

First Impressions of Characters



Francis

Francis after the war / at the start of the novel (aged eighteen)

As Francis is the **narrator** of the story, we are introduced to him at the very start; the story is told from his perspective throughout. He is romantic in his outlook on the world by nature and his story uses description; yet his injuries are presented in a 'matter-of-fact' manner. Through his descriptions of his face, we see the devastating effects of war with dramatic impact. Francis's description is understated, and this makes it worse, as he describes his injuries with understanding and acceptance.



Passage 1

1. Read this passage about Francis's appearance at the start of the novel.
2. Write down the descriptions of Francis's face (Chapter 1, p. 1). What is particularly shocking about these descriptions? Does this make him different from typical narrators in novels?

I have eyes because I can see and ear-drums because I can hear but no ears to speak of, just bits of dangling flesh [...] If anything bothers me it's my nose. Or rather, the absence of my nose. My nostrils are like two small caves and they sometimes get blocked and I have to breathe through my mouth. This dries up my throat and I find it hard to swallow. I also become hoarse and cough a lot. My teeth are gone but my jaw is intact and my gums are firm so it's possible for me to wear dentures. In the past few weeks, my gums began to shrink, however, and the dentures have become loose and they click when I talk and slip around inside my mouth.

I have no eyebrows, but eyebrows are minor, really. I do have cheeks. Sort of. I mean, the skin that forms my cheeks was grafted from my thighs and has taken a long time to heal. My thighs sting when my pants rub against them. Dr Abrams says that my skin will heal in time and my cheeks will some day be as smooth as a baby's arse. That's the way he pronounced it: arse.

(Chapter 1, p. 1)

3. Write down the simile Francis uses to describe his nose. What is the effect of the simile?
4. What difficulties does Francis have because of his appearance?
5. What encouragement does Dr Abrams use?

Passage 2

1. Write down details about Francis based on his second description (Chapter 1 p. 2). How does he try and make the description sound more romantic and descriptive?

I wear a scarf that covers the lower part of my face. The scarf is white and silk like the aviators wore in their airplanes back during the First World War, over the battlefields and trenches of Europe. I like to think that it flows behind me in the wind when I walk but I guess it doesn't.

There's a red sox cap on my head and I tilt the cap forwards so that the visor keeps the upper part of my face in shadow. I walk with my head down as if I have lost money on the sidewalk and am looking for it.

I keep the bandage on the space where my nose used to be. The bandage reaches the back of my head and is kept in place with a safety pin.

2. Write down the description Francis uses about how he wears his scarf. What are your first impressions of Francis based on the language he uses?
3. How does Francis use his cap, and why?
4. What else does he do to hide his face?

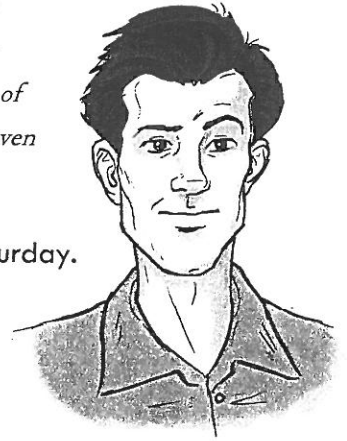


Young Francis

Francis before the war / as a child growing up in Frenchtown (Chapter 5, pp. 27–28):

The Wreck Centre became my headquarters in the seventh and eighth grades, a place away from the sidewalks and empty lots of Frenchtown. I had never been a hero in such places, too short and uncoordinated for baseball and too timid to join the gangs that hung around the street corners.

I had no best friend, although Joey LeBlanc, who lived on the first floor of my three-decker, often went with me to the Plymouth on Saturday afternoons. He kept up a steady commentary during the movie, like a radio announcer describing the action. He didn't like to read and I loved roaming the stacks of the Monument Public Library, where I discovered Ernest Hemingway and Thomas Wolfe and Jack London and rushed home with an armful of books. Home was now the tenement where I lived with my Uncle Louis, my father's brother, a silent giant of a man who was a yardman at the Monument Comb shop. He took me in after my dad died, cooked our meals and cleaned the apartment. He drank three bottles of beer every night while listening to the radio, volume turned low, until his bedtime at eleven o'clock. He seldom spoke but I never doubted his affection.



1. Read the passage above and consider what Francis might do on a typical Saturday. Write two paragraphs as if you are Francis at the end of your Saturday.
2. Remember to include life in the tenement with Uncle Louis, a visit to the public library and the books which you have chosen, how you feel when you are out around Frenchtown and/or a possible visit to watch a film with Joey LeBlanc in the afternoon.



Nicole

Nicole is first introduced by Francis on in Chapter 2, p. 8. The first time we see her is on her first day at Francis's school. He describes her in a typically descriptive and romantic way:

...followed by the most beautiful girl I had ever seen.

'This is Nicole Renard. She is a new student here, all the way from Albany, New York.'

