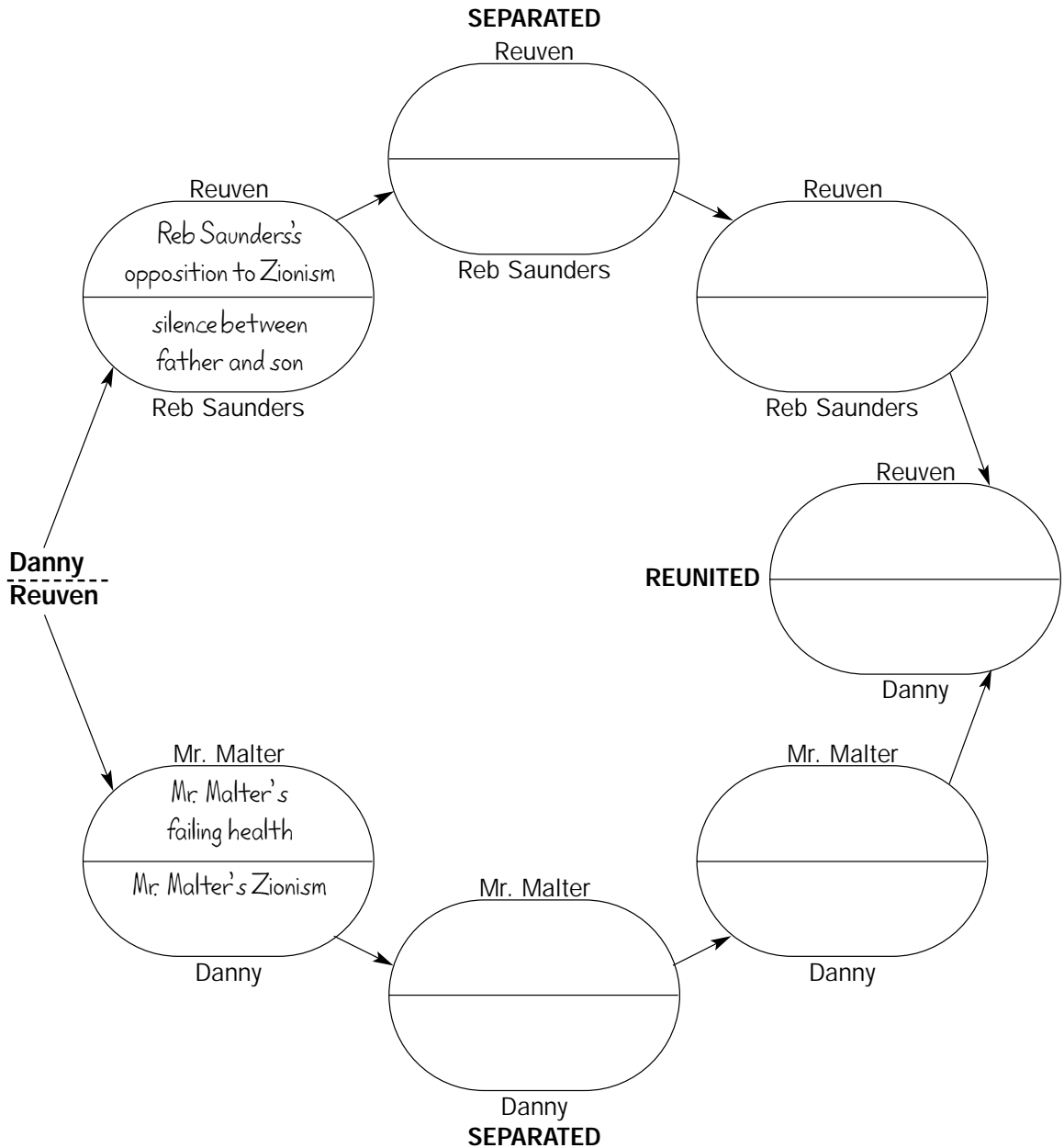
sporadically [spə rad'ik lē] *adv.* off and on

tenuously [ten'ū əs lē] *adv.* weakly

Active Reading

The Chosen Book 3

In the novel's final chapters, the main characters are pulled apart by many forces. The two boys' friendship is sorely tested, and each boy's relationship with his father also leads to separations. As you read, record the events that lead to these separations and those that contribute to a later reunion.



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Responding

The Chosen Book 3

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. In the end, how are Reb Saunders's and David Malter's views of Jewish responsibility the same? How are they different?

5. How does the author use historical events to add depth to his story? Give details from the novel to support your answer.

Literature and Writing

Personal Letter

The decision each boy makes concerning his future sets an important course for his adult life. How do you think each boy's decision will stand the test of time? As either Reuven or Danny, write a letter to the other. Date your letter one to five years after the events at the end of the book. Tell your friend how your life has unfolded and what feelings you now have about the decision you made earlier. Use details from the book to make your letter realistic.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Many of the characters and groups represented in the novel feel strongly about their ideas. They also act on these feelings. In your group, review the chapters in Book 3 for examples of passionate commitment to ideas or causes. Discuss whether people's actions on behalf of their views are or can be justified, even if they contain violence. Compare your reactions with the views and actions of the main characters in the novel.

