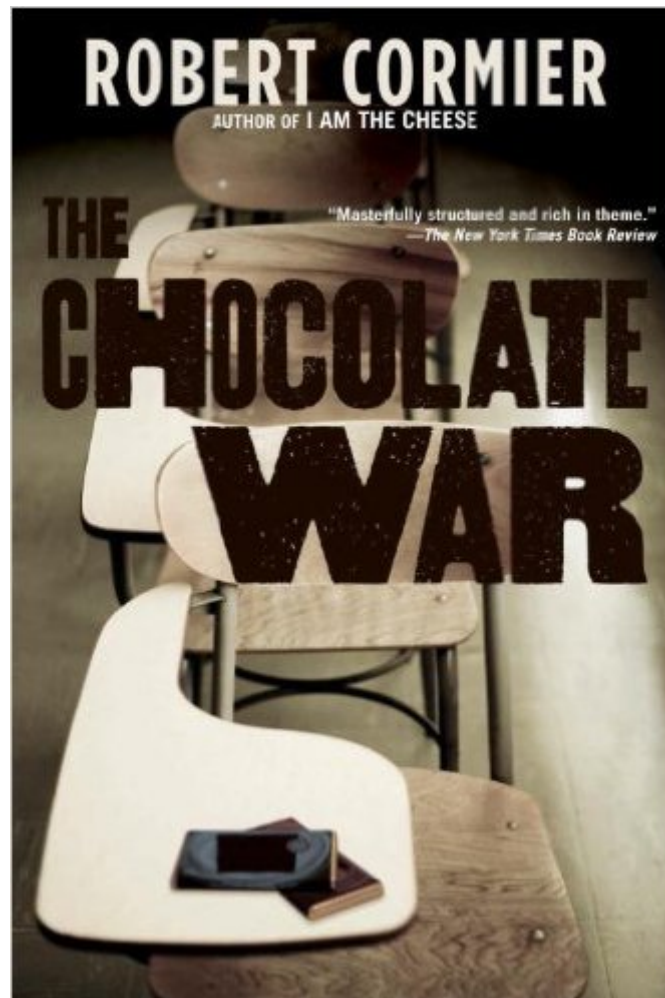


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# The Chocolate War



## Synopsis

One of the most controversial YA novels of all time, *The Chocolate War* is a modern masterpiece that speaks to fans of S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* and John Knowles's *A Separate Peace*. After suffering rejection from seven major publishers, *The Chocolate War* made its debut in 1974, and quickly became a bestselling and provocative classic for young adults. This chilling portrait of an all-boys prep school casts an unflinching eye on the pitfalls of conformity and corruption in our most elite cultural institutions. Masterfully structured and rich in theme; the action is well crafted, well timed, suspenseful. "The New York Times Book Review" "The characterizations of all the boys are superb." "School Library Journal, starred review" "Compellingly immediate. . . . Readers will respect the uncompromising ending." "Kirkus Reviews, starred review" An ALA Best Book for Young Adults A School Library Journal Best Book of the Year A Kirkus Reviews Editor's Choice A New York Times Outstanding Book of the Year

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 0820 (What's this?)

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Ember; 30 Anv Rep edition (September 14, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375829873

ISBN-13: 978-0375829871

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars See all reviews (513 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #6,384 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #2 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Peer Pressure #3 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Dysfunctional Relationships #6 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Physical & Emotional Abuse

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

It's difficult to review "The Chocolate War" because so much has already been said about it. The painful story of one boy's steadfast refusal to sell chocolates for his high school, and the consequences he faces for such a decision is as brilliant and difficult to read as ever. This isn't to

