

The Chosen Study Guide

Name _____

BOOK ONE

Chapter One

Hasidic - the members of a sect of Jewish mystics that originated in Poland in the eighteenth century samovars - metal urns used throughout Russia for boiling water for tea

Yiddish - a language spoken by many European Jews and their descendants

Michna service - afternoon services

Shabbat - the Sabbath, the day set apart in the fourth commandment of the Bible to be observed as a day of rest from all labor, originally the seventh day of the week, Saturday, the day on which God rested from the work of creation

Yeshiva - a school or college for Talmudic studies, combining religious and secular studies

Apikorism - Jews who are not Hasids; an extremely negative term

Shamashim - an official in synagogue

Jewish Orthodox - strictly observing the rites and traditions of Judaism as formulated in the Torah and Talmud

Talmud - the collection of writings constituting the Jewish civil and religious law. It consists of two parts

tzitzit (zitit) - the fringes or tassels worn by orthodox Jewish men

Torah - the first five books of the Old Testament

momzer - a curse; a term of abuse

1. Why do the Jewish parochial schools have competitive baseball leagues?
2. Briefly describe Mr. Galanter. What is his baseball philosophy?
3. What painful thing does Reuven do just before the start of a game?
4. Contrast the uniforms of the opposing team with the way Reuven's team is dressed.
5. What does the first confrontation between the two coaches signify?
6. Briefly describe Danny Saunders. Why is Reuven angry when Danny calls the team apikorism?
7. As the game continues, why does Reuven find himself more and more angry at the opposing team?
8. For what reasons does Mr. Galanter put Reuven in as the pitcher for the last inning of the game?
9. List two possible reasons Reuven decides to throw a fastball to Danny for the last strike.

10. Briefly describe Reuven's injuries. Why does Mr. Galanter go to call a cab after his team loses the game?

Chapter Two

kosher - food which is considered fit to eat by Jewish law

abba - father

tefillin - an assist and reminder used in Jewish prayer

1. Describe a few things which occur at the very beginning of Reuven's hospital stay.

2. Briefly describe Mr. Savo, Billy, and Reuven's father.

3. How does Reuven feel about Danny Saunders? What does his father think about his son's attitude toward Danny? State a theme for this story based on Mr. Malter's advice to Reuven that he should listen when someone wants to talk to him.

4. Why is Reuven worried about his eye? What insight does Reuven gain about life while worrying about his eye?

5. What does Reuven's father do for a living?

6. Could Reuven's thoughts about blindness also serve as a theme? If so, what?

Chapter Three

phylacteries - a leather box which holds passages from the Torah, worn during prayers

rabbi - the Jewish religious leader, similar to a priest or minister

blatt - a section of reading from the Talmad

1. What is happening in Europe that is exciting to the patients in the ward?

2. Why does Reuven need to ask the nurse for permission to pray during his phylactery?

3. Why does Reuven say to Danny, ". . .you can go to hell, and take your whole snooty bunch of Hasidism along with you!?" (pg. 63) In what way is Reuven being unfair to Danny and his team?

4. What rule from the Talmud does Reuven violate when he sends Danny home?

5. While talking to Danny in the hospital, why does Reuven have “the feeling that everything around [him] was out of focus”? (pg. 67)

6. How does Danny learn “two blatt” of Talmud each day?

7. Why is Danny surprised Reuven wants to be a Rabbi? What does Danny want to be?

8. In what way is Reuven partly responsible for his own injury?

9. Why does Reb Saunders not like to write? What does he mean when he says “he wishes everyone could talk in silence”?

10. What is ironic about Danny’s answer that his father is “quite a man”? (pg. 22)

Chapter Four

1. State a theme for this story based on the following passage from this chapter:
“I wish I was outside now,” I said. “I envy them being able to walk around like that. They don’t know how lucky they are.”
“No one knows he is fortunate until he becomes unfortunate,” my father said quietly. “That is the way the world is.”

2. State another theme for this story based on Mr. Malter’s reaction to Reuven’s story of Danny Saunders’ visit.

3. What two things does the Talmud say a person must do for himself? How does Mr. Malter define friendship? Why do you think he wants Reuven and Danny to be friends?

4. State why you agree or disagree with the following statement made by Mr. Savo when he is warning Reuven to be careful about making friends with Danny:

“You’re a good kid. So I’m telling you, watch out for those fanatics. They’re the worse cloppers around.” (pg. 76)

5. What, according to Danny’s father, is a Jew’s mission in life? Why is Danny confused by this idea?

6. Why is Reuven confused about Danny?

7. In what way is Danny’s life similar to Billy’s?

8. How does Danny feel when he first realizes Mr. Malter is the same man who has been suggesting books for him to read in the library? What happens to make Danny comfortable again?

