

Freshman Religious Studies Summer Reading

Welcome to the Prep! As a freshman, you will study world religions, like Islam and Buddhism, and the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Scriptures. In order to help you understand the world of Judaism better, your summer reading assignment is **The Chosen** by the well-known Philadelphia-area author, Chaim Potok.

To help you understand the book, look over the following background information.

The story is set in Brooklyn, NY, from 1944 to the mid-1950's. The main characters are Reuven Malter and his father, David, and Danny Saunders and his father, Reb. David Malter is a teacher in a yeshiva (a Jewish school for boys). The Malters believe in fitting in with the culture in which they live and work. Reb Saunders is a Hasidic rabbi, a leader of a very conservative Jewish sect which isolates itself from the rest of society.

This story is about "coming of age", or growing up, not just physically, but emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. Potok develops his story chronologically, but often inserts dreams, visions and voices. Don't be confused by these techniques.

While reading the book, **take notes** on the following questions to prepare for class discussion. Also, write out your answers to **two** of the questions on 8.5 x 11" paper, typed, double-spaced. Limit your essays to 100 words for *each* answer. These papers will be collected.

1. What is your view of God? Is he a stern taskmaster, a kindly parental figure, or does he fit some other description in your mind? Why do you think you have this view?
2. Much of the book is about father-son relationships. Which of the two (Reuven/David and Danny/Reb) better resembles your own relationship with your father? Explain.
3. What are your thoughts on the relationship between Danny and Reuven? Have you ever thought about how you pick your friends? Have you ever had experiences similar to Danny's and Reuven's? Explain.
4. Why do you think it is important that the story opens with an injury to the eye instead of another body part? What does this injury mean or symbolize? The Talmud, a Jewish book of reflections on the bible, says, "We see things not as they are, but as we are." Does this statement help to explain the story's meaning?

You may be viewing selected portions of the movie version of The Chosen in class to help you understand the story and the Jewish culture better. Good luck with this assignment. We hope you enjoyed reading this book.