Social Studies Connection

David Malter believes that American Jews must revive the vitality of their people. Find out how well they have succeeded at this since World War II. Use library and Internet sources to learn about the cultural and intellectual achievements of postwar American Jews.



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Proverbs 3:13–18

the Tanakh

In Search of Oil

the Talmud

Before You Read

Focus Question

What does it mean to have wisdom? What are some experiences that have made you wiser?

Background

The most sacred writings of the Jewish faith are found in the Hebrew Bible—known as the Tanakh—and the Talmud. The Torah, the first section of the Tanakh, is the written law. The Talmud is a collection of laws, stories, and teachings that explain the Torah. The selection from Proverbs comes from the first complete English translation of the Tanakh. The parables from the Talmud are simple translations of important teachings. Together, these selections reflect themes in the novel.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to Proverbs 3:13–18, what is the real reason people should seek wisdom? What descriptive words does the passage use to show the importance of wisdom?

2. In “In Search of Oil,” what is the buyer’s first reaction to the man in the field? What is inaccurate about the buyer’s first impression?

3. What lesson does “In Search of Oil” teach? According to the lesson of the parable, for what should people always be searching?

4. **Making Connections** In *The Chosen*, Reuven and Danny gain wisdom and understanding in a variety of ways. Explain how, when they first meet each other, each is like the buyer in “In Search of Oil.” Explain how learning this lesson brings some of the rewards promised in the reading from Proverbs.

Storytelling

Think about an experience that taught you an important lesson. Write down some of the key elements of the experience. Then relate your experience as a story to a small group of classmates. Explain the lesson, or moral, of your story.

from The Classic Tales

Ellen Frankel

Before You Read

Focus Question

Recall a time in which you were unsure about something but decided to believe in a good outcome despite the circumstances. Would you call that having faith? Explain.

Background

In *The Chosen*, Reuven's father tells the story of Israel ben Eliezer, the peasant who reveals himself to be Ba'al Shem Tov, a holy man and worker of miracles. This man's teachings were the foundation for Hasidism, one of the strongest movements in the history of Judaism. After Ba'al Shem Tov's death, his followers shared his teachings through stories. These selections from *The Classic Tales* reveal some of the ideas that shaped Hasidism.

Responding to the Reading

1. What does the rabbi's son feel he needs to do? Why is the rabbi so firmly against his son's wishes?

2. Why do the rabbi and his son decide to end their journey? What consequences must the rabbi face as a result of this decision?

3. In the second selection, what different paths do the simple son and the clever son take when they leave their fathers?

4. At the end of the tale, the clever son reaches a turning point. What forces him to see things in a new way? What lesson does he learn about faith?

5. **Making Connections** How does the decision by Reb Saunders to raise Danny in silence demonstrate an intense faith? Why, in Reb Saunders's view, is Danny in danger of being the "clever son" of the tale? How does Danny demonstrate his strong faith in his religion and his father, despite the fact that he chooses to follow his own dreams?

Cultural Connection

Learn something about your cultural background, either by talking to relatives or by doing some research. Find something—such as a tradition, a craft, an event, or an interesting story—that describes an aspect of your heritage. Share your findings with your classmates.

My Father Sits in the Dark

Jerome Weidman

Before You Read

Focus Question

Think about a time when someone close to you misunderstood your feelings. What emotions did this generate?

Background

In this story, author Jerome Weidman portrays one son's attempt to deal with what appears to be troubled and remote behavior of his father. The son feels helpless as he struggles to understand his father's feelings. The story, originally published in 1934, appears in a collection called *Jewish American Stories*. The collection's editor, Irving Howe, called Weidman's story "one of the most memorable stories composed by an American Jewish writer."

Responding to the Reading

1. What does the narrator find frustrating and upsetting about his father's behavior?

2. According to the narrator at the end of the story, what could be occupying the father's thoughts?

3. What is the tone, or feeling, in the last line of the story? Explain.

4. **Making Connections** Like the narrator of the short story, Danny and Reuven care deeply about their fathers but do not understand everything about the older men. Their fathers have learned from experiences that the boys have not had. Give examples from the novel that illustrate this point.

Interview Skills

As you learned from the novel, the Jewish tradition has survived centuries of struggle. This was possible because people learned that working together, communicating values and beliefs, and sharing experiences were key to survival. Conduct an interview with a relative or family friend from another generation. Ask questions about his or her childhood, values, and important life experiences. You may tape-record your interview or take notes. When you have finished, examine your information. Write a short report summarizing your interview.

Walking Away Paths

C. Day Lewis

Josephine Miles

Before You Read

Focus Question

What would you say is the most difficult part of growing up? Have you ever wondered how the people who raised you from childhood feel as they watch you grow more independent? What do you think they find most difficult about this experience?

Background

Cecil Day Lewis (1904–1972) was a respected English poet and novelist. In this poem—written for his first-born son—Day Lewis captures how a parent might feel when having to part with a child. Josephine Miles (1911–1985) was born in Chicago. In addition to writing poetry, she taught for many years at the University of California at Berkeley. Her poem uses images of nature to show a young adult on a journey.