BOOK TWO

Chapter Five

1. Briefly describe Manya.

2. What does the following passage from the novel tell the reader about how Reuven’s experience during the last five days have changed his life?

“I felt I had crossed into another world, that little pieces of my old self had been left behind on the black asphalt floor of the school yard alongside the shattered lens of my glasses. . . I lay very still on the lounge chair and thought a long time about Danny.” (pg. 96)

Chapter Six

shofar - a wind instrument made from a ram’s horn

tallit - a shawl for prayer

kabbalah - a book of Jewish mysticism

mitnaged - a sect which opposed the Hasids

1. Briefly describe the relationship between the Jewish people and the nobles of Poland. In what way did the Jews act

as a buffer between the nobles and the serfs? How did this position lead to the destruction of the great Jewish community in Poland?

2. What happened to the faith of the Jewish people after the Chmielnicki uprising?

3. Briefly summarize Israel's (Besht's) teachings, known as Hasidism.

4. Reuven's father tells him the story of the evolution of the Hasids. Who is the tzaddik of the Hasidic community? How does the Hasidic movement begin to degenerate? Which kind of Hasidic sect does Danny belong to?

5. Why is the story of Solomon Maimon sad? How is he similar to Danny?

6. The character of Reuven's father is frequently the author's voice, stating the themes of the book. He often finishes a statement clarifying a theme with the words, "That is the way the world is." Find a similar quotation at the end of the chapter. What theme is he summarizing for the reader?

Chapter Seven

shtibblach - the name for the house of worship in a Hasidic sect

shul - school

ark - an enclosure in a synagogue or temple for the scrolls of the Torah

caftan - a long garment like a jacket

kaddish - a prayer for someone who has died

challah - type of bread

amalek - heathen

b'kuit - simple interpretations of the Talmud

nu - "good," "well," "continue;" the word has many different connotations; similar to "so"

gematriya - a mystical method of interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures based upon the numerical value of the letters in the words.

Havdalah - a brief service at the end of Shabbat

1. Why is Danny's uncle, his father's older brother, not inherit the rabbinical position? How did Reb Saunders save his Hasidic community?

2. Why, according to Danny, did the devotees of Reb Saunders all follow him to America? What is Reuven's opinion of that?

3. What is the author saying about Danny by using this extended metaphor to compare him to a blind soldier?

“I began to hear, distinctly, the tapping sounds of Danny’s metal-capped shoes. . .and I remembered the old man I often saw walking along Lee Avenue, moving carefully through the busy street and tapping, tapping, his metal-capped cane, which served him for the eyes he had lost in a First World trench during a German gas attack.” (pg. 116)

4. What is “number one on [the Hasidic community’s] catechism? How does the community react when Rabbi Saunders enters the synagogue? What is symbolic about his appearance?

5. Reb Saunders shakes hands with Reuven twice in this chapter. How is the second time different from the first?

6. Briefly describe Danny’s little brother. How does he behave during the service?

7. Who is the Master of the Universe Reb Saunders refers to when he speaks? How can the Master of the Universe fulfill a man’s wishes?

8. List two parts of Reb Saunders’ service that Danny disagrees with?

9. What ritual does Danny endure each week?

10. List one way Reb Saunders approves and one he disapproves of Mr. Malter.

11. Who is Rav Gershenson?

12. In what way does David Malter defend Reb Saunders’ practice of publicly arguing the Talmud with Danny?

13. Find a passage in this chapter where the character of Mr. Malter, while discussing Danny’s training, restates a theme for this novel.

14. What is David Malter's opinion of Reb Saunders as a leader for his community?

Chapter Eight

goy - a non-Jew

1. Why is Danny bothered by the history he reads concerning Drov Baer, a man his father considers to be almost a saint?

2. State a theme for this story using the following passage from the novel.

"Your father said I should read a Jewish history. He said the first important step in anyone's education is to know your own people." (pg. 147)

3. Cite a passage from this chapter to support or refute the following statement: Not everything you read is true; it is important to understand the biases and limitations of the author.

4. How does Mr. Malter justify his decision to suggest books for Danny without Reb Saunders' knowledge?

5. List the two ways Rabbinical literature can be studied. Which way does Reuven's father prefer? In what way is Reuven's knowledge of the Talmud equal to Danny's?

6. One of the overall themes in this story is the theme of true friendship. What do you think of Reuven's decision to answer Reb Saunders' questions about Danny's reading? Is he being disloyal? What information about Danny does Reuven not tell Reb Saunders?

