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## **Sample MonkeyNotes for "The Chosen"**

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# *The Chosen*

by

**Chaim Potok**



MonkeyNotes by PinkMonkey Staff

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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

The novel is set during the Second World War. It revolves around a number of Jewish families who have traveled from Russia to Williamsburg, New York, hoping to find a safe haven. They have.....

### LIST OF CHARACTERS

#### Major

**Daniel (Danny) Saunders** - He is the son of Rabbi Reb Saunders and the protagonist of the novel. He is a brilliant boy who is confused by the ideologies of his Hasidic religion. His friendship with Reuven helps him to understand himself.

**Reb Saunders** - He is the Rabbi of the Hasidic sect of Jews living in Williamsburg and the father of Danny. A deeply religious and God fearing man, he has a great influence on the Jewish people in his sect; he wishes he had as much influence on his oldest son.

**Reuven Malter** - He is the son of Professor David Malter, who brings up Reuven to be strong and think for himself. He becomes Danny's friend and helps him to understand his life, his values, and his religion. Influenced by his own activist father, Reuven disapproves of Rabbi Saunders' philosophies, which seem tyrannical and orthodox to him.

**David Malter** - He is Reuven's father, who is a teacher at the "yeshiva" (school) where Reuven studies. In many ways, he is the exact opposite of Reb Saunders, for he is liberal and understanding and.....

### CONFLICT

**Protagonist** - Danny Saunders, a young, intelligent Hasidic Jew, is the main protagonist of the novel. Throughout the book, he suffers from his father's silence. He also longs to become a.....

**Antagonist** - Danny's antagonist is really himself. The novel is a coming of age story in which Danny must learn to accept his Hasidic family and his place in it. Because Danny's father has raised him in.....

**Climax** - The climax of the story occurs in the last chapter. Using Reuven as a go-between, Reb Saunders reveals that he knows of his son's desire to become a psychologist rather than a rabbi, as expected of.....

**Outcome** - The story ends in comedy, for Danny knows who he is and what he wants in life. Additionally, the silence barrier between Danny and his father has been permanently broken, and Danny is.....

### PLOT (Synopsis)

During World War II, Reuven Malter and Daniel Saunders are two sixteen-year-old Jewish boys, living just a few blocks away from each other in Williamsburg, New York. It is not until the beginning of the book, however, that they meet at a baseball game in which Danny injures Reuven.

Danny belongs to the Hasidic sect, an orthodox group of Jews who follow the old traditions and wear beards and ear locks. His father, Reb Saunders, is the rabbi for the Hasids of Williamsburg. He ascribes to all the old Jewish traditions and even raises his son in silence, only speaking to him about the Talmud.

In contrast to the relationship between Reb Saunders and Danny, the relationship between Reuven and Mr. Malter is close and loving. Mr. Malter, a teacher at the school that Reuven attends, is a brilliant Jew who is

considered a rebel by many. Being a liberal with a strong belief in Zionism, he brings up Reuven to think for himself and face any situation. Mr. Malter befriends Danny, even before Reuven and he become friends, because he recommends secular books for Danny to read from the library.

Reuven and Danny meet at a baseball match, where their teams are pitted against one another. The game becomes more than a baseball battle, with each team wanting desperately to win to prove their.....

## **THEMES**

### **Major**

The key theme of the novel is the importance of relationships. Throughout the book, the close relationship of Danny and Reuven is displayed, but Danny longs for more. He wants a warm and loving relationship with his father like the one he sees between Reuven and his father. When Reb Saunders breaks up the friendship between the boys because of the Zionism issue, Danny is truly lost. At the first opportunity, he re-establishes his friendship with Reuven; but he does not find true happiness until his father breaks his.....

### **Minor**

A minor theme that runs throughout the novel is the difficulty of man getting along with his.....

## **MOOD**

Throughout most of the novel, the mood is tense and strained due to the silence between Danny and.....

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Author Information**

Dr. Chaim Potok was born on February 17, 1929, in Bronx, New York. He was brought up as an orthodox Hasid even though he did not wear a beard or ear locks. His family, however, closely observed the Shabbat and the Kosher dietary laws. His brother became a rabbi and his sister married one.

