

Heroes

by Robert Cormier

Study Pack

English Literature Unit 2a

Question 2 - prose

Divided into;

A context passage with question -20 minutes

One essay from a choice of two options -40 minutes-

1 hour in total.

Essay questions



1. 'Now I'm starting to find out what I am, who I really am...' To what extent do the main characters in *Heroes* learn about themselves in the course of the novel?
2. Which actions in the novel are heroic?
3. How important is Nicole to the novel and how is she presented by Cormier?
4. How does Cormier explore the theme of forgiveness in *Heroes*?
5. Explore the ways in which the novel presents its heroes.
6. How is religion used in the novel?
7. How does the way in which Cormier structures the novel affect the reader's response to it? Write about:
 - the importance of the two halves of the novel
 - the use of flashbacks
 - how the reader's response is affected by the way the novel is written.
8. What does the wartime setting contribute to the themes and ideas in *Heroes*?
9. How important is Larry LaSalle to the novel and how is he presented by Cormier?
10. What part does the song *Dancing in the Dark* play in the novel?
11. Consider the use of symbolism in the novel, focusing on the scarf, the gun and table tennis.
12. Examine Cormier's presentation of tension in the novel. Consider:
 - the way the narrative is structured
 - the use of flashback
 - features of language and style.

Exploring the novel

Themes in the novel

When you are considering the themes found in a text you must produce evidence from the text for your views.

Use this list to make notes on the different themes and find relevant quotations.

Power	Who wields power? Who has power over other people? Who is in control? How do the actions of the powerful affect the weaker characters? Does the power balance change at all during the novel?
Religion	Frenchtown is heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, St Jude's. Consider the ways in which religion is part of everyday life and how it influences Francis and the other characters in the book.
War and its consequences	What changes does the war bring to Frenchtown and its inhabitants? How are the characters affected by their experiences of war?
Love	What is love? How many different kinds of love do you find in this story? Is Francis in love with Nicole?
Appearance and reality	Is what you see the real person? How much of themselves do people hide? What are people not prepared to talk about?
Guilt	Who is full of guilt? Which characters should feel guilty?
Revenge	Who should take revenge? Do you believe that life will pay you back for your actions? How much does this affect the characters in the story?
Secrets	Look how much we learn about people when we hear their thoughts. What are they not able to say? How much of their lives are influenced by the secrets that only they know?
Heroism	Who are the heroes in this story? What are the criteria for being a hero? Is heroism always recognised?
Wounds	Francis has physical wounds too horrific for everyone to see. Who else is wounded? Remember that wounds do not have to be physical.
Growing up	Francis was still a child when the events that affected him most happened. Does becoming an adult alter his views in any way?
Time	Think about the ways in which time has affected the characters. It is said that time heals. Is this theory true in this story?
Isolation	Who is alone? Is this important? Who feels that they are the only people who feel like this?

Exploring the novel

Frenchtown is a section of the small town of Monument where the French Canadians have settled. Robert Cormier has based this town on a place where he lived for much of his life, renaming his hometown of Leominster (Massachusetts) as Monument. Frenchtown represents the suburb of French Hill in the town.



Consider Cormier's presentation of **Frenchtown**

- Is it a wealthy area? How do you know?
- What languages are spoken?
- What do people do for work and leisure here?
- What impression do you get of the place? Use quotations to support your ideas

Francis spends time in **France** during the invasion of Normandy in the Second World War.

- How much do you learn of France as a place?
- Only one particular event seems to make a lasting impression on Francis - have his memories of actual events of the war coloured his recollection of the setting?
- Why do you think the author gives us minimal details of the setting here?

Francis also spends time in **England** where he is recovering from his wounds.

- How much do we learn about England?
- What does Francis actually want to do when he travels to London?
- Is this setting particularly important to the plot? Explain your views.

The **Wreck Centre** is at the centre of the action in Frenchtown as it is the place where all the teenagers choose to spend their time.

- What is the significance of the name of this place? Is it ironic in any way? How is the name of the place used to give the reader clues about what might happen later in the novel?
- Is this setting viewed as important by the author? Justify your opinion.
- What details can you find that tell you what the Wreck Centre is like?

There are some other specific places described: **the church, the social club and the school.**

- How important are they to the story? Do events that happen there take the story forward?
- All these places are named after St Jude, the patron saint of lost causes. How relevant is it that Cormier has chosen this particular saint for these important places in Francis's life?

Heroes by Robert Cormier

Structure, Language and Style

Structure

Non chronological order.

Moves between three time frames:

- Growing up in Frenchtown
- The Second World War
- After the War.

Francis Cassavant is the first person narrator. We share his thoughts and see events and characters through his perspective.

As he wonders through Frenchtown in search of Larry La Salle, whom he wants to kill, we are gradually drip fed information about the past which explains Francis' hatred and why he is searching for Nicole Renard.

This gradual revelation creates suspense, especially as Larry seems such a heroic figure in Frenchtown.

Francis is reminded of events in the past, which lead to flashbacks, either to growing up or to the time Francis spent in the War.

e.g. As Francis applies Vaseline to his injured cheeks, he recalls his doctor's words as well as those of a friend, Enrico's comments about women. This leads to his recollection of his first meeting with Nicole.

As Francis tries to fall asleep, he recites the names of fellow soldiers, which leads to a recollection from the War.

These pieces fit like a jig saw, gradually feeding us pieces of the plot.



Language and Style

The writing is often very direct e.g. The opening description of Francis' injuries "I have no face." The first section is very graphic and instantly grabs the reader's attention.

Descriptions of war are also direct and deliberately concentrate on the non-heroic aspects., "quiet curses floating on the air, grunts and hisses and farts—"

Similes and metaphors are used effectively;

Similes—Mrs Belander's veins "bulging like worms beneath her skin."

Francis' adoration of Nicole "I knelt there like a knight at her feet."