Nicole Renard was small and slender, with shining black hair that fell to her shoulders. The pale purity of her face reminded me of the statue of St Therese in the niche next to Father Balthazar's confessional in St Jude's Church. As she looked modestly down at the floor, our eyes met and a flash of recognition passed between us, as if we had known each other before. Something else flashed in her eyes, too, a hint of mischief as if she were telling me we were going to have good times together. Then, the flash was gone and she was St Therese once more, and I knelt there like a knight at her feet, her sword having touched my shoulder. I silently pledged her my love and loyalty forever.'

1. Look at the words Francis uses to describe Nicole:
small slender shining pale purity
2. What kind of pictures come to your mind when you read these words?
3. What does he compare Nicole to? What effect does this comparison have?
4. What does he think passes between them? Do you believe him?
5. Francis uses a simile, comparing himself to a knight at her feet. What does this simile show you about Francis? What images does it conjure to mind?
6. Which lines show you that Francis has very strong feelings for Nicole straightaway?



Analysis of Major Characters

Although first impressions are significant we learn more about the characters as the story progresses. There are **three** important characters, but the minor characters are also functional as they help to move the plot along. It's important to understand who the major characters and minor characters are. The major ones are important as they will be used by Cormier to explore his different themes and ideas.



It is important to read the character information (main and minor), perhaps highlighting important points in class. You could use them as the basis for a note-making activity or use them as a revision guide before the exam.

Francis Cassavant

Young Francis

Francis is a gentle boy who loves to read and watch films. He suffered the loss of both parents at a young age. He is romantic yet of a dutiful nature and is influenced by his religious upbringing. His character only develops as the narrative unfolds, revealing a complex character who has changed as a result of the course of events.



His mother died when he was six, giving birth to a boy who survived only for a few hours, and his father died of a heart attack when Francis was 13 years old. He does not present the deaths as tragedies, and this subtle underplaying runs throughout the narrative, especially when dramatic events occur. Francis lived with his Uncle Louis, who looked after him after his parents died. He remembers Louis, who fed and looked after him, fondly.



Francis is a solitary character. He hangs around with Joey LeBlanc and they go to see films together, but they have little in common. He is timid and his ambition is to read all the books in the local library. He is good at writing and won an award at school for composition. However, he is reserved and can't pluck up the courage to speak to Nicole, whom he adores. It's only at the Wreck Centre that he becomes closer to her, and this is through his developing confidence encouraged by Larry LaSalle.

Larry also encourages him with his developing talent at table tennis; this leads to his victory over Larry in a tournament, which helps boost his confidence.

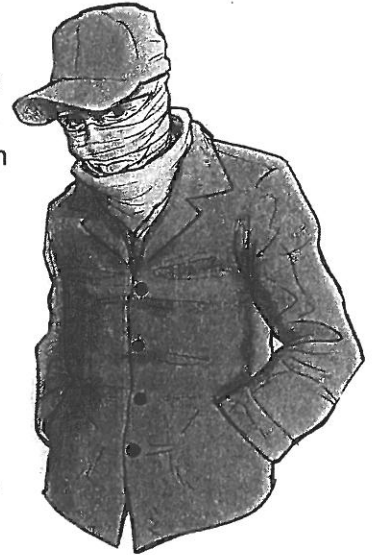
Francis is also a romantic figure; he loves art, books and films. He has romantic feelings for Nicole. He also creates a romantic image of the scarf he wears. His ideas of London are based on the books he reads: stories about Jack the Ripper and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes.

He is also strongly influenced by his Catholic religion and upbringing. This may have contributed to his strong sense of duty. He describes the strictness of the nuns and how he obeys the rules of the Church.



Francis after the war

Francis returns to Frenchtown an 18 year old veteran of World War Two. During the war he fell on a grenade and became horribly disfigured. His face is badly burned and there is little left of his features. He wears an army jacket, a white scarf to cover his face and a baseball cap which he pulls down to maintain his cover. He also carries a duffel bag which contains a gun.



Francis is on a 'mission.' He wants to kill his childhood hero, Larry, and is committed to doing so. As the story continues we discover that Larry raped Nicole, a girl whom Francis loves. Although Francis knew about it as it was taking place, he did not stand up to him. Ever since, he has carried the burden of guilt and responsibility for what happened to Nicole. Initially he contemplated suicide, but instead decided to sign up for the army, hoping that he would be killed in action. However, he survived and is determined to gain revenge on Larry, then kill himself.

He continues to suffer with a poor self-image. We know that in his childhood he was shy and a bit of a loner. His shyness caused his inability to speak to Nicole for many years.

He enjoys a brief, happy period when he attends the Wreck Centre. Larry works hard to instil a sense of self-worth into Francis. This is so successful that he finally develops the courage to ask Nicole out. It is ironic that Larry destroys the happiness which he helped Francis to achieve.