Potok was a good student in both his secular and religious studies. As a young man, he realized he was more attracted to a conservative Judaism rather than an orthodox one.

When he graduated from college, he chose to enter the Jewish Theological Seminary. He was.....

### **Literary Information**

Chaim Potok admits that he was greatly influenced by Evelyn Waugh's novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, which dealt with the world of upper class British Catholics. Because of this novel, Potok decided to write about Jews and Jewishness, concentrating on the Jews who lived in America. To learn how to write, Potok set.....

### **Historical Information**

The Chosen was set during the latter part of the Second World War. Germany had already invaded Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, and the Russians had occupied Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. By the time of the novel, the Allies had begun to push the Germans into.....

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND NOTES

### BOOK I

#### Chapter 1

##### Summary

Although Reuven Malter and Danny Saunders are both Jewish boys who had lived in the same neighborhood in Williamsburg since their childhoods, their paths had never crossed until they played against each other in a baseball game. Reb Saunders, Danny's father, is the rabbi for a sect of Russian Hasidic Jews. The Hasidic Jews are extremely orthodox, following their customs faithfully. The men wear black skullcaps, full beards, and long ear locks (side curls). The Hasidic children attend their own parochial school, away from the other neighborhood children. In class they study the Talmud and their Jewish faith and tradition in the morning; in the afternoon, they follow a normal American secular curriculum. Danny Saunders attends the small Hasidic "yeshiva" (school).

David Malter is an instructor in a different "yeshiva," the one that Reuven attends. It is a much more liberal school that emphasizes a normal American secular curriculum; as a result, it is looked down upon by other more traditional Jewish students and their parents. The school is also criticized for conducting its lessons in Hebrew, a situation that the Hasidic Jews consider blasphemous, for Hebrew is the language of the Lord.

Danny and Reuven play baseball for opposing teams. Reuven's coach is Mr. Galanter, and Danny's coach is a rabbi. When the game between the two teams begins, Reuven's team feels quite certain that they will be victorious, believing a rabbi to be an unlikely coach. In truth, none of the gangly young men play baseball very well. They invariably fail to hit the ball and are put out easily.

Reuven's team is taunted by their opponents. They shout, "Burn in hell, you apikorsim!" The slanderous word is meant to be a slur against Jews who do not wear side curls and beards. Frustrated by the taunts and the fact that his team is not winning, Davey Cantor, one of Reuven's friends on his team, suggests to Reuven that they cheat to win. Reuven, however, dismisses the suggestion even though he is also feeling frustrated.

The rabbi's team is determined to win, especially Danny. When he comes up to bat, he hits.....

##### Notes

This opening chapter is largely introductory. The time of the book, during and after World War II, is clearly established. The author also explains much about Williamsburg and the Eastern European Jewish communities that have developed there. He then discusses the ways of the Hasidic Jews, the sect to which Danny belongs, and compares them to the more liberal Jewish sects, to which Reuven belongs. He also begins to develop the two main characters, Danny Saunders and Reuven Malter. Additionally, he establishes Reuven as the first person narrator of the story.

Potok clearly establishes the fact that there is a rivalry amongst the Jews who live in Williamsburg. On the block where Reuven lives, there are three clusters of Jewish inhabitants, each with its own form of Jewish faith, ranging from orthodox to liberal. Each Jewish sect feels it is better than the others. The Hasidic Jews, who are extremely traditional, feel that they are more righteous than everyone else; but there is a division even amongst this sect. One Hasidic sect drinks tea from samovars and speaks in Russian Yiddish; another sect from Southern Poland wears black hats, black coats, black beards, and ear locks.

Although Reuven and Danny are both young Jewish men, they are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Danny's upbringing is very orthodox; he attends a parochial school that is taught in Yiddish and that emphasizes the tenets of the traditional Jewish faith. Reuven's upbringing is much more liberal. He attends a school that is

more secular. His father, an instructor at the "yeshiva" that Reuven attends, gives his son much more physical and intellectual space than Danny enjoys. Because the two boys attend different schools and .....

