

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 of *The Chocolate War* vividly portrays the power dynamics at play within the school, specifically showcasing the influence of the Vigils, a powerful student group led by the manipulative Archie. The chaos in Brother Jacques' U.S. History class serves as a stark demonstration of this control. The chapter opens with a disruptive sequence that has become routine for the students. Whenever Brother Jacques mentions the word "environment," the class erupts into a bizarre display of energy, with students jumping up and down in silence. This seemingly random outburst is no accident but a planned prank by Archie, a spectacle that has been unfolding for over a week. Brother Jacques, a young and relatively inexperienced teacher, is clearly unsettled by the bizarre behavior but chooses not to intervene, perhaps thinking it is just a temporary joke. While the teacher remains passive, Obie, a member of the Vigils, observes the absurdity of the situation. He knows full well that Archie is the mastermind behind the disruption, but the rest of the class chooses to feign ignorance and go along with the spectacle. Obie feels frustrated by the entire scenario, caught between his involvement in the Vigils and his increasing discomfort with Archie's manipulation of the situation.

Despite the rising tension, Archie pushes forward with his plans, turning the disruption into a larger campaign against Brother Jacques. The aim of this prank, as explained by Archie, is to reduce the teacher's vocabulary by making the class mock him every time he uses the word "environment." Though Obie is not entirely on board with the idea, he is reluctantly drawn into it, knowing that he will be tasked with ensuring that the word is mentioned repeatedly by the teacher. This responsibility weighs heavily on Obie, who is exhausted by the endless manipulation he must help carry out. He is increasingly disillusioned with Archie's need to control every aspect of the class and his peers. The students, while participating in the prank, are not fully invested in it.

Most of them, like Obie, are beginning to recognize the futility of their actions, yet they continue to go along with Archie's whims, understanding that resistance would only lead to further complications. The classroom becomes a stage for Archie's dominance, and Obie finds himself becoming more irritated with every passing moment, realizing that his involvement in these pranks is diminishing his sense of agency.

The power balance shifts unexpectedly in the latter part of the chapter when Brother Jacques, who has clearly been informed of the situation, decides to take control in a surprising way. Rather than allowing the students to continue mocking him, he begins to play along with their antics, encouraging them to jump up whenever the word "environment" is mentioned. This reversal of roles catches Obie off guard and adds a layer of complexity to the dynamic. Instead of being the orchestrator of the joke, Obie becomes a passive participant in it, realizing that the joke he had been so carefully maintaining is no longer under his control. The shift in power creates a deep sense of discomfort for Obie, and as he watches the students play along, he feels a mix of anger and humiliation. His role in the prank, which he had been performing out of obligation to Archie, has been undermined, and he now sees how powerless he is in the face of the teacher's unexpected response. When Obie leaves the classroom, his frustration boils over. He vows to get revenge on Archie, who remains unfazed by the chaos he has caused, smiling as if nothing is out of the ordinary. This moment of rebellion against Archie's control represents a small but significant shift in Obie's mindset. His anger is not just directed at the prank but also at the manipulation and power plays that have been a constant part of his life within the Vigils.

This chapter encapsulates the broader themes of authority, control, and resistance that define the environment at Trinity. The manipulation of the students by Archie and the unexpected counterattack by Brother Jacques illustrate the complexity of power dynamics within the school. While the students are often portrayed as pawns in Archie's schemes, Brother Jacques's sudden shift in tactics reminds them that even the most seemingly passive figures have the ability to reclaim control. The absurdity of the situation underscores the tension between the students' desire to break free from the authority imposed on them and the teachers' ability to respond to their antics. In the

end, Chapter 20 serves as a turning point for Obie, who begins to question his role within the Vigils and the broader power structures at play in his life. His internal conflict deepens as he confronts the consequences of his participation in these manipulations and realizes that the rebellion against authority that he had once supported may not always be as righteous as it seems.