Metaphors - "I haunted Sixth Street at all hours,"

"Larry La Salle had been a bright Pied Piper for their children."

"a tide of confidence swept through me."

Pathetic Fallacy (sympathetic background) is often used when the weather seems to be reacting to what is happening to Francis. "the clouds are still thick and low, and rain falls almost every day."

After Larry has raped Nicole, Francis is unable to sleep:"stared up at the ceiling, glad for the heat that was so relentless, as if it was part of the hell that I had earned."

Be aware of the power of **specifically chosen verbs** e.g. The morning sun **slashes** my eyelids. "I **stalked** the centre, restless and nervous." "a pang of regret **gnawing** at me"

Onomatopoeia is also used. "the **swish** of the tennis rackets and the **plopping** of the ball outside."

Imagery

The image of a game of tennis is repeated in the second part of the book. Consider the significance of this.

Religious images are repeated, especially in relation to Nicole.

Francis portrays himself as a spy or as a ghost.

Heroic images are used to describe Larry.



Exploring the novel

Considering the structure of the novel

Narrative framework - how is the story told?

- Who tells the story? Is it told in the first or third person?
- Why does the author do this? What effect does it have?



How does the author use time?

- Is the story told in chronological order?
- Does the author use flashbacks or other techniques to switch between timeframes?
- Are the flashbacks in chronological order?
- In what order are the events revealed? Does this create tension?

How does the author organise the words?

Consider the use of the following:

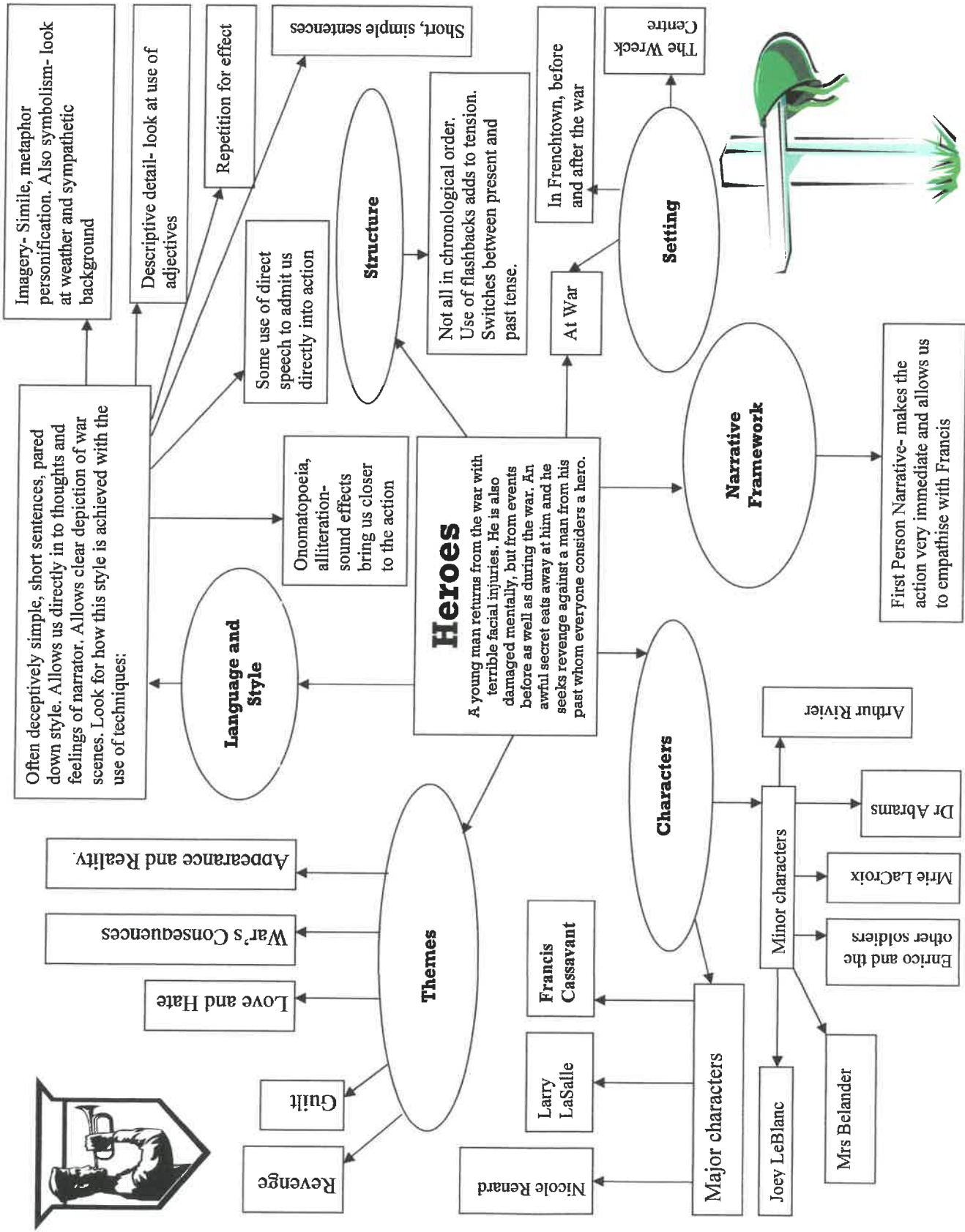
- sentence length
- paragraph length
- amount of dialogue
- amount of description
- use of verbs, adverbs and adjectives.

Does the writer use any other literary devices?

- similes
- metaphors
- symbolism
- onomatopoeia
- alliteration or assonance.

What tone does the author use?

- How does the author use these techniques together to create a certain tone or mood?



