

Let's Talk About ...

NOT FOR CHILDREN ONLY



“Books written for children are intrinsically humanizing to any reader and are no less affecting than books written exclusively for adults. Adults also enjoy reading again books they loved as children.” – Elizabeth R. Baer, for the American Library Association, 1984

Featured book: *I Am the Cheese* by Robert Cormier (1977) is a starkly contemporary novel, touching on issues such as government control, the ethics of psychiatry, and organized crime—all topics that were previously deemed taboo in children’s literature. Cormier utilizes a tightly controlled, three-strand narrative to tell his chilling story. Hence, the reader must shift among young Adam Farmer’s first-person account of his experiences, a third-person description of Adam’s life, and excerpts of taped interviews between Adam and a mysterious man named Brint. The novel is at once a mystery, a spy/counterspy story, and a classic quest book in which a boy searches for his father. But unlike Cassie Logan, and unlike the archetypal hero of most quests, Adam Farmer appears to be retreating from consciousness, from a resolution to his odyssey. Cormier uses his reference to “The Farmer in the Dell” in his title in a bitter and ironic fashion. It would be unfair to reveal the conclusion of this novel; suffice it to say that Cormier has been criticized for his bleak endings (American Library Association, 1984).

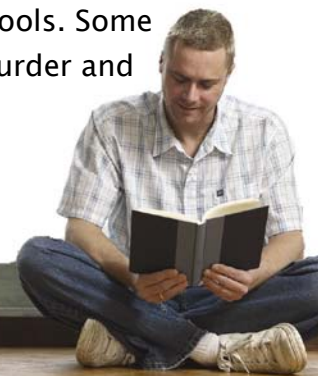
Discussion Questions: [compiled from Let’s Talk About It program scholars]

1) Science fiction or reality? This novel was published in 1977. In what ways is it both a product of its time and a harbinger of things to come?

2) What is this novel about? Consider each perspective described below. Which, in your view, describes the book best?

- The individual is ignorant of and at the mercy of a governmental bureaucracy that is big and mysterious. Citizens have become disenfranchised; democracy is an illusion.
- Adam’s plight symbolizes the state of contemporary adolescence, involving a search for identity in a hostile, uncaring world.
- The novel is a chronicle of an adolescent’s mental breakdown. Adam’s narrative reveals that he is paranoid, claustrophobic. Can we trust him as a narrator?

3) This book has been on the “censored” list in some communities and schools. Some parents have objected to the depiction of a U.S. government engaged in murder and other surreptitious activity. Do you agree this book is “dangerous”?



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