Through the use of memories and flashbacks, the narrator is able to introduce a range of characters whose reported comments and actions give the reader different perspectives on what it means to be a hero, one of the key themes of the novel.

In later chapters of this book, you will look in detail at the main characters in the novel and its major themes – aspects that determine what any book is really about. In many ways, the story of the novel is the least important aspect of it from the point of view of the demands of your assessment. Nevertheless, it is impossible to reveal a good understanding of the novel in an exam without having a very firm grasp on its plot and action.

**Events in chronological order**

In the list below, the major events or episodes of the plot – Francis’s story – are outlined in chronological order.

Before the book begins:

- Grenier Hall is closed following the shooting of a bride by her jilted fiancé.
- Francis’s mother and baby brother die (Francis is six).

Within the book:

- Francis first sees Nicole Renard. It is ‘love at first sight’ for Francis (who is 12).