Heroes – Robert Cormier

Francis Cassavant

Point	Quote	Explain
The novel is told through Francis' eyes.	<i>My name is Francis Joseph Cassavant - - and I have no face.</i>	The use of the first person narrator allows us to share Francis' thoughts and get to know him well. As we don't experience the viewpoints of the other characters, it affects the reader's perception of them (e.g. Nicole is always idealised)
Francis begins with a graphic description of his disfigurement.	<i>- - no ears to speak of, just bits of dangling flesh.</i>	The description is very direct, with elements of self hatred.
There are touches of bitter humour in his description too.	<i>I wear a scarf that covers the lower part of my face - - like the aviators wore in their airplanes back during the First World War -</i>	He makes fun of himself by using a glamorous and heroic image.
He compares himself to several ugly images.	<i>I am like the Hunchback of Notre Dame, my face like a gargoyle and the duffel bag like a lump on my back.</i>	Again, his self hatred is obvious. We're told that there is a gun in the bag and we wonder at its purpose. The fact that he hides his identity adds to the mystery.
Francis has no remaining family.	<i>When I was only six my mother died giving birth to my brother Raymond - -</i>	Francis' brother and father also died, possibly explaining Francis' sense of isolation and shyness.
Francis is religious	<i>I light a candle in St Jude's Church.</i>	He recalls his roles in church as a child and his time at the church school, taught by nuns.
We're gradually fed clues as to why Francis carries a gun.	<i>Then I am filled with guilt and shame knowing that I just prayed for the man I am going to kill.</i>	Slowly feeding clues about Francis' mission adds suspense, especially as Larry la Salle seems to be such a hero.
The sense of mystery is heightened by not knowing why Nicole Renard left and also why Francis won't accept that he's a hero.	<i>I am not a hero of course, and I turn away in disgust.</i>	We wonder why Francis seems to feel so guilty about Nicole as well as about his courage in the war.

Point	Quote	Explain
Francis recalls his first childhood meeting with Nicole.	<i>-- the most beautiful girl I had ever seen -- I knelt there like a knight at her feet -- I silently pledged her my love and loyalty for ever</i>	Francis' view of Nicole is consistently idealised and adoring. As the reader only experiences her through Francis' eyes, we don't get to see the real Nicole.
Francis is so shy and adoring that he can barely speak to Nicole and is painfully embarrassed in her presence.	<i>My mouth would instantly dry up and I would look away -- -- Plunge into an agony of regret,</i>	Words like <i>agony</i> show the intensity of his feelings. He is almost suffering at each brief meeting.
Francis loves reading	<i>I loved roaming the stacks of Monument Public Library</i>	He mentions books several times, having read novels by Ernest Hemmingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald
When Francis meets the other veterans at St Jude's Club, he feels unable to fit in.	<i>A fellowship that I wish I could be part of. Referring to Arthur Rivier, Francis states I am not the hero he thinks I am</i>	The reader wonders why Francis feels this way.
Larry La Salle dazzles everybody in Frenchtown and builds Francis' confidence at table tennis	<i>I had never been a hero in such places (community sports and social centres like the Wreck centre) For the first time in my life, a tide of confidence swept through me.</i>	Larry tirelessly coaches Francis at table tennis so that he tastes success and starts to believe in himself. He also develops Nicole's dance skills.
Larry becomes a hero to Francis and the others and he singles out Francis and Nicole.	<i>I stood spellbound by his words. I am not supposed to play favourites, Francis, but you and Nicole are special to me.</i>	This makes us all the more curious to know why Francis wants to kill Larry.
Francis realises that Larry is deliberately letting him win the table tennis match against him.	<i>He led the cheers --</i>	Larry has deliberately lost, without making it obvious, in order to boost Francis. We continue to wonder why Francis hates him so much after the War.
Francis' dream comes true when Nicole agrees to go to the movies with him.	<i>The earth paused in its orbit.</i>	This shows the intensity of Francis' feelings

Point	Quote	Explain
Francis recalls walking through London when recovering from his injuries in hospital there and the horror on the faces of passers-by.	He looks at his reflection, <i>I saw what the boy had seen- my face. No face at all actually, the nostrils like the snout of an animal, the peeling cheeks, the toothless gums - -</i>	Immediately after his injury, he hadn't thought of covering his face, as the nurses at the hospital hadn't seemed scared of his appearance.
Francis remains determined to hide his identity in order to carry out his mission and seems to have decided that he will have no future after this.	<i>This might be the day when Larry La Salle will show up and I start to close doors. Not real doors but doors to the future.</i>	Francis burns the list of hospitals given to him by Enrico a fellow injured soldier, saying that he has also planned <i>disposal</i> .
When Larry returns on leave from the war, he arranges a party and asks Francis to leave him and Nicole alone at the end of it. In spite of Nicole's reluctance, Francis agrees.	<i>We always did what Larry La Salle told us to do. Always carried out his slightest wish.</i>	Although Francis feels uncomfortable about leaving Nicole alone with Larry, his influence is so strong that Francis obeys.
As he waits for Nicole, Francis realises that something is wrong.	<i>I couldn't breathe, my body rigid, my lungs burning - -</i>	It takes Francis a while to realise that Nicole is being raped and he seems helpless to respond.
Francis is horrified by Nicole's reaction as she rushes past him in the hallway.	<i>And I recognised in her eyes now what I could not deny: betrayal.</i>	Francis' hurt increases as he hears Larry whistling to himself, obviously feeling no sense of guilt.
Francis sees Nicole four days later and is upset by her accusation that he should have stopped Larry.	<i>My head so heavy, pounding with blood, that I could barely nod - -</i> <i>- as if all my sins had been revealed and there was no forgiveness for them.</i>	The language used conveys a sense of intense suffering and the events explain Francis' guilt, his hatred of Larry and his later search for Nicole.
That evening, Francis considers killing himself by jumping off the church steeple.	<i>I thought of my mother and father – could I disgrace their name this way?</i> <i>Soldiers were dying with honour on battlefields all over the world. Noble deaths. The deaths of heroes.</i>	As a Catholic, suicide would be a great sin for Francis. He decides to die honourably by enlisting as a soldier and altering his birth certificate, as he is under age. This explains why he doesn't see his part in the war as heroic. He went there, out of a sense of shame, to get killed.