Responding to the Reading

1. What does Lewis mean when he compares his son to “. . . a satellite / Wrenched from its orbit, go drifting away”? Judging from this line, how does the speaker feel about parting with his son?

2. What might the speaker mean when he calls his experience an example of “nature’s give-and-take”?

3. In “Paths,” what do the lines “We shake the dew from the grasses. / All is new” tell you about what the speaker is experiencing? What might the speaker be seeking?

4. **Making Connections** In the final scene of *The Chosen*, Danny is walking away toward his apartment near Columbia to pursue his studies. With this in mind, explain why Danny’s father could be the speaker in “Walking Away” and Danny, the speaker in “Paths.”

Music Connection

Song lyrics often deal with accepting loss, striving for independence, and finding inner peace. Working with a partner, make a list of songs that deal with these issues. Consider contemporary music, anthems, folk songs, or songs from musicals. Discuss the different images people use in lyrics to express feelings and ideas that are in the novel and the two poems. Share your list with the rest of the class. Discuss why people are drawn to these subjects when they write or compose music.

The Dispersal of European Jewry Albert Einstein

40,000 Here Seek Way to Save Jews *New York Times*

Before You Read

Focus Question

What kinds of experiences tend to make people stronger and more vocal?

Background

Jewish physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955), one of the great thinkers of the twentieth century, is well known for his scientific essays. He also wrote and gave speeches on philosophical and political issues. In this 1939 piece—delivered prior to the outbreak of World War II in Europe—Einstein examines the plight of the European Jewish population and stresses the importance of solidarity. The *New York Times* article from 1944 describes the information Americans had on the actions of Hitler at this point in the war.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to Einstein, why are Jews being persecuted? What does he feel will happen to Europe if the persecution is allowed to continue?

2. From where do the Jewish people draw their strength and power, according to Einstein? Describe the test he believes they all must face in the near future.

3. What is the general feeling of President Roosevelt and the governor toward the situation in Europe? What resolution is adopted at the gathering?

4. **Making Connections** Thinking about Einstein’s speech, discuss why Mr. Malter might feel connected to Reb Saunders on a deeper level. Keeping in mind the newspaper article, explain why Mr. Malter would risk his health for his political causes.

Learning for Life

With a partner, make a list of some lessons that can be learned from ideas about war and persecution in the novel, the speech, and the newspaper article. Then make a list of current political and social problems. Can lessons learned from World War II help people to deal with some of these problems? Why or why not? With your partner, write a speech that connects a current event to events of the 1940s.

TEST: *The Chosen*

Recall and Interpret (40 points total; 5 points each)

Write the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. The main characters in *The Chosen* live a life focused on
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|--------------|-----------------|
| a. sports. | c. integration. |
| b. religion. | d. survival. |
- _____ 2. At the beginning of the story, Danny and Reuven approach each other with
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|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. suspicion, prejudice, and hatred. | c. cooperation and mutual respect. |
| b. fellowship and team spirit. | d. warmth and acceptance. |
- _____ 3. Danny and Reuven's relationship is changed by
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|---|--------------------------------|
| a. the interest they share in World War II. | c. living near each other. |
| b. the fun they have playing baseball together. | d. the injury to Reuven's eye. |
- _____ 4. One of the things Danny and Reuven share is
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|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. their interest in learning. | c. their home and family life. |
| b. the way they practice Judaism. | d. the way they dress. |
- _____ 5. One major conflict in the novel is between
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|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| a. Danny and Reuven. | c. Danny and his father. |
| b. Reuven and his father. | d. Reb Saunders and his wife. |
- _____ 6. In Book 3, Reb Saunders changes Danny and Reuven's relationship because he
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|--|------------------------------------|
| a. thinks Reuven can help Danny study. | c. hopes Danny can convert Reuven. |
| b. believes Mr. Malter's Zionist position is sinful. | d. doesn't like Reuven very much. |
- _____ 7. Danny faces a difficult choice because he wants to
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|--|----------------------|
| a. fight in Israel instead of finishing college. | c. become a rabbi. |
| b. marry a girl of his own choice. | d. study psychology. |
- _____ 8. During the course of the novel, both boys discover
- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| a. that faith is more important than anything else. | c. that their fathers are evil men. |
| b. the value of learning from each other. | d. that Judaism is not for them. |

Evaluate and Connect (60 points total; 30 points each)

Answer two of the following essay questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Why do you think *The Chosen* is considered a coming-of-age story? Discuss at least one lesson each boy learns during the course of the story. Explain Reuven and Danny's friendship.
2. Discuss the difficult choice Danny Saunders has to make between his religious and family obligations and his personal quest for knowledge. Do you think he makes the right choice in the end? Use evidence from the novel to support your opinion.
3. Explain the two basic religious positions in the novel. Link each to the political conflict that arises in Book 3. Then trace the impact of these religious and political disagreements on the relationships of the novel's main characters. At the novel's close, how—if at all—are these conflicts resolved?