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# THE CHOCOLATE WAR

A Play in Two Acts

Based on the book  
by  
ROBERT CORMIER

Dramatized  
by  
JOSEPH ROBINETTE



**Dramatic Publishing**

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## A Note from the Playwright

Robert Cormier's brilliantly crafted novel *The Chocolate War* was both a joy and a challenge to dramatize for the stage.

The exquisitely drawn characterizations, placed in a compelling coming-of-age story about young men in conflict at a New England prep school is indeed the stuff of the theatre.

The obvious challenges of bringing a novel from page-to-stage were inherent in *The Chocolate War*: reducing the many characters to a manageable cast size, combining the large number of locales into as few as possible, envisioning a *mise en scene* which would allow for the greatest fluidity of action, and, of course, being true to the original intent and purpose of the author.

As with any great novel, dialogue and description are key elements of the dramatic impact, thus, the original dialogue has been kept intact as much as possible in this dramatization.\* Another device for presenting Cormier's rich prose is the use of an Ensemble, five-to-ten actors, male or female, who often voice the inner thoughts of the characters or comment on the proceedings. The Ensemble was also created to portray many of the smaller roles and offstage voices and to serve as "scene-setters" for the several locales.

In this dramatization, set pieces and props have been kept to a minimum in the style of Chamber Theatre, often referred to as a "theatre of the mind," wherein the emphasis of the presentation is on the word and the action to relay the thoughts and ideas of the drama to the audience.

\*See Production Notes regarding Language and Sensitive Subject Matter.

# THE CHOCOLATE WAR

A Play in Two Acts

For 14-28 Actors (Including an Ensemble of 5-10)\*

## Major Characters

Jerry Renault  
Roland (Goober) Goubert  
Archie Costello  
Brother Leon  
Emile Janza  
Brian Cochran  
Obie  
Carter

## Supporting Characters\*\*

Ellen Barrett  
Gregory Bailey  
Jerry's Father  
David Caroni  
Frankie Rollo  
Hippie

## Minor Characters\*\*

Adano	Darcy
Beauvais	Parmentier
Malloran	Jeff
Santucci	Danny
Tessier	Porter
Williams	LeBlanc
Coach	Brother Eugene (Voice)
Fontaine	Brother Jacques (Voice)

The Time: The 1970s.

The Place: A New England Prep School for Boys.

\*The Ensemble may be played by all males or all females or any combination thereof (see Production Notes).

\*\*All Supporting and Minor Characters may be doubled (or tripled) and/or played by Ensemble Members.



# ACT ONE

## SCENE 1

### An Open Area (Football Field)

*(At Rise: The stage is in darkness. Loud VOICES [ENSEMBLE MEMBERS] are heard amid cries of agony on stage.)*

VOICES. Get him! Get him! Hit him! Hit him! Don't let him get away! Grab him! Take him down! Kill him! Bury him!

*(Two loud whistle blasts are heard from offstage.)*

1st VOICE. They murdered him!

*(The lights come up to reveal an open space containing a tableau of five or six "bodies" piled atop each other. Standing nearby are 10 ENSEMBLE MEMBERS (VOICES)\* who appear to have just arisen from the top of the pile.)*

2nd VOICE. A grenade shattering his stomach.

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\* The ENSEMBLE may be played by as few as five actors. Lines would be redistributed accordingly.

3rd VOICE. Pain in his groin.

4th VOICE. Jelly in his knees.

5th VOICE. Ringing in his ears.

6th VOICE. Hello, hello.

7th VOICE. Anybody there?

8th VOICE. Lonely.

9th VOICE. Abandoned.

10th VOICE. Defenseless.

ALL VOICES. They murdered him!

*(Another whistle blast is heard as a FOOTBALL COACH enters and the tableau dissolves. Arising from the pile are football players wearing helmets and practice gear. Among the players are CARTER, ROBERT [GOOBER] GOUBERT and JERRY RENAULT who is at the bottom of the pile holding a football. JERRY is visibly shaken.)*

COACH. Okay, that's it. Give me the ball. *(JERRY weakly tosses the ball to the COACH.)* Everybody to the showers. *(All begin to leave.)* Not you, Renault. Wait here. I'll be right back.