Point	Quote	Explain
On Larry's return to Frenchtown after the war, Francis goes to his apartment.	<i>The gun is like a tumour on my thigh.</i> <i>I am calm. My heartbeat is normal.</i>	The use of the word <i>tumour</i> suggests that killing Larry would be like cutting out a cancer. Francis' calmness contrasts to his previous sense of awe of Larry as well as his panic over meetings with Nicole.
Francis confesses to Larry what he has told no one else, that he wanted to die in the war.	<i>When I fell on that grenade, I wasn't trying to save those GIs. I saw my chance to end it all - -</i>	This explains why Francis refuses to accept that he's a hero.
Larry tries to help Francis feel better about the fact that he didn't save Nicole from being raped.	<i>You couldn't have stopped me, anyway, Francis. You were just a child.</i>	Francis aims his gun after this but is taken aback by Larry's attitude, there are elements of the old, kind Larry but there is no regret for what he did to Nicole.
After learning that Larry probably raped other girls too, Francis aims for his heart but Larry says that he'll kill himself if Francis leaves the room.	<i>Go, Francis. Leave me here. Leave everything here, the war, what happened at the Wreck Centre, leave it all behind, with me.</i>	Larry will spare Francis the sin of killing him so that Francis can move on.
After Larry's death, Francis tracks down Nicole who apologises for accusing him of abandoning her over the rape and encourages him to become a writer.	<i>You weren't to blame for what happened.</i> <i>Are you going to write? I always thought you'd be a writer.</i>	Francis realises that Nicole has changed and is trying to move on with her life.
Francis realises that Nicole no longer loves him but that there is still affection.	<i>I knew I had lost her, had lost her a long time ago.</i> <i>She calls him My Silver Star hero - -</i>	Francis knows that the relationship must end so that she can move on.
At the end, Francis realises that the soldiers were heroes. He decides that he will write, as Nicole suggested. He prepares to leave by train with his duffel bag on his back.	<i>Scared kids - -who were not only there but who stayed, did not run away -</i> <i>The weight is nice and comfortable on my back.</i>	There is a sense of hope at the end after the previous despair and hints at suicide. The bag, which at the start is described like a hunchback's hump, has now become comfortable. Is Francis a hero?

Francis Cassavant

- First person narrative, so we view events through his eyes and share his feelings. Events from his youth and during the war are recounted in flashback.
- Francis graphically describes his ugliness after falling onto a grenade in battle.
- He hides his identity from the citizens of Frenchtown so that he can wait anonymously for the return of Larry La Salle.
- His self hatred, as well as his dislike of Larry La Salle, is strong and consistent.
- There is a sense of mystery surrounding Francis' mission to kill Larry. Details are revealed gradually, creating suspense.
- Francis' love for Nicole Renard is worshipful and idealised. He is so nervous in her presence that he almost physically suffers.
- Francis has lost his parents and lives with his conscientious but rather distant uncle.
- Francis is shy and loves reading. He enjoys visiting the library.
- He is also religious, having been educated by nuns at a Catholic church school and attended church regularly.
- He lacks confidence in competitive situations such as sport.
- Larry La Salle raises Francis' confidence through coaching him to become a good table tennis player. Like all the others, the young Francis sees Larry as a hero.
- When Larry comes back on leave from the war and rapes Nicole after a dance, Francis is too stunned to prevent him.
- Out of self disgust, Francis first considers suicide then enlists as a soldier, hoping to get killed and die honourably.
- When Francis falls forward onto a grenade and saves fellow soldiers, he is hailed as a hero but knows that his real intention was to kill himself.
- Francis waits for Larry to return to Frenchtown in order to kill him. Larry says that he will shoot himself to save Francis from that sin but he shows no regret for what he did to Nicole.
- Francis visits Nicole but realises that their love is over and feels that he now has a chance to move on.

Heroes – Nicole Renard

Point	Quote	Explain
Right at the start of the novel we hear of Francis Cassavant's love for Nicole.	It would always be Nicole Renard.	He tells us that even after the war, he thinks of her almost constantly.
In flashback, Francis recalls his first meeting with Nicole.	<i>The most beautiful girl I had ever seen.</i> <i>The pale purity of her face reminded me of the statue of St Therese - -</i> <i>I knelt there like a knight at her feet - - I silently pledged her my love and loyalty for ever.</i>	Francis idealises Nicole and uses images of perfection to describe her. His view of her is adoring, as shown by the comparison to the saint's statue. As we only ever view Nicole through Francis' eyes, we often don't see the ordinary Nicole.
There are the occasionally more human touches.	<i>Something else flashed in her eyes ,too, a hint of mischief - -</i>	We get glimpses of Nicole's humour in the novel.
Francis is so nervous and in love that he can hardly speak to her.	<i>In an agony of love and longing - - my voice would emerge as a humiliating squeak if I tried to say hello.</i>	Francis' brief encounters with Nicole seem almost painful as he is so shy.
A touch of humour is shown when Francis is teased by Nicole as he watches her pass while leaning on a banister.	<i>"Don't fall off, Francis," she said - - - Had she merely been teasing me?</i>	Francis is so intense about her that he analyses every tiny communication.
At the start of the novel a sense of mystery is created around the disappearance of Nicole and her family and why Francis is searching for her.	Norman Rocheleau told Francis during the war; <i>I don't know where they went, the Renards. They left without warning, in the middle of the night.</i>	Even in France, Francis still thinks of her and wonders about what happened. It makes the reader wonder why the family would leave like this.
The sense of mystery is heightened when we hear of the change in Nicole's behaviour.	<i>Didn't come out of the house except for the five thirty morning mass - -</i>	The fact that Nicole shuts herself away suggests that something serious happened.
Nicole joins a dance class held by Larry La Salle at the Wreck Centre.	<i>She seemed to exist in a world of her own, like a rare specimen, bird-like and graceful - -</i> <i>Drops of perspiration on her forehead like raindrops on white porcelain.</i>	Again the images used to describe her are idealised and beautiful.