Francis accepts responsibility for what happens to Nicole, without question. He suffers from feelings of guilt and depression. He finds it hard to accept that there can be any good left in him, and is constantly self-deprecating.

At the end Nicole seems to be damaged by the experience, but she forgives Francis for his part in what happened and apologises to him for turning on him. She has attempted to move on, and away from Frenchtown. However at the end of the novel it's ambiguous whether or not Francis will move on. Nicole encourages him to write about his experiences, and he considers this and the prospect of recovery in the future. However, Francis is alone.

Francis has strong moral principles, which he tries to live by. His motive for killing Larry is to try and make right the wrong which was committed before the war. He does not want personal glory for this – he does not even tell Nicole when he visits her. Perhaps his mission was for forgiveness for his part in the rape of Nicole, which is why he does not kill Larry.

Francis and Nicole

Francis is besotted with Nicole from the start. She is the object of his affections. He describes her in an idealistic way, physically. His feelings are contradictory; he longs for her to notice him yet is scared that if she does he will make a fool of himself. Again, his lack of self-belief leads to his low confidence. When she does finally speak to him, he later agonises over it.

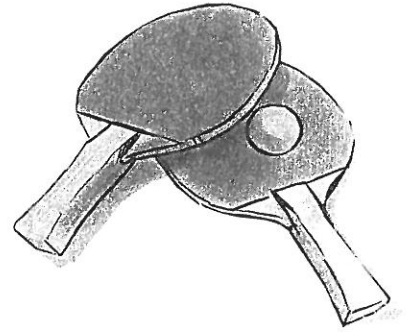
They see each other at the Wreck Centre. There, Nicole dances, which gives Francis the opportunity to study her. When she supports him at the table tennis tournament he is ecstatic. However his feelings of encouragement are dampened by his jealousy of the relationship between Larry and Nicole.

When Larry leaves for the war they start dating. They have dates at the movies. Francis is relaxed with Nicole and they talk about books and movies. This all changes when Larry returns from the war. Larry rapes Nicole. Francis feels guilty as he left Nicole alone with Larry, despite her pleading with him to stay. It is his guilt about his part in this event which leads to him signing up for war.

When he finally tracks Nicole down, she apologises to him about the way she treated him, and tells him she forgives him. She also encourages him to write about his experiences.

Francis and Larry

We learn more about Francis's feelings towards Larry as the narrative develops. Larry is the children's hero at the Wreck Centre, and Francis is part of the group that admires him. Both he and Nicole are given special attention – Francis and his table tennis, Nicole and her dancing. They look up to Larry and are influenced by him. Larry 'opens doors' to Francis, encouraging him to overcome his lack of self-belief. He helps Francis to develop his talent at table tennis, and with this boost, Francis's confidence develops. This is evident in the table tennis tournament, which Larry lets Francis win.



Tension is created through the relationship between Francis, Larry and Nicole. Francis looks up to Larry as a mentor. He admires him, like all of the others. However, he's also aware of Larry's closeness to Nicole and jealousy grows within him. The changing language which Francis uses to describe Larry reflects his different attitudes towards him before and after the war. He describes him with admiration at the Wreck Centre, but changes to words of hatred as the story progresses.

When Larry returns from the war, he is a hero – he attracts the residents of Frenchtown with the same movie-star smile, but he seems hardened by his experiences. Francis is soon caught up with Larry again and participates in the Homecoming celebrations. When Larry later asks him to leave Nicole with him, Francis does so. He doesn't want to, but he also doesn't want to challenge Larry. He even thinks that Larry might have some news for Nicole which he wants to share in private.

Later, Francis feels guilty about following what Larry tells him to do. When he hangs around outside it is not because he thinks that Nicole might be at risk, but because he is jealous as Larry dances with Nicole. It doesn't cross his mind that Nicole might be in danger. It is only when the song finishes that he realises what is happening. He sees Nicole's face as she leaves, and remembers the look in her eyes – anger at his betrayal. This is the turning point for Francis: when he enlists.

Larry LaSalle

Francis introduces Larry as being somebody he plans to kill. At the start of the book we know him as the person whom Francis plans to murder. Larry is described through Francis's eyes and we don't get a description of his appearance and character until further on. Tension is created – we do not immediately know the reason why Francis plans to kill Larry, and we are shocked that he plans to do so, despite his dutiful, sensitive nature and his faith. Francis is aware that what he plans to do is a sin.



After our speculation about what kind of person Larry must be, it comes as a surprise when Francis describes the day of the reopening of the Wreck Centre. Larry speaks to the children. He resembles a movie star: tall, slim, blond hair and a dazzling smile. He is presented in an appealing way. He has charisma. This is shown straightaway when the crowd applaud after he has spoken. However Cormier's language alerts us to something a little disturbing about him straightaway – to be a movie star is to have an image that is not real, and this links with the theme of appearance and reality.