## **OVERALL ANALYSES**

### **CHARACTER**

**Daniel Saunders** - Daniel (Danny) Saunders is the extremely intelligent son of Reb Saunders, the rabbi of the Hasidic sect in Williamsburg. Danny is also the protagonist of the novel who struggles to understand his father and find himself.

In appearance, Danny looks like a typical Hasidic Jew, wearing ear locks, a skullcap, and a beard. He also has a superior attitude towards the less orthodox Jews in the neighborhood, believing that they are less religious and righteous. When he plays in a baseball game against a team of conservative Jews, Danny is determined to win to prove the Hasids' superiority. During the course of the game, he bats a ball very hard and directly at Reuven Malter, who is injured when the ball hits his face. He has to be taken to the hospital and have an operation on his eye. Danny is remorseful about his behavior and goes to the hospital to apologize to his victim. This begins a close friendship between Reuven and Danny.

In demeanor, Danny is an intense and introspective loner who spends his time studying the Talmud and reading books from the library. Until he and Reuven become close, he has had few friends. As a result,.....

### **PLOT STRUCTURE**

The plot of *The Chosen* is divided into three parts. Book I, from chapter 1 through chapter 4, is largely introductory, presenting the Williamsburg setting and Jewish lifestyle and introducing the main characters and their problems. It also serves to bring Danny and Reuven together so that the rising action of the plot can unfold.

Book II, from chapter 5 through chapter 12, is largely devoted to the developing relationship between Reuven and Danny. Although they have completely opposite backgrounds, which are carefully revealed, they become the closest of friends and help each other with their studies and problems. It is as if Reuven, who enjoys a close relationship with his father, has been "chosen" to help Danny come to terms with the taciturn Rabbi Saunders and to find his place in the world.

Book III, from chapter 13 through chapter 18, leads to the climactic moments of the novel and its consequent outcomes. The war comes to an end, and the American Jews learn about the atrocities committed against the European Jews by Hitler. When most Jews react with Zionist activities, the friendship between Danny and Reuven is temporarily broken by Reb Saunders, due to the liberal politics of Reuven's father. After the state of Israel is approved by the United Nations, Danny dares to resume his friendship with Reuven. He tells him of his plans to become a clinical psychologist and reveals that he has still not been brave enough to tell his father he will not become a rabbi, as expected. In the climax, Reb Saunders breaks his silence with his son. He reveals that he has been concerned about Danny's soul and has known Danny's career plan for a long time. When he blesses Danny's choice of being a psychologist rather than a rabbi, both Danny and Reuven are shocked, but pleased. In the falling action, the rabbi is seen telling his congregation about his son's decision to become a psychologist. Danny is also seen thinking about his father. He realizes the rabbi's deep love for him and considers raising his own future son in the old Hasidic tradition of silence.

The novel ends in comedy. Danny has found himself and accepted his father. As he heads off to study clinical psychology in graduate school, there is a sense of peace and calm for him. The reader is left with the feeling that Danny will certainly be a success. He will also feel closer to his father in the future.

## **THEMES**

### **Major Themes**

**The Importance of Relationships** - A key theme in the novel is the importance of relationships. The book centers on the friendship of Reuven Malter and Danny Saunders. It is a relationship born out of diverse backgrounds. Though both boys are Jewish, Danny is Hasidic, and his family rigidly adheres to the traditions, customs, and beliefs presented in the Talmud. Reuven comes from a more liberal background; his father is a broad-minded, intelligent, and politically active professor. Despite their diversity, the two boys help one another greatly. Reuven longs to become a rabbi, and Danny helps him with the study of the Talmud since his own father is a rabbi. More importantly, Reuven and his father help Danny to come to.....

### **THE MEANING OF THE TITLE**

The "chosen" has several levels of meaning. First, and most obviously, it refers to the Jewish people as the chosen people of God, as clearly indicated in the Old Testament of the Bible. It also can refer to .....

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Who is the protagonist of the novel and what is his antagonist? Support your answer with details.

Compare and contrast Danny and Reuven.....

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