Point	Quote	Explain
Nicole is singled out by Larry La Salle as a talented dancer	<i>Pressing her close, their faces almost touching, their lips only an inch or so from a kiss - - He applauded her, his eyes looking deeply into hers - -</i>	Larry seems to be very attracted to Nicole. This is a warning of what will happen.
Larry arranges a table tennis tournament for Francis and a dance solo in a production for Nicole.	<i>I'm not supposed to play favourites, Francis, but you and Nicole are special to me.</i>	This favouritism will later prove disastrous for Nicole.
As Francis wins the match, he notices Nicole watching him.	<i>Hands joined, as if in prayer, eyes half closed as if making herself an offering to me.</i>	There is religious imagery here again as Francis revels in Nicole's admiration.
Eventually Francis plucks up the courage to ask Nicole out and she accepts.	<i>The earth paused in its orbit.</i>	This shows the intensity of the moment for Francis.
When Larry La Salle returns on leave from the war, Francis notices the affection he feels for Nicole.	<i>His eyes moved to Nicole and I saw the rush of affection on his face.</i>	Is this another warning of what will happen later?
Nicole seems to sense danger as Larry leads the crowd to a party.	<i>Once Nicole whispered: "Stay close to me, as we resumed our parade - - Francis replies: I'll never leave you.</i>	Her fears are later proved right.
As Larry tries to persuade Francis to leave him alone with Nicole at the end of the party, Nicole wants Francis to stay.	<i>"Don't go," Nicole whispered into my ear.</i>	She continues to sense danger but Francis is too blinded by Larry's influence.
Francis waits for Nicole and slowly realises that she is being raped.	<i>A whimpering, like a small animal caught and trapped, moaning distinct now.</i>	This makes Nicole seem vulnerable and distressed.
As Nicole leaves and sees Francis standing nearby, she is no longer perfect and idealised but hurt and angry.	<i>Her hair dishevelled, mouth flung open, lips swollen - I recognised in her eyes now what I could not deny: betrayal.</i>	Francis realises that he has been naive in leaving Nicole alone with Larry.
When Nicole sees Francis again a few days later, she is still angry.	<i>Why didn't you do something? Tell him to stop, run for help. Anything.</i>	At the moment she feels as if he abandoned her.
When Francis meets Nicole years later at her school in Albany, she has changed.	<i>The softness has gone from her face and her voice is sharp and brittle.</i>	She seems distant but does apologise for blaming Francis for not defending her against Larry.

Point	Quote	Explain
Nicole sums up Larry's influence on all of them.	<i>For a while there he made me feel special. Made us all feel special - - Now I'm starting to find out what I am, who I really am.</i>	It seems as if Nicole has come to terms with what happened and is rebuilding her life.
Nicole tells Francis that she saw no point in telling what Larry had done.	<i>He was a big war hero. He didn't beat me up. No visible wounds.</i>	She also felt that the news would be too distressing for her parents. Should she have told?
Francis realises that their relationship is over.	<i>She looks at me with affection. But affection is not love.</i>	The experience has been too much and has changed Nicole.
Nicole says farewell to Francis with praise.	<i>My good Francis. My table tennis champion. My Silver Star hero.</i>	She is kind and considerate in spite of all that's happened.
She encourages Francis to write but makes it clear that this should be their last meeting.	<i>Have a good life, Francis. Be whatever will make you happy.</i>	She realises that she needs space to move on and needs to distance himself from what happened. This is a different Nicole from the idealised images at the start of the novel.

Nicole Renard

- Francis Cassavant adores her. She is described using imagery of perfection and religion.
- She arrives in Frenchtown from Albany and Francis falls in love with her at first sight.
- She is taught by nuns at the St Jude's Parochial School. Religion is important to her.
- Because we view Nicole through Francis' eyes, we don't get a balanced idea of Nicole as a person (He is possibly a bit more objective during their final meeting after Larry's death.)
- Francis is so in love with her that he finds it difficult to talk to her.
- She shows touches of humour in some light hearted, teasing comments made to Francis.
- She is coached as a solo dancer by Larry La Salle while Francis is developed as a table tennis player.
- She and Francis date.
- On Larry's heroic return on leave from battle, Francis notices attraction towards Nicole in his eyes.
- When Larry insists that he and Nicole be left alone after a party, Francis is too much in awe of him to refuse in spite of Nicole's requests for him to stay.
- Nicole is raped by Larry and accuses Francis of abandoning her.
- In disgust, at what he views as his betrayal of Nicole, Francis enlists in the army.
- Nicole becomes reclusive. In a short while, the Renard family move from Frenchtown with no explanation.
- After Larry's death, Francis tracks down Nicole. She is caring towards Francis but has obviously moved on. She apologises for accusing him of abandoning her and encourages him to develop his writing skills. Francis realises that he must now continue without her.