On the surface level lies one of Larry's strengths: his physique. He is good at sports and leads the children in this area, as well as being an effective teacher. In this role he is also successful as he encourages the children, and brings out the best in them. A talent is that he can bring out strengths from all the different

children in the community. He believes in the potential of them all. Larry has gifts as both a teacher and a leader; because he believes in the children he encourages, they develop self-belief. He is full of energy and is always active at the Wreck Centre. The children grow to admire and respect him as a role model.

Larry's past

Larry is an enigmatic character, who appears to have two sides. On the one hand he is the respectable and charismatic youth worker, sensitive and dedicated. He comes from a show business background, although the mystery surrounding his arrival in Frenchtown is the first hint of the darker side of his character. We learn that he was born in Frenchtown and took dance lessons there, before winning a talent contest at a young age. The rest of his life is a mystery. Rumours circulate about his past as a night club performer in New York and Chicago. Larry does not talk about his past. The mystery is tainted with a dark edge when other rumours spread that he had been in some sort of trouble in New York. These rumours do not stop him from being popular within the community, however. He pleases the crowds, children and older members alike. The mystery actually helps his glamorous image.

Larry's complexity

He is popular with children for the work he does in the Wreck Centre. Although he is a little larger than life, Larry LaSalle's public persona is hugely likeable. He cares about all the children and is careful to include them all in the life of the centre. He works to provide for them and to make them happy.

However, the other side of Larry is much darker. We discover that he is an abuser, who uses his position of power to take advantage of young girls. Nicole is not the only one he has harmed. When Francis finds him, he describes his victims as 'sweet young things,' indicating that there have been other girls. He is also clever enough to know how to maintain his reputation and use it to keep the young people in his charge at his mercy.

What, then, should we make of him at the end? He asks if his sin cancels out all the other good things he has done, and this question is crucial to our understanding of him. Whatever you think, Cormier has created a character who **challenges our moral assumptions** about what is right and what is wrong. We soon see that there are grey areas in morality, and that every individual must take responsibility for their own actions and behaviour, and consider how they will affect those around them.

Larry and Francis

Larry takes a special interest in Francis and is aware of his sensitive nature. He approaches Francis with care. He knows that Francis lacks self-belief and works on developing his confidence, firstly by encouraging him with table tennis. The support Larry gives him encourages Francis to become a skilled player and worthy of winning the table tennis tournament. Larry gives up his time to provide Francis with the extra lessons so that he too becomes an expert at the sport.

Tension mounts during the tournament when Larry and Francis go up against each other. We know that Larry lets Francis win, however we don't know his definite motive for doing so. Is it to boost Francis's confidence? Or is it simply to protect Francis from the humiliation of losing the match? In this sense, Larry's motives are **ambiguous**, just like his character overall. Cormier's opening descriptions of Larry create slightly uncertain, uneasy feelings which the reader feels now, based on the uncertainty of his motives.

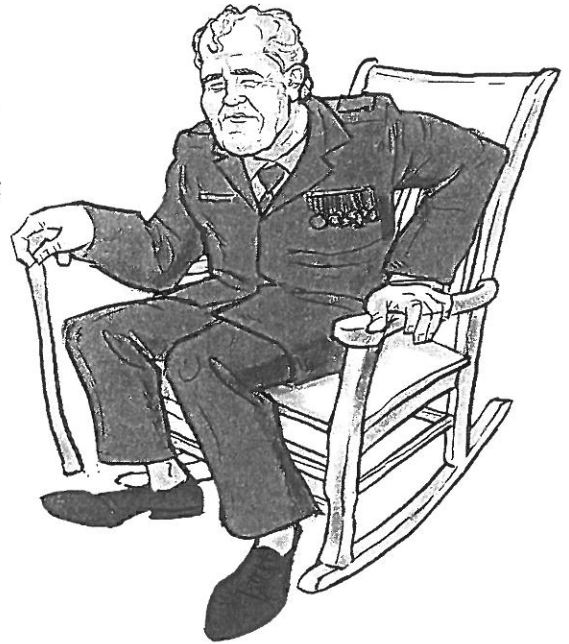
His relationship with Francis before Nicole's rape is close. He looks after him and helps him to develop more confidence. As Francis is an orphan, Larry can be seen as being like a father figure whom Francis can turn to for emotional support.

War hero

Despite maintaining the image of a hero, Larry returns from the war a different man, who has been affected by his experiences. He is no longer the saviour of the Wreck Centre, but a heroic soldier, taking his first leave. He was one of the first men to enlist and modestly says that he is doing the same as millions of other men.

Larry is shown in the Movietone news looking gaunt and unshaven, with eyes deep in their sockets. He is presented as a hero; he has saved the lives of a platoon of men. When he returns Cormier uses language which shows that he is changed; his appearance suggests that he is threatening, his body hard. But he is the same, and still a hero. This is apparent when he provides a party for the children at the Wreck Centre.

