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Larry LaSalle

WHO IS LARRY LASALLE?

Larry is a mysterious youth worker who has the ability to find and develop the talents of young people; however, beneath the surface there lies a dark and unpleasant secret.



WHAT DOES LARRY DO IN THE NOVEL?

- He arrives in Frenchtown and creates an instant impression (Chapter 5).
- With carefully targeted encouragement he helps young people find unexpected talents (Chapter 5).
- He is predatory and calculating in his approach to Nicole (Chapter 7).
- He always knows what to say for maximum effect (Chapter 11).
- Larry is celebrated as a hero but he has a fatal flaw (Chapter 11).
- Like Francis, Larry too hides his real identity (Chapter 14).
- Even when facing Francis's gun, Larry shows that he still has influence over him (Chapter 14).
- Larry stops Francis from killing him but commits suicide instead (Chapter 14).

HOW IS LARRY DESCRIBED AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Quotation	Means?
'A tall slim man stepped into view, a lock of blond hair tumbling over his forehead, a smile that revealed dazzling movie-star teeth.'	Larry is established as an attractive and glamorous figure. It is as if he has stepped down from the cinema screen as he will appear to do again later. This makes him a natural centre of attention.
'"Good morning," he said. "My name's Larry LaSalle."'	Right from the start Larry is out to create an impression. He enjoys being the centre of attention and the status his role gives him.
'He was our champion and we were happy to be in his presence.'	He wins the respect and the devotion of all the young people because he is good at the things they admire. As their hero they believe that he can do no wrong.
'He applauded her, his eyes looking deeply into hers, as she lay at his feet.'	Larry's behaviour towards Nicole is an important indication of the way he regards young women. He sees himself as dominant and believes that they should be submissive.

Quotation	Means?
'"What's the matter?" Larry LaSalle asked.'	Larry has positive qualities. He is generous and sensitive in his dealings with Francis, offering time to a shy and isolated boy and allowing him to become a champion, boosting his self-esteem.
'We have to keep the world safe for these young people – they are our future.'	This is an indication of the way Larry always tries to say the right thing. Ironically, Nicole must confront a hero who in fact represents danger and will destroy her future.
'Sweet young things.'	The words that he uses here reveal his character. The girls he has abused are not people, but 'things'.
'Does that one sin of mine wipe away all the good things?'	This comment might indicate that Larry does not accept the full extent of what he has done. He doesn't regard it as serious since he thinks that it can be excused.

EXAMINER'S TIP

Always support your points about characters with quotations or detailed references to the text.

★ GRADE BOOSTER

Re-read Chapter 14 and the confrontation between Larry and Francis. What opinion do you have of Larry's final words in this chapter? Think about whether Larry has changed as a character by this point, or whether he is still trying to manipulate Francis.

EXAMINER'S TIP: WRITING ABOUT LARRY

Remember that there is an essential dilemma at the heart of Larry's character. Can we ever take at face value anything that he says? He appears to lack sincerity and honesty. He undoubtedly did many good things in his work as we see in Chapter 5. However, they can never excuse his behaviour as a serial abuser of young women. Through his actions he betrays their trust.

You should indicate that you can see the manipulative elements in his character in his 'grooming' of Nicole. Indicate that he expresses his desire for her in the stylised conventions of dance and then introduces an overtly sexual element.

You must show, as a sophisticated reader, that you are aware that it is difficult to accept anything that Larry says as the truth. Almost everything he says or does is designed to create an effect. Even at the end of his life, when we can see that Larry has changed and cannot face a future as the person he has now become, his desire to control those around him is still displayed.

Notice how Robert Cormier encourages us to look beyond a person's physical appearance. The appearance of some of the characters has been altered forever by the war. We are encouraged to see the feelings of the person beneath.

Always remember that Larry sees himself as a creative figure. In fact he is destructive.

KEY CONNECTION

Read 'The Hero', a poem by Siegfried Sassoon where the mother of a soldier from the First World War and the colonel bringing her the news of his death have very different views of the young man's heroic behaviour.

