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English 404 - Adolescent Literature

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The Chocolate War - Robert Cormier

1) Age Group

This book is targeted towards kids age 12-16. While older kids will enjoy it, kids just starting, or on the verge of starting high school will most identify with these characters. The style of writing is (in some cases) fairly raw.

2) What is the theme of the story?

The primary themes of this book are bullying and conformance. In addition, the main character struggles against corruption in both the student body at his school and amongst the administration.

3) List 3 books you could recommend to a child who likes this story and wants to read more.

In this case, I've suggested three other books that I feel are very real and uncensored in their styles and writings, so while they don't necessarily share the same themes, the writing styles or semiotics are similar.

J. D. Salinger's *Catcher In The Rye*

Carolyn Cooney's *The Terrorist*

S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*

4) Review

The Chocolate War follows the atypical protagonist Jerry through his first, incredibly difficult year at an all boys high school. He's being raised by his single father, who is largely not present, as he works odd hours, and he is still dealing with the passing of his mother. Very quickly, Jerry comes under the scrutiny of The Vigils, the gang that runs the school through fear and intimidation. The new headmaster over promises that the students will sell twice as much during the school's fundraiser, selling chocolate bars. Jerry finds himself stuck in the middle of a power play between the school's administration and The Vigils, determining who really controls the school. When Jerry doesn't pick a side, he's forced to endure the cruel punishments that are dished out, which, as anyone who has suffered through bullying in high-school, can include physical harm. Ultimately, Jerry is faced with the choice: conform or suffer.

Works Cited

Cooney, Caroline. *The Terrorist*. Open Road Media, 2012. Print.

Cormier, Robert. *The Chocolate War*. Dell, 1975. Print.

Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders*. Speak, 2006. Print.

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Little, Brown and Company, 1991. Print.