*(ALL except JERRY, GOOBER and VOICES 1-5, who fade into the background, exit.)*

JERRY. I'm not going to make the team, Goob. He's getting ready to tell me.

GOOBER. You did good, Jerry.

JERRY. They clobbered me all day. Why does he put us freshmen opposite the juniors and seniors?

GOOBER. He's testing us, Jerry. You especially. *(Looking toward offstage.)* Here he comes. I'll wait over there.

*(He exits as the COACH reenters.)*

COACH. How tall are you, Renault?

JERRY. Five nine.

COACH. Weight?

JERRY. One forty-five.

COACH. Soaking wet, I'll bet. What the hell you want to play football for? And quarterback at that... But I got to admit, you hung in there. Show up tomorrow. *(Calling toward offstage.)* Hey, Carter, wait up. I'm thinking about moving you to linebacker! Let's talk it over.

*(He exits as GOOBER reenters, unnoticed by the COACH.)*

GOOBER. What did he say?

JERRY *(delighted, somewhat in disbelief)*. Show ... up ... tomorrow. He said, "Show up tomorrow."

GOOBER. I told you. You made some good passes today. Especially the one to me.

JERRY. You made a great catch, Goober. That was all you.

GOOBER. Let's go shower.

JERRY *(holding his stomach)*. I'll be along.

GOOBER. You okay?

JERRY. Just a little woozy, that's all. I need to catch my breath. *(GOOBER starts to leave.)* Hey. Thanks, Goob.

GOOBER. Sure, Jerry. *(He exits.)*

JERRY *(struggling to pull himself together)*. I'm going to make it. I'm going to make the team.

1st VOICE. Dreamer. *Dreamer.*

JERRY. I am. I *am*... I really feel sick.

2nd VOICE. You took a lot of hits today.

JERRY. I believe I'm going to throw up.

3rd VOICE. Think about something else.

JERRY. Like what?

4th VOICE. Anything. Like that girl at the bus stop.

JERRY. Yeah.

5th VOICE. With the tight sweater.

JERRY. Yeah.

5th VOICE. With those nice, soft, round—

*(JERRY exits quickly, gagging. He is heard retching off-stage. The ENSEMBLE MEMBERS exit, smiling in sympathy. ARCHIE COSTELLO and OBIE, holding a large notebook and pencil, enter.)*

OBIE. Come on, Archie. It's getting late. I've got to get to my job. I'm going to get fired one of these days.

ARCHIE. There are other jobs, Obie.

OBIE. Why did we have to wait so long to do this?

ARCHIE. I wanted to watch football practice.

OBIE. You hate football.

ARCHIE. I hate *all* sports. But I wanted to scout the guys for assignments.

OBIE. Why couldn't *you* write down the assignments today?

ARCHIE. Because that's *your* assignment, Obie. Of course, if you don't want the job, there are plenty of other guys who—

OBIE. No, no. I'm very happy being secretary of the Vigils.

ARCHIE. Because it gives you status, Obie. These assignments have practically made me a legend here at Trinity.

And you have the honor of writing them down. Right?

OBIE. Yeah, Archie.

ARCHIE. Okay then. How many names are on the list?

OBIE (*looking at the notebook*). Seven.

ARCHIE. I promised the Vigils I'd come up with ten names by this afternoon. Let's see—who was that redheaded kid in the backfield? The one who brags a lot.

OBIE. Norman Stanton?

ARCHIE. Yeah, Stanton.

OBIE. Assignment?

ARCHIE (*after a moment*). Sidewalk.

OBIE (*writing*). "Sidewalk." I can't wait to see what you do with that one, Archie.

ARCHIE. It'll be brilliant. Count on it.

OBIE. Two to go. Who's next?

ARCHIE. The guy playing end. The one they call Goober.

OBIE (*writing*). Right. "Robert Goubert." Assignment?

ARCHIE. Brother Eugene's room.