Heroes – Larry La Salle

Point	Quote	Explain
We first hear of Larry as the man Francis Cassavant intends to kill.	<i>I just prayed for the man I am going to kill.</i>	We wonder why Francis feels like this about Larry, creating suspense.
When he arrives to take charge of the renovated Wreck Centre, Larry seems like a hero to the young people of Frenchtown.	<i>Dazzling movie star teeth</i> <i>Larry La Salle had the broad shoulders of an athlete and the narrow hips of a dancer. He was both.</i>	He seems to be perfect in appearance and ability, combining skills that most people admire.
There are hints that Larry's not as perfect as he seems.	<i>-- dark hints that he had "gotten into trouble "in New York City.</i>	This creates a sense of doubt and mystery.
During the war, Larry is hailed as a hero. The Strangler keeps a copy of the newspaper article in a scrapbook.	<i>The Strangler calls Larry the best of the best.</i>	Larry seems to fit the typical image of a hero in every way, confident, good-looking, athletic and awarded the Silver Star.
At the Wreck Centre, Larry tirelessly builds the self confidence and skills of the young people of Frenchtown.	<i>-he had lured awkward girls into ballet classes and ball players and bullies into being singers and dancers - -</i>	Larry seems to find the strengths of those he works with and is admired by all.
Larry develops Francis' skills at table tennis and Nicole's dance abilities.	<i>I'm not supposed to play favourites, Francis, but you and Nicole are special to me.</i>	This special relationship will soon prove to be disastrous.
After Francis wins the table tennis tournament, he's challenged to play Larry La Salle	<i>I realised that he was letting me win.</i>	Larry keeps on building Francis' confidence and status with the crowd by letting him win, but only by a fraction so that it's not obvious.
In true heroic style, Larry enlists as soon as war is declared.	<i>Larry La Salle was one of the first Frenchtown men to enlist in the armed services.</i>	Larry's heroism is praised further when news arrives that he captured an enemy machine gun nest and features on the news.
When Larry comes home on leave in 1943, he is hailed as a hero.	<i>Lt. Lawrence La Salle, US Marine Corps, holder of the Silver Star for acts of heroism - - hero of newsreels and radio broadcasts -</i>	Using his official title and listing his achievements suggests the way in which he was viewed in Frenchtown but, on rereading the book, there could be some irony too when we consider what he is about to do.

Point	Quote	Explain
On arrival at the station, Larry seems more perfect and heroic than ever.	<i>- Ribbons and medals on his chest. He smiled the old movie star smile, skin tanned and glowing</i>	Larry fits all the criteria for a hero yet again, confident, active and good looking. The fact that everybody admires him so much makes what he's about to do even more shocking.
The young people from the Wreck Centre are particularly proud of him.	<i>Larry was our war hero, yes, but he had been a hero to us long before he went to war.</i>	
There are several hints that Larry is attracted to Nicole.	<i>His eyes moved to Nicole and I saw the rush of affection on his face. As they do a snake dance; Nicole was next with her hands on his hips.</i>	Francis notices the signs of attraction but is probably too much in awe of Larry to be warned.
At the end of the party, Larry encourages Francis to leave so that he can be alone with Nicole.	<i>Just her and me alone. It's important, Francis.</i>	In spite of Nicole's reluctance, Francis is too much under Larry's influence to disobey.
Larry seems to feel no guilt at having raped Nicole.	<i>- Whistling softly as he stepped through the doorway -</i>	His attitude seems totally carefree. The act was also planned as he had deliberately made Francis leave so that they would be alone.
When Francis confronts Larry after the end of the war, he is physically broken and feeble.	He is pale, eyes sunk into the sockets - - and he seems fragile now -	We wonder if the broken exterior means that he has changed as a person or if it will affect Francis' decision to kill him.
Even now Larry is encouraging in his attitude towards Francis.	<i>That face, what's left of it, is a symbol of how brave you were</i>	Larry tells Francis that he has no external wounds but is worn out inside. He shows obvious admiration of Francis going to war underage.
When Francis explains that he went to war out of hatred and anger for what happened to Nicole, Larry is briefly shocked but recovers his composure.	<i>He flinches as if reeling from an unexpected blow. You couldn't have stopped me, anyway, Francis. You were just a child.</i>	Even though he shows no regret, he still tries to make Francis feel better about what happened.
Francis is shocked at Larry's revelation that Nicole probably wasn't the first young girl he'd raped.	<i>The sweet young things, Francis. Even their heat is sweet – We love the thing that makes us evil.</i>	Again there is no sense of shame. He seems almost to boast.

Point	Quote	Explain
When Francis tells Larry that he was always the young people's hero, Larry asks him an important question.	<i>Does that one sin of mine wipe away all the good things?</i>	This is an important question. Larry has done so much that's good. Does what he did to Nicole cancel them all out? Should a hero be perfect? Is this possible? Are we to think that Larry did all his good work with the young people to gain access to a young girl like Nicole?
In order to prevent Francis from committing a sin, Larry insists that he will kill himself if Francis leaves.	<i>You've accomplished your mission here.</i>	Does this show the generous side to Larry?
As Francis leaves, Larry adds one more comment of praise.	<i>You would have fallen on that grenade, anyway.</i>	Even at the end, he's trying to boost Francis. As Larry shoots himself, the sound from a distance seems like a ping pong ball hitting a table. An echo of the match played between Larry and Francis at the Wreck Centre.
Later at a convent, Nicole discusses Larry's death with Francis	<i>For a while there he made me feel special - - Now I'm starting to find out what I am, who I really am.</i>	Does this suggest that Larry gave them a slightly false impression?