Before Larry's return as a war hero, he was known as a teacher, performer and dancer. He's also athletic. When Francis finds him, he moves slowly and uses a crutch. These physical changes reveal that Larry's physical strength and appeal has now gone.



Larry and Nicole

Nicole catches Larry's attention and he prepares for the Wreck Centre production by developing her ability as a dancer. She becomes the star of the show. However, there is a growing sense of uneasiness about their relationship, which has sexual undertones, revealed when they dance together intimately.

Ultimately it is only Francis and Nicole who come to know Larry's dark side, in the novel. It is not clear how far the rape was premeditated but Cormier's language suggests that it could have been when he first sees her in the crowd. From Francis's naive perspective, we discover that Larry's 'affection' which he feels towards her is apparent in his face. Francis is unaware of Larry's intentions, due to his innocent nature.

Larry insists on a last dance with Nicole, manipulating Francis into leaving them alone together. Ultimately the reader discovers that there is a dark secret behind the rumours and that Larry does have something to hide. This could be the reason why he left New York. He is a flawed character due to his lust for young girls.

Larry's sin

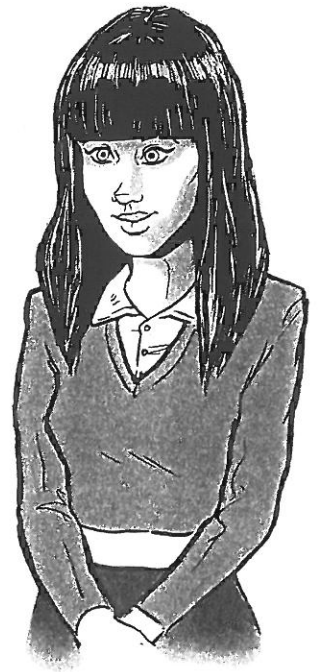
Despite the nature of his sin, Larry does not feel the need to show any remorse. He accepts it. We know this when Francis confronts him about his actions. Larry does not regret what he has done to Nicole.

However, Larry's life as it was is now over. The war has damaged his legs so much that he will never be able to dance again. He is also damaged by the war on a general physical and psychological level. Before he kills himself, he does try to make Francis feel better – a gift which he uses one last time. He tells Francis that he would have fallen on top of the grenade at war anyway, because it is in his nature to do so.

Nicole Renard

Young Nicole

Like Larry, Nicole is presented through Francis's eyes, therefore the descriptions he uses show his love for her. The first description shows her to be a picture of innocence. She wears a white dress which suggests purity; she has a pale face and he links her with the statue of St. Therese, suggesting saintliness. However Francis also acknowledges her to be human as he describes her as having mischief in her eyes as she laughs with Marie LaCroix. She also seems to tease Francis when she first acknowledges him – she warns him not to fall off the banister and then greets him as she leaves the Wreck Centre with a teasing tone in her voice. Like Francis, she seems to be a solitary character who is fairly reserved. When she starts dance classes at the centre, she goes straight there and then leaves when they are over.



Francis also reveals that she's a good dancer and becomes Larry's dance partner. A dance scene suggests sexual tension between them – they dance closely, lips almost touching. He makes her a star at the Wreck Centre and they seem quite close.

Francis comes to her attention when she sees him playing table tennis. She compares table tennis with dancing, admiring his movements. When he wins the tournament she names him her champion. Tension mounts as she watches Francis and Larry contend – they are like two suitors vying for her.

When Nicole and Francis date, we discover that, like him, she likes books and films. She has hopes for the future and also encourages Francis to write. However when the war begins and Larry leaves, her dreams to be a dancer seem to be forgotten. Instead she reveals that she would like to help in the war, perhaps by becoming a nurse. She spends time with the nuns at the convent, then becomes a volunteer with the Monument Red Cross. Her good nature is shown through her work. She eventually lives at the convent of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit, where Francis discovers her towards the end of the story.

As Nicole grows older, her good looks and talent as a dancer mark her out as attractive. Francis comments on her appearance and is also aware of how closely Larry LaSalle holds her when they dance. She is becoming more of a sexual being and her relationship with Francis becomes slightly more intimate. Nicole, too, is probably aware of the attraction men feel towards her, as she is desperate not to be left on her own with Larry LaSalle. However, her reliance on Francis to protect her is perhaps her downfall. When she is attacked by Larry she is violated and nothing can restore her innocent state.

Nicole and Larry

Nicole seems to be wary of Larry when he comes home for his first leave from the war. She asks Francis to stay close to her, which suggests that she feels vulnerable. When Larry manipulates Francis into leaving them alone together for a last dance, Nicole still seems unsettled. She asks him not to go, but Larry's hold over Francis seems to be stronger than Nicole's.