OBIE (*writing*). I'll look forward to *that* one. What's it going to be?

ARCHIE. You'll have to wait to find out—just like everybody else.

OBIE. One more name.

ARCHIE. The kid who just left. The one they kept wiping out all day.

OBIE. Jerry Renault.

ARCHIE. What do you know about him?

OBIE. Anything you want. This book's more complete than the school records. (*He flips through the book.*)

ARCHIE. The Vigils have a history of thorough bookkeeping.

OBIE. Here it is. Renault, Jerome E., freshman, son of James R., pharmacist. Huh-oh.

ARCHIE. What's wrong?

OBIE. Mother died last spring—cancer.

ARCHIE. Poor kid.

OBIE. So, who else? We still need another name.

ARCHIE. Must be hard on him.

OBIE. Archie, who else? I'm really running late.

ARCHIE. You know what that kid needs, Obie? Therapy.

OBIE. Therapy?

ARCHIE. To help him get through this difficult time. Put him down.

OBIE. For crying out loud, Archie. He just lost his mother. Anyway, he's a nobody—a skinny kid who probably won't even make the freshman team.

ARCHIE. Don't let him fool you. He's a tough one. Gets wiped out all day, then gets right back up on his feet. Put him down.

OBIE (*after a pause*). Assignment?

ARCHIE. Let's see. The assignment must fit the kid. That's the beauty of it, Obie... Put him down for the chocolates.

OBIE. How can you make an assignment out of the chocolates?

ARCHIE. Are you doubting the great Archie Costello, Obie? ... Write it down.

OBIE (*writing*). "Renault—chocolates."

ARCHIE. Give me the list. I'll turn it in to Carter. (*OBIE hands him the list.*) Now, you'd better get to work. You don't want to be late. (*Sarcastically.*) I'd sure hate to see you get fired.

(*He exits as five ENSEMBLE MEMBERS enter into the background.*)

6th VOICE. What a bastard.

7th VOICE. Yeah, but he's the big dog.

8th VOICE. The assigner of the Vigils.

9th VOICE. Even more important than the president of the Vigils.

10th VOICE. Because he's brilliant. Hell, he's *God*.

*(OBIE scans the area, then uses the notebook as a pretend football.)*

OBIE. Obie back to pass—he looks—he cocks his arm... I should have gone out for football. I was hot stuff in Pop Warner at St. Joe's. Instead, I end up secretary of the Vigils.

6th VOICE. That's cool.

7th VOICE. It makes you an insider.

8th VOICE. Respected.

9th VOICE. Looked up to.

OBIE. Yeah, but hell, I can't even tell my parents about it... He throws! *(He drops the notebook, then picks it up.)* Oh, man, if I ever lost this book, I'd be dead with the Vigils. I'd have to drop out of Trinity—maybe even leave the whole state of Massachusetts. They'd massacre me. *(Looking toward offstage.)* Hey, that's my bus coming. *(Calling out.)* Archie! Archie! Wave down that bus! I got to catch it! Hold the bus—I know you can hear me! *(He runs a few steps, then stops.)*

10th VOICE. What a bastard.

*(OBIE and the ENSEMBLE MEMBERS exit as the action dissolves to:)*

## SCENE 2

An Open Area (Bus Stop)

*(Several ENSEMBLE MEMBERS enter carrying briefcases, etc., as though going to workplaces. Some exit as five remain at the bus stop in the background. JERRY, carrying a book bag, and ELLEN BARRETT, also holding a book bag, enter from opposite directions and stop at center stage.)*

JERRY *(tentatively)*. Hello—again.

ELLEN. Again?

JERRY. I saw you here at the bus stop last week.

ELLEN. I take the bus when my mom can't drive me to school.

JERRY. I take it every day. My dad has to—

ELLEN *(looking into the distance)*. I can't believe those hippies and flower children over at the Common. They come so early every day.

JERRY. A lot of them sleep over there.

ELLEN. Really? Jeez. What will they do when it gets cold?