Larry La Salle

- Epitomises (sums up) the typical idea of a hero – handsome, athletic, good with people.
- He contrasts to the shy, awkward (and after the war, ugly) Francis Cassavant.
- Larry is universally admired but there are hints of shadows in his past on his return to Frenchtown.
- He is the perfect coach at the Wreck Centre, spending hours recognising potential and making young people feel better about themselves. He becomes a hero to the young people of Frenchtown.
- He singles out Francis Cassavant and Nicole Renard for special attention. Francis changes from totally lacking confidence to genuinely believing he can win the table tennis tournament. Nicole is given a solo dance.
- In a table tennis display following the tournament, Larry subtly lets Francis beat him in order to increase his self confidence and status with the audience. Does he show generosity here?
- When war breaks out, Larry is the first to volunteer and becomes a Silver Star hero of whom the whole town is proud. Again he fulfils the typical ideal of a hero.
- On his arrival in Frenchtown on leave, crowds turn out to greet him and he is admired by all. He has medals on his chest and looks fit and tanned. Again he is a typical hero.
- The Strangler keeps cuttings of Larry's (and Francis') heroism in a scrap book and the men at St Jude's Bar all see him as a hero.
- After a party to celebrate his return on leave, Larry tells Francis to leave Nicole so that she may be alone with him. Francis is so in awe of Larry that he agrees, even though there are definite signs that Nicole is uncomfortable with this.
- Larry rapes Nicole and leaves the hall whistling happily. He shows no shame or guilt.
- After the war, he returns to Frenchtown with an illness. Francis comes to kill him. Francis tells him that he knows what happened with Nicole and that was the reason that he enlisted under age and tried to kill himself by falling onto a grenade. Larry is calm and tells Francis that he was a hero anyway. Even at the end, he tries to boost Francis but still shows no guilt.
- Larry asks Francis if this one sin outweighs all the good he did. This is an important question to which there is probably no correct answer.
- Larry offers to kill himself to prevent Francis committing murder. Is he being selfless here?
- To what extent is Larry a hero? To what extent are his actions selfless? Could some of his actions be seen as manipulative? To what extent is Larry's image deceptive? Is he a hero?

English Literature

Themes

The main theme of *Heroes* is about what heroism means, and what it doesn't mean. But there are also themes of love, guilt and forgiveness.

Heroism

The question of what makes a hero is asked all the way through *Heroes*, by many different characters.

Before they even go to war, LaSalle is a hero to the kids of the Wreck Centre. He brings out the best in them and they adore him. Even at the end he is still making Francis feel better about himself, and prevents him from becoming a murderer. Is this more or less heroic than his war record? Francis is something of a peacetime hero as well – by becoming table tennis champion and beating LaSalle he becomes an icon to the other children.

The scrapbook kept by the 'Strangler' at the St. Jude's club contains newspaper clippings about all the 'heroes' of Frenchtown, including both LaSalle and Francis. The other men regard it as something of a symbol, something to be proud of, but Francis is ambivalent.

The Silver Star is the only medal awarded for 'heroism', we are told. Both LaSalle and Francis have been awarded this medal, for saving the lives of their fellow soldiers. LaSalle does so by taking out a machine gun nest, Francis by falling on a grenade – the grenade that destroys his face. Is it significant that one wins it by committing an act of violence, whereas the other wins it by taking the damage himself? It impresses the townsfolk – but Francis wants to remain anonymous.

Heroism - continued

Francis finds Arthur drunk outside the back of the St Jude club one night. Arthur is crying, because he is haunted by the war but nobody will talk about it. He scoffs at the idea of 'heroes' and says they were all just scared boys, and that there was no glamour involved. He says 'We weren't heroes. We were only there.'

This can be interpreted in two ways. One is that it is wrong for people to call them heroes, because they didn't act like heroes. It was merely chance that they were there in the war. But when Francis remembers Arthur's words right at the end of the book, it gives them a different interpretation. Francis is suggesting that merely by being there they were heroes – scared or not, they did what they had to do and did not run away.

When Francis talks to LaSalle he admits that he fell on the grenade not out of heroism, but because he wanted to die, so he is not a hero. LaSalle counters this, by telling Francis that deep down it was an heroic act, driven by his instincts to save his fellow men. But it is LaSalle telling him this – can he be trusted?

Francis tells us that he always wanted to be a hero like LaSalle, but that when he finds himself one he wants to get rid of the 'fakery'. For him being called a hero can't disguise what he feels underneath, the guilt at failing Nicole, and the fact that he wanted to die, so he feels like a coward. This links to the question that LaSalle asks at the end: 'Does that one sin of mine wipe away all the good things?' The whole book questions whether people can really be heroes, when they have all their human failings underneath.

Heroism - continued

Why do Francis and Nicole not tell everyone the truth about LaSalle? Why does Francis tell no-one (apart from LaSalle) that he fell on the grenade because he wanted to die? When Arthur is drunk and crying about his wartime experiences, his two veteran friends pick him and take him home, not wanting Arthur to talk about the war. There seems to be a conspiracy not to reveal the heroes for what they are. Is Cormier suggesting that we need heroes, even if they are fake?

This is also suggested by the very positive effects of Francis beating LaSalle at table tennis. LaSalle knows that if the other children believe Francis has beaten him it will give them more self confidence. Although LaSalle fakes the result, Francis is a hero. Cormier is suggesting that even fake heroes can have a positive value in society.

Nicole tells Francis that he should write about it, in order to find out what a hero really is. This suggests the answer to the question is in the book. But what is it? In the train station Francis thinks of the soldiers in his platoon who were scared, but stayed and fought anyway. They died and were never awarded medals, and he calls them the real heroes. This is a straightforward way of looking back at those who died in the war.

War

War ties into the theme of heroism as a useful motif – it is a time when people are often called ‘heroes’ but it is also a theme in itself.

Francis dreams of the German soldiers that he killed, but in his dreams they cry ‘Mama’ and he sees them as boys, like him ‘too young to shave’. In real life they didn’t have

time to speak, but the dream emphasises a common idea in war literature – that the soldiers on both sides often have more in common with each-other than with their commanders.

Throughout Francis never questions whether the war itself was just – he describes it at the end as the ‘good war’. However, the depiction of violence, and its effects, is quite brutal. The clinical and grotesque description of Francis’s facial injuries at the beginning of the novel is a good example of this. War is presented as horrifying and terrifying, with a massive effect on those who fight in it, but Cormier is not concerned with the politics of the war, nor does he make *Heroes* a pacifist novel.

Arthur’s collapse behind the club one evening suggests that many of the veterans have similar issues to Francis – although Arthur appeared normal he is finding it very difficult to cope with the memories of what the war was like. Because he is physically unharmed, it is easier for him to pass as ‘normal’ than it is for Francis, but this episode shows that doesn’t mean the soldiers who came back in one piece are actually okay.