Betrayal

Nicole is betrayed by both Larry and Francis. In this sense she is presented as an innocent victim of other people's actions. She is not only abused by Larry, but Francis did nothing. Afterwards she feels that Francis has betrayed her. She is filled with pain and anger. She wants nothing to do with Francis. This event robs Nicole of her childhood as the pain stays with her for a long time. Before this she was open and friendly, and she made the most effort to establish a relationship with Francis. It was some years after she met

Francis that she finally began to date him, and their relationship is based mainly on friendly conversation. Her innocence at this time is emphasised by her love of butterscotch bits.



After the rape, she withdraws from society, almost completely isolating herself. She does not tell anybody about what happened but tells her parents that she wants to leave Frenchtown. It is only in her new environment and after a long period of time (three years) that Nicole is prepared to think about what happened in Frenchtown. She starts to reply to Marie LaCroix's letters. She also starts to discover herself.

Nicole after the war

When Francis visits Nicole years later, he is hoping that things can be the same between them once again. Nicole, however, is mature enough to realise that the damage cannot be reversed. While Francis thinks revenge will put things right and constantly dwells on the past, Nicole finds the strength to look forward to the rest of her life. Over time, she has changed and she has forgiven Francis for his part in what happened. His visit gives her the opportunity to tell him that she is sorry for blaming him for not helping her. Her forgiveness of Francis is part of her healing process. She suggests that he should do something positive to help himself and he considers her idea about writing at the end of the novel.

Comparison/contrast of Francis and Larry

Cormier presents **similarities** and **differences** between Francis and Larry, particularly in relation to the theme of heroes.

Similarities

Larry LaSalle has returned to Frenchtown, he walks slowly as if his legs hurt...

(Chapter 13, p. 71)

Both Larry and Francis return to Frenchtown as war heroes. They have each gained a Silver Star because they have saved their platoons. They are also similar because they are both affected by their wartime experiences on a physical and psychological level. We know that Francis has suffered severe facial injuries and plans to kill himself. We also know that Larry reveals to Francis that his legs were damaged in the war and he too considers suicide regularly. They both keep a gun close to them. They have both lost their lifestyles as they were prior to the war. The war has ultimately changed their lives.

Differences

I had never been a hero in such places, too short and uncoordinated for baseball and too timid to join the gangs that hung around the street corners.

(Chapter 5, p. 28)

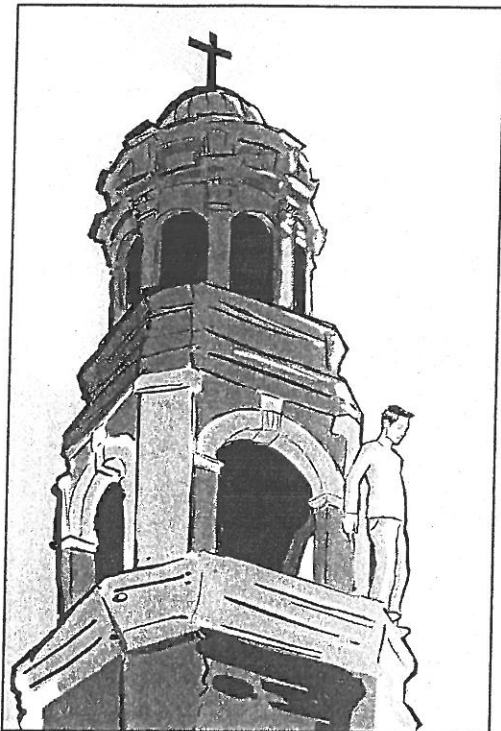
The contrast between Francis and Larry is evident when we learn more about Francis's personality. He is a reserved boy who looks up to Larry who is confident in the public eye. Francis trusts him. When Larry goes to war, he is a respected figure who is one of the first to enlist in Frenchtown. He goes because he is angry, unlike Francis, whose motive is suicide.



The contrast between the two at war can also be considered. Whereas Larry makes headlines and even appears on the Silver Screen at the Plymouth, Francis returns to Frenchtown in disguise and wishing to remain anonymous. Cormier uses a strong visual contrast to show the differences: Francis's face wrapped in bandages is a strikingly different image from Larry's image on the Silver Screen for the public to see: 'Captured an enemy machine gun nest. It was on the radio...' (Chapter 9, p. 53).



Larry accepts himself as a flawed hero, but Francis does not see either of them as being heroes due to the rape of Nicole. 'I don't know what a hero is anymore, Nicole. I think of Larry LaSalle and his Silver Star. And my own Silver Star, an act of cowardice' (Chapter 16, p. 88). Francis reveals his complicated thoughts about what a hero is. There seems to be a divide between the public labelling them Silver Star heroes, and the reality behind it.



Francis planning to jump from the steeple

Their differences in thoughts and behaviour can also be seen after the rape. When Larry LaSalle comes out, Francis hides away from him. He is whistling a tune and shows no sign of remorse for what he has done. In contrast, Francis has to face the consequences of what he has done. He goes to the top of St Jude's steeple, planning to jump off. In contrast to Larry, Francis takes on great feelings of guilt and responsibility for his lack of action in defending Nicole.