7. Find a clue in this chapter that might help the reader understand why Reb Saunders believes in silence.

8. In what way is Reuven a buffer between Reb Saunders and Danny? What lesson from Jewish history lets the reader know that Reuven is in a dangerous position when he becomes a way between Danny and his father?

Chapter Nine

1. Find the extended metaphor in this chapter about the spider and the fly. How does it relate to Billy, his blindness, and his unsuccessful operation? What does Reuven learn about life from Billy's situation?

Chapter Ten

kashruth - the laws applying to food preparation

1. Danny is having difficulties understanding Freud written in its original German. How does he solve his problems with the writings. In what ways might studying Freud contribute to Danny's reluctance to be his father's replacement?
2. How does Reuven try to add balance to the new world of knowledge Danny discovers in the library?

Chapter Eleven

1. What is wrong with Danny's eyes?
2. What major figure dies?
3. How do Danny's father and Reuven's father react to the news from Europe that six million Jewish people have been killed in the concentration camps? How does this tragedy help the reader understand their differing opinions on how God wants them to conduct their lives?
4. Why does Reuven go to live with Danny's family?

Chapter Twelve

1. In what way does Freud contradict the teaching of the Talmud?
2. What ironic element seems to be occurring in the book?
3. Define Zionism. Why is Reb Saunders against the idea of Palestine becoming the homeland for the Jewish people?
4. Why is Danny really concerned about his brother's health.

5. How does Danny feel about his father?

BOOK THREE

Chapter Thirteen

1. What two pieces of advice does Reuven offer Danny to help him deal with his frustration at college?

2. In what way is Mr. Malter's method of teaching Reuven the Talmud similar to Professor Appleman's method of teaching psychology?

3. What is the Irgun? Why does Reuven's father have mixed feelings about its activities?

4. What is Reuven's father saying when he tells his son,

"I learned a long time ago, Reuven, that a blink of an eye is in itself nothing. But the eye that blinks, that is something." (pg. 204)

5. One of the overall themes of this story is friendship. Find a statement in this chapter where Reuven's father tells his son that good friends can disagree and still remain friends.

6. Why does Danny decide to learn experimental psychology?

7. How does Danny feel about Zionism? Why does he not voice his opinion?

8. Why is Danny not allowed to be seen with Reuven anymore?

Chapter Fourteen

rebbe - plural of rabbi

mishna - written rabbinical law

inyan - a Talmudic passage

1. What is the only contact Reuven has with Danny at the beginning of their second year of college? In what way is this contact ironic?

2. Explain the Partition Plan of the United States. Why is Reuven glad he restrains the anger he feels toward the anti-Zionist Hasidic students after this plan is adopted by the United Nations?
3. List the two methods Reuven uses to prepare a passage of the Talmud for Rav Gershenson's class.
4. Why does Rav Gershenson ask Reuven never to use his father's method of studying the Talmud in his classroom?

Chapter Fifteen

1. After the establishment of the Jewish state, what happens to end the anti-Zionist activities inside the school?

Chapter Sixteen

1. How does Reuven feel about Reb Saunders when he meets him again after the ban on his friendship with Danny is lifted? What does Reb Saunders want from Reuven?

Chapter Seventeen

1. How does Danny's understanding of silence change since the last chapter?
2. Why is it important that Danny anticipate the questions Reb Saunders will ask him when he tells his father he wants to be a psychologist?
3. What does Mr. Malter say about "silence" as a method of raising children?
4. Why does Danny not tell his father about the plan to be a psychologist?
5. For what reason is Reuven's father angry with his son at the end of this chapter?

Chapter Eighteen

1. Discuss Reb Saunders reasons for raising Danny in silence. What is ironic about his methods? Are the methods cruel, or correct for a person like Danny?

2. What is the “tortured victory” referred to in the following passage:

“Reb Saunders sat back slowly in his chair. And from his lips came a soft, tremulous sigh. He was silent for a moment, his eyes wide, dark, brooding, gazing upon his son. He nodded his head once, as if in final acknowledgment of his tortured victory.”

3. Why is the following passage ironic:

Reb Saunders looked at me and smiled feebly, nodding his head. “My son, my Daniel, has also become a man. It is a great joy for a father to see his son suddenly become a man.”

Danny stirred faintly in his chair, then was still.

“What will you do after your graduation?” Reb Saunders asked quietly.

“I have another year to student for my smicha.”

“And then what?”

“I am going to the rabbinate.” (pg. 262)

4. Another important theme in this novel is the theme of the importance of the father-son relationship. Compare and contrast the two father-son relationships in this story. Do you believe both fathers have raised their sons to the best of their abilities? How much influence does Reuven’s father have over the kind of man Danny becomes and how much influence does Reb Saunders have over Reuven’s development?

5. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Danny and Reuven will remain life-long friends despite their differences.