say that the book is difficult to read stylistically. Instead, it's a well written tour de force that slyly invites the reader to know more about the characters, even as the situations described grow worse and worse. Cormier is to be commended for creating one of the world's first young adult psychological thrillers. Though the end of the book does disintegrate into needless violence, most of this story concerns mental anguishes and locked horns as characters vie for superiority over their fellows without fisticuffs. There's some interest in figuring out who the book's protagonist is too. Our sympathies lie, of course, with poor Jerry Renault. Here's the single man poised to challenge the universe around him. Then there's Archie Costello. Leader of the school's secret society and an interesting portrait of someone both evil and amazingly confident he works his hardest to bring Renault down. Both boys (men?) fight. One for what he believes is right, and the other for his own selfish desires. In the end, it is difficult to accept that the man who has ended up on top is entirely less deserving. The book's downbeat ending, in which our hero declares that it is never wise to buck the system, has always brought the book under a certain amount of fire. Adults who read this book find themselves trying to shield it from their own kids. Which is, of course, patently ridiculous. Any kid who has ever attended activities with others their own age will instantly recognize the fear and intimidation their peers can inspire. The book's excellent understanding of how large groups of people will stay silent when one of them is being persecuted, because none of them want to be singled out, is drilled home in the story's final climactic boxing match. Better still, Cormier truly explores the nature of violence in every human being. Archie understands it, and sets up a situation where the kids of the school participate in something akin to the gladiator fights of ancient Rome. The final atrocity Archie manages to perpetuate against Jerry is that he makes the kid himself want to taste blood. To give in to the violence around him. It's heartbreaking and amazingly well written. The fact that there's a sequel to "The Chocolate War" depresses me on some level. This is one book I really felt stood on its own. We can imagine the repercussions that occur later well enough without having to rely on a continuation of some sort. Either the sequel will simply establish the first book's moral (disturbing the status quo may well kill you) or it will trump everything the first book ever proposed (now the good guys win and the bad guys suffer). In any case, "The Chocolate War" is well worth reading. Painful reading, yes. Sometimes difficult and sometimes unsentimental. I myself am going to go curl up with "Charlotte's Web" to get the taste of the book out of my mouth. But every kid in the world should read it. It is perhaps the best young adult novel ever written.

The Chocolate War, by Robert Cormier, brings you into the life of a young teenager named Jerry Renault. This book not only shows a reader the world of teenage boys; it puts the reader in the

shoes of the three main characters. Cormier brings them to life by realistically describing the character's feelings. The unique writing style of Cormier allows readers to truly understand the feelings of each and every character. "I'm getting tired of selling this crap. The kid's probably got the right idea." Trinity, the school where *The Chocolate War* takes place, is running its annual ritual of selling chocolates to raise money. Selling the chocolates is supposedly voluntary, but Brother Leon, the assistant head of the school has some other things up his sleeves. When Jerry Renault, a meek freshman of Trinity, and the new kid in school, decides not to sell the chocolates, Brother Leon becomes desperate because he can't get Jerry to sell chocolates. Jerry's defiance is trickling down to other students as well, and when things get out of hand, Leon asks the Vigils, the school gang, for help. For an unknown reason, the number of chocolate boxes and the price of each box are doubled this year. Leon knows that the students will not be particularly excited to sell these chocolates, so he asks the Vigils to step in and urge students to sell more and more chocolates. There are certain 'assignments' that the Vigils give to the students of the school, and if these assignments are not carried out, there are severe consequences. When Jerry decides not to sell the chocolates, the Vigils start assigning things, and everything begins to go wrong. I thoroughly enjoyed this book when I read it and I particularly enjoyed the writing style of Cormier. The way he organized the book, and the way he used descriptive words in every sentence, allowed me to think and feel everything the characters did.

I feel I need to defend this novel, especially after the plethora of negative reviews. Often in children's/YA novels good v. evil is played out in fantasy terms, (witches, demons, etc.) but this novel disturbs the universe and places real people in real situations. A freshman at a private high school decides to "disturb the universe", and soon realizes that he may have overstepped his bounds. The shifting narrative is very distinct and unique, yet sometimes confusing. This is a great novel for classroom discussion with some strong themes: to include, courage & cowardice, peer pressure, victimization, individualism, good v. evil and god and religion. The ending is unconventional and truly climatic, can you remember when you first realized that life is not fair, and sometimes doesn't come close to being fair? This book opened up the new genre of YA literature, and Cormier certainly "disturbed the universe" with its publication. This book is constantly under the eye of parent groups who would like to see it "banned" or placed on a restricted list (recently under pressure from a parent's group here in VA)...because that is the case, it should be required reading for all teenagers. If you are younger, you may want to read Spinelli's *WRINGER*: a story so foul, so horrifying with peer pressure that it should be shelved next to Cormier's *The Chocolate War*. As a

children's librarian, I will continue to offer Cormier's books because he refuses to compromise the truth as he sees it. For an indepth look at Cormier's writing try: PRESENTING ROBERT CORMIER  
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