JERRY. Borrow some blankets, I guess... Say, my name's—

*(An offstage car horn is heard.)*

ELLEN. Oh, there's Jamie. Her mom's driving her today. Good. *(Waving and yelling.)* I'm coming! I'm coming! *(She exits.)*

JERRY. She didn't even say goodbye.

1st VOICE. She just met you.

JERRY. She didn't actually meet me. I don't even know her name.

2nd VOICE. You'll see her again. Probably right here.

JERRY. What if I do? It doesn't mean she'll like me... I wonder if a girl will *ever* like me.

3rd VOICE. You may have a shot at it, if you ever get out of that all-boys' prep school.

*(A HIPPIE enters and approaches JERRY.)*

HIPPIE. Hey, man.

JERRY. Me?

HIPPIE. Yes, you. Why do you stare at us, man? You think we're in a zoo?

JERRY. I don't stare.

HIPPIE. Yes, you do, man. You and your homework and books and nice shirt and blue-and-white tie. You even had the girl staring at us today. We're not sub-human, man.

JERRY. I didn't say you were.

HIPPIE. You know who's sub-human, man? You. Going to school every day. Coming back home every day, square boy. Already caught in a routine.

JERRY. Excuse me, I've got to watch for the bus.

HIPPIE. Yeah. Don't miss the bus, boy. You're missing a lot of things in the world. Better not miss the bus. *(JERRY starts to walk away.)* Where you going?

JERRY. I think I'll walk to school today.

HIPPIE. Yeah, you do that, square boy. Walk to school today. Break up the old routine for a change. *(He approaches the ENSEMBLE MEMBERS who ignore him.)* Hey, anybody got a little spare change for a bite to eat?

*(He looks toward offstage and calls out.)* Hey, man! Spare a quarter for a cup of coffee? Help take the morning chill off? *(He exits as JERRY watches him.)* Hey, thanks, man. Thanks a lot.

4th VOICE. Square boy.

5th VOICE. Don't miss the bus, boy.

1st VOICE. You're missing a lot of things in this world, boy.

2nd VOICE. Better not miss the bus.

*(JERRY and the ENSEMBLE MEMBERS exit in opposite directions as the action dissolves to:)*

### SCENE 3

#### Brother Leon's Office

*(Two or three ENSEMBLE MEMBERS bring two chairs and a small table into the playing area, then move to the background. BROTHER LEON enters, followed by ARCHIE.)*

ARCHIE. How many boxes?

LEON. Twenty thousand.

*(ARCHIE emits a low whistle, then cuts it off.)*

6th VOICE. Don't whistle. Don't let Brother Leon see you blow your cool.

7th VOICE. Man, he looks tense. Just like most adults. Vulnerable. Running scared.

8th VOICE. That's why he's got you in here right now.

*(LEON motions for ARCHIE to sit, then seats himself.)*

LEON. I know that's a lot of chocolates, but the chocolate sale is an annual event. The boys have come to expect it. They've easily sold ten thousand boxes in other years. Why not twenty thousand this year? And these are special chocolates. A special deal, Archie.

6th VOICE. He called you Archie. Not Costello.

7th VOICE. You're in his office by special invitation.

8th VOICE. He needs you, Archie. He needs you.

ARCHIE. How is it—special?

LEON. I got them at a bargain price. Mother's Day chocolates that didn't sell. Still fresh. Beautiful boxes. All we do is remove the Mother's Day ribbons. They cost a dollar each—we sell them for two.

6th VOICE. Why is he telling you all this?

ARCHIE. Why are you telling—I mean, why are you *selling* twenty thousand this year? Last year it was only ten. *And* we only sold them for a dollar apiece.

LEON. Twenty was the deal the man made me. *And* the price was right. Now, I'm convinced that four hundred boys can sell fifty boxes each, *if*—

7th VOICE. Here it comes.

ARCHIE. *If*?

LEON. *If* I can get your help, Archie.

8th VOICE. He means the Vigils' help.

6th VOICE. But he can't say the word.

ARCHIE. How can *I* help?

LEON. By getting behind the sale. Private schools today—Catholic and otherwise—are struggling. Many are clos-