Similarities between Francis and Nicole

Francis and Nicole can be compared because their lives change as a result of the same event; they become isolated by it. Also their lives are strongly influenced by the Catholic faith. The younger Nicole spent time with the nuns at the convent, then became a volunteer with the Monument Red Cross.

Minor Characters

We know that minor characters tend to be functional. There are many characters in *Heroes* with only a small part in the action. Together they emphasise the community spirit that characterises Frenchtown. This is often a positive support network, but sometimes it creates a situation where people feel outside the group and are unable to challenge the accepted 'norms' and beliefs.

Marie LaCroix

Marie is one of Francis and Nicole's peers; she is a friendly girl, who enjoys gossiping and good times. She has good intentions and is well liked in the community. Although it's typical that boys and girls of twelve do not communicate, Francis and Marie are neighbours, and become friends. Francis is comfortable enough to admit his feelings for Nicole to Marie. We don't know if Marie told Nicole, and if Nicole spoke to Francis as a result of finding out about his feelings. She contrasts with Nicole, who is more reserved. She tells jokes and does imitations of Sister Mathilde burping and farting. She eventually decides to be a nun, in spite of her outgoing nature.



Joey LeBlanc

Joey is the closest Francis has to a best friend and bits of information are shared about him from Francis. He is an outspoken and slightly cheeky boy; he enjoys action and attention. He sometimes annoys Francis with his 'mucking around' but in general it's clear that Francis likes him. He is the friend who calls to Nicole, showing off. Francis tells him that he's got a big mouth. We also know that he was punished by the nuns for talking out of turn.

He goes to see films with Francis but talks all the way through. Joey's jokes are sometimes very perceptive, especially when he suggests that Larry LaSalle may have a murky past. In this sense, his comments are somewhat true as he indicates that Larry may not be what he seems. He also says that he can feel the old doom hanging over the Wreck Centre. He likes to circulate the rumours about Larry, repeating them with a knowing look. Joey is eventually killed in action and Francis describes him as a real hero.

Mrs Belander

She is Francis's landlady and an experienced businesswoman. A nonsense lady, she is nevertheless kind to Francis when she realises he is a war veteran. When he first arrives, she is quick to pick up on the fact that he knows her name, and she also wants a month's rent in advance. Although he remembers her from his childhood when she was generous, she doesn't recognise him, and her coldness towards him shows the contrast between the way members of the community are treated in comparison to outsiders. However, she is also suspicious of him because of the way he looks; it is only when he reveals that he is a war veteran that her suspicion changes to pity.



On a functional level, Mrs. Belander becomes an important part of the plot in Chapter 13: Francis learns about Larry's return to Frenchtown after eavesdropping on her conversation with a neighbour.



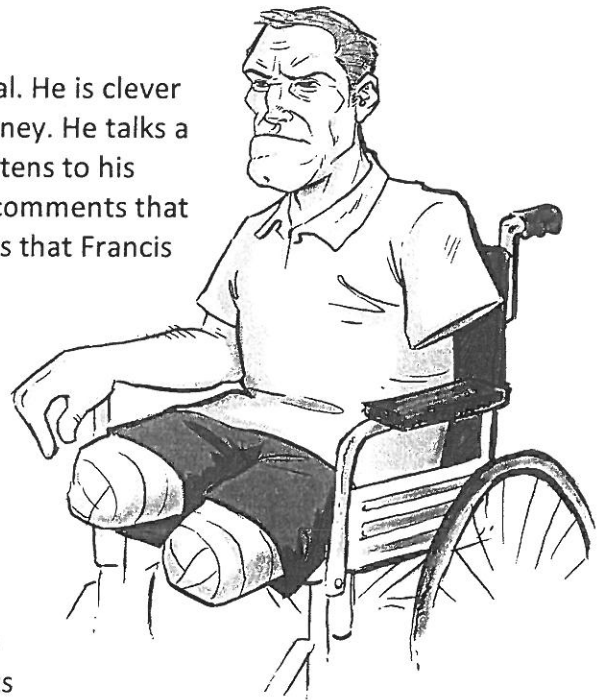
Dr Abrams

Dr Abrams is the doctor who treated Francis's injuries. He encourages Francis, telling him that his injuries will heal with time. He has a sense of humour and tries to make Francis feel positive about his treatments in the future. He tells Francis to contact him after the war is over, and he will arrange to do cosmetic surgery on his face. However, Francis destroys Dr Abrams' address and phone number, which suggests that he is not prepared to consider it. However by the end of the novel Francis brings it up again as a possibility. He could try and find Dr Abrams.