Innocence/ the end of childhood

There are many points in the book which represent an ending of naïveté. One is a major event in American history – the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Francis notes that ‘We had discovered in one moment on a Sunday afternoon that the world was not a safe place anymore.’ This was not just their discovery, but the discovery of the whole United States, that they could not remain in isolation from the rest of the world.

When Francis confidently leaves Nicole alone with LaSalle in the Wreck Centre, he does so in complete innocence of the danger she is in. Taking people at face

value is something which the novel constantly warns us against – the apparently happy Arthur is found crying behind the St Jude club, and the villainous LaSalle ends by doing something positive for Francis, in affirming his heroism, and refusing to let him become a murderer. LaSalle's rape of Nicole in the Wreck Centre is the end of innocence for both her and Francis, who waits in the dark knowing but unable to acknowledge what is happening to her. It is also symbolic of the end of their innocent belief in goodness – something that the war ended for many people.

Francis going off to war with a faked age on his birth certificate is a significant step out of childhood – like many soldiers who signed up underage, he is forcing the issue. He notices that other soldiers – even the Germans – are also very young.

He maintains a certain innocence even after the grenade – going to London with his face uncovered, he doesn't think that other people will notice, until he makes a young boy cry. When he is home in Frenchtown he appears to have become very cynical, but at the end of the novel, he has turned back a little from that, perhaps coming to happy balance.

The fact that Nicole will not see him again after the meeting they have at the end of the book also closes a door on the idea of there being a 'happily ever after': although she is surviving, and continuing to recover, she cannot go back to that state of innocence.

Love

There are different types of love in Heroes.

Francis's love for Nicole is highly romanticised – his first meeting with her is compared to a knight kneeling at the feet of a saint. He can barely get up the courage to speak

to her, although they do eventually go out, and their relationship is sweet and innocent.

Later, in the army, he is motivated by both his love for her which has never gone away, and his guilt about his failure to help her when she was attacked. During the war his love and desire for forgiveness turns into the only thing that makes his life worthwhile. From the first chapter where he says 'it would always be Nicole Renard' to the penultimate one where he tells us the reason he went to see Nicole was to see if she could still be his girl 'which could maybe change my mind about the gun in my duffel bag.' This is verging on the obsessional, and Francis realises as he talks to Nicole that the love they had ended a long time ago.

There is the hero-worship the teens feel for LaSalle before the war, and then that the town feels for the returning heroes. The scrapbook, the reception for LaSalle and the toasting of the Silver Star heroes in the St Jude Club all evidence this kind of love, and the need to find something or someone to admire to make life seem better.

Love - continued

Much of what LaSalle did for the kids of Frenchtown, and Francis in particular could be described as loving: he makes Francis a more confident teenager, and continues trying to make him feel better about himself even after Francis has threatened to kill him. LaSalle also describes his sexual desire for young girls ('sweet young things') as love. He says 'we love our sins. We love the thing that makes us evil.' This is a darker side to what 'love' can mean to different people.

There is an element of brotherly or fraternal love in Francis's memories of his fellow soldiers, in his

remembrance of them every night. His sacrifice, of throwing himself on the grenade, could also be seen as a loving one – certainly LaSalle thinks that Francis's instinct was to save his fellow soldiers, not to kill himself. There is a sense in which all the veterans are bound together by their experiences, which forms a kind of brotherly bond between them.

Forgiveness

There are two types of forgiveness in the novel: forgiveness of another and forgiveness of yourself.

Francis is intent on taking revenge on Larry LaSalle, rather than forgiving him. He does not offer any forgiveness: when LaSalle asks if his one evil act can erase all the good he did, Francis coldly tells him to 'ask Nicole.' However, he does allow LaSalle to redeem himself a little by letting him take his own life. Is Francis's drive to revenge more about LaSalle's guilt or his own? Francis is driven by the need to find forgiveness for having let Nicole down by leaving her alone with LaSalle. The guilt of the action, and the fact that she blamed him for it, are almost overwhelming. He wants to die, and closes 'doors to the future' because he doesn't feel he deserves either recognition as a hero or to live.

The theme of forgiveness is set in the context of Nicole and Francis's Catholic school, where they are taught by nuns. After the rape, Francis climbs the steeple to throw himself off, but cannot, at least partly because it is the 'greatest sin'.

Ironically LaSalle gives Francis a measure of forgiveness, when he tells him that he couldn't have stopped the rape – he was just a 'child.'

Nicole offers Francis forgiveness in a very understated way. As it turns out she regrets blaming him for the rape,

and tried to tell him so many years ago, but he had already left for the army. It is somewhat of an anti-climax, but the real person he needs forgiveness from is himself.

Concealment and revealment

Francis arrives in Frenchtown with his face wrapped up and concealed. On one level he's hiding his injuries from sight, to stop them horrifying others like they did the small boy in London who cried. The idea of a face wrapped up in bandages recalls horror films of the early part of the twentieth century. It may deliberately recall the image of the Invisible Man.

He's also concealing his identity – he lies to Mrs Belander about how he knows her name, and the wrappings conceal whatever might be recognised.

Francis is therefore able to walk around town completely unrecognised, except as a war veteran.

Larry LaSalle also has a secret concealed in his past – the mysterious reason as to why he had left his showbiz career to become a youth worker. We never find out what this reason is, but it is implied by LaSalle's referring to 'sweet young things' in the plural in his last encounter with Francis, that it was for something similar to his rape of Nicole. In the beginning this mystery seems attractive, adding to his 'glamour'.

This theme is exemplified by the structure of the novel, which weaves the three timelines together. Cormier uses foreshadowing extensively to create tension in the novel – such as when Francis tells us in the first chapter that he has 'just prayed for the man [he is] going to kill.' Then he gradually reveals different morsels of information, about Francis's war experience and the pre-war life in Frenchtown.