Understanding the question

Questions in examinations or controlled conditions often need **'decoding'**. Decoding the question helps to ensure that your answer will be relevant and refers to what you have been asked.



TOP TIP UNDERSTAND EXAM LANGUAGE

Get used to exam and essay style language by looking at specimen questions and the words they use. For example:

Exam speak!	Means?	Example
'convey ideas'	'get across a point to the reader'. Usually you have to say how this is done.	The way Cormier describes Francis's injuries conveys the horrible reality of war.
'methods, techniques, ways'	The 'things' the writer does – such as a powerful description, introducing a shocking event, how someone speaks.	The description of the murder of Marie Blanche establishes the atmosphere which surrounds the Wreck Centre.
'present, represent'	1) present: 'the way in which things are told to us' 2) represent: 'what those things might mean underneath'	The writer <i>presents</i> the reader with descriptions of the people of Frenchtown's reaction to the outbreak of war, <i>representing</i> their patriotism and their support of the young people who fight for their country.

TOP TIP 'BREAK DOWN' THE QUESTION

Pick out the **key words** or phrases. For example:

- Question:** How does Robert Cormier use the **character of Francis** to **explore** the **idea of loneliness** in the novel?
- The focus is on **character** (Francis Cassavant) so you will need to talk about him, what he does and how he presents himself and how others react to him.
 - The reference to **'explore the idea of loneliness'** indicates that this is a question about one of the themes in the novel, e.g. the loneliness that Francis experiences both before and after the war.

What does this tell you? **Focus** on Francis and show how his childhood is often solitary and how after the war he isolates himself from contact with others.

TOP TIP KNOW YOUR LITERARY LANGUAGE!

When studying texts you will come across words such as 'theme', '**symbol**', '**imagery**', '**metaphor**', etc. Some of these words could come up in the question you are asked. Make sure you know what they mean before you use them!

Planning your answer

It is vital that you **plan** your response to the controlled assessment task or possible exam question carefully, and then follow your plan, if you are to gain higher grades.



TOP TIP DO THE RESEARCH!

When revising for the exam, or planning your response to the controlled assessment task, collect **evidence** (for example, quotations) that will support what you have to say. For example, if preparing to answer a question on the way Robert Cormier allows us to see the different sides of Larry LaSalle's character, you might list ideas as follows:

Key point	Evidence/quotation	Page/chapter. etc
Larry is very supportive of Francis and ensures that he wins the table tennis competition to boost his confidence.	Francis tells us 'I realized that he was letting me win, was guiding the game with such skill that no one but me realized what he was doing.'	Chapter 7, p. 52

TOP TIP PLAN FOR PARAGRAPHS

Use paragraphs to plan your answer. For example:

- 1 The first paragraph should **introduce** the **argument** you wish to make.
- 2 Then, jot down how the paragraphs that follow will **develop** this argument. Include **details, examples** and other possible **points of view**.
- 3 **Sum up** your argument in the last paragraph.

For example, for the following task:

Question: How does Cormier present the character of Nicole?

- Paragraph 1: *Introduction*, Nicole is important because of the effect she has on Francis and because she provides the link between the two male characters.
- Paragraph 2: *First point*, e.g. Nicole's importance is emphasised in her first appearance. Use of religious images shows that she is a symbol of purity.
- Paragraph 3: *Second point*, e.g. Cormier establishes the goodness of her character. She enjoys Francis's company, she encourages him. She has a playful teasing attitude towards him. She shares her dreams for the future with him.
- Paragraph 4: *Third point*, e.g. Nicole is shown to be attractive and also innocent. She enjoys the attention and status she gets from Larry but doesn't understand his motives. Refer to the dancing and her use of his Christian name.
- Paragraph 5: *Fourth point*, e.g. After the attack she blames Francis. She is angry. She later regrets this, which shows her good nature, but the attack has changed her, as symbolised by the writer's description of her cut hair.
- Paragraph 6: *Conclusion*, e.g. Sum up the character of Nicole.