Enrico

Enrico is a fellow war veteran whom Francis met in hospital. He is clever and knowledgeable about worldly things, like love and money. He talks a lot, and has something to say about every topic. Francis listens to his advice, an example of which is to forget about Nicole. He comments that men are attractive to women as war heroes, but then jokes that Francis will need a blind girl to love him. These jokes are bitter.

Both of his legs and his left arm were blown off in battle, but his determination is shown as he learns to shuffle cards one-handed. He occasionally displays a similarly grim humour to Dr Abrams, but is depressed. He plans to kill himself. Enrico's plight illustrates the emotional trauma inflicted on young soldiers who suffered such horrific injuries. In this sense he is a functional character; he shows the devastating effects of war. He also illustrates the suffering of physical pain, which is always there; he gets sensations which cause him agony from his legs which are no longer there. He tells Francis that he will stay in hospital until he finds the best way of disposing of himself.



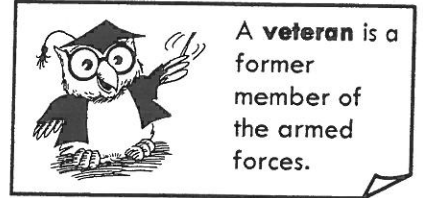
Arthur Rivier

Arthur is another, slightly older war veteran, also damaged by the war. He turns to alcohol for comfort. Although he has no physical scars he is traumatised by his experience and the lack of understanding and support when he returned home. His support and respect for Francis illustrate that Francis is indeed regarded as a hero.

Through Arthur we gain more insight into the concept of heroism when he says that they weren't heroes in the war, but just scared and homesick boys from Frenchtown. On a functional level, Cormier challenges the concept of heroism in war through what Arthur says to Francis. He states that the Frenchtown men who went to war were not heroes and insists that they were all scared kids who were there.

War Veterans

Big Boy Burgeron, Armand Tellier, Joe LaFontaine and George Richelieu are all minor characters in the text. Through them, Cormier presents a picture of veterans who are different from Francis. They contribute to various themes in the novel such as heroes and help us to understand what it must have been like to be a soldier who immediately returns to his home town after the war. They display camaraderie and resilience after their wartime experiences; their attitude is that they have done their time and survived.

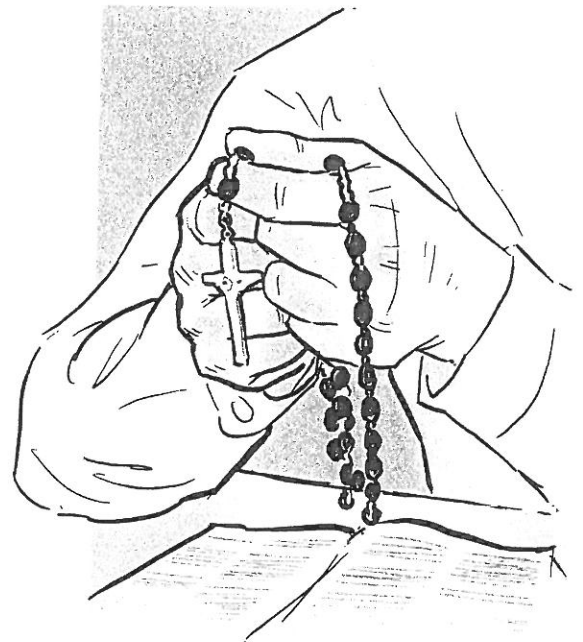


The war appears to have opened the doors of opportunity to them. Unlike before, there is provision for veterans to get free college education and they are encouraged to get jobs within the public sector. An example of this is Joe LaFontaine who, despite not having graduated from high school, reveals his plan to go to college and train to become a teacher. Similarly Armand Tellier plans to become a member of the police force.

However there are times when the war comes back to haunt them. This is apparent when Arthur Rivier's mouth twitches and Armand stares into the distance, thinking of some haunting horror.

The Nuns

Francis was taught by the nuns for eight years. They are central to the Roman Catholic community of Frenchtown. Francis was strongly influenced by them during his developing years. Their strict routines were accepted by the students. Joey was punished for regularly speaking out of turn, and he and Francis joke about this when they are war veterans. Although the nuns teach moral guidelines and provide support and stability, their ethos of sin and redemption sometimes alienates Francis and he feels he cannot turn to them for help when he is so distressed he doesn't want to live.



Louis Cassavant

Francis's uncle upholds some of the values which Francis honours, such as duty. He gives Francis a home after the loss of his parents, and treats him well. His life follows a routine which impacts on Francis: each evening he asks him how his school day went. Louis is quiet, but this does not seem to bother Francis who is comfortable in his presence.



Character revision

Whom do the two following quotations describe and what do they suggest about the character?

1. 'The pale purity of her face' (p. 8)
2. 'The broad shoulders of an athlete and the narrow hips of a dancer' (p. 27)

Find some suitable character quotations for Francis and write down what they suggest about him.

