

Hook, line, and
sinker: the one that
got away in the
chosen



In Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, a quote by psychologist Karl Menninger appears in the dedication. It goes, "When a trout rising to a fly gets hooked and finds himself unable to swim about freely, he begins a fight which results in struggles and splashes and sometimes an escape... It is hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one." In terms of Potok's novel, Menninger's words hold substantial significance. Not only can Danny — with his future decided for him — and Reuven, who is able to choose his own path, be taken as the novel's hooked and free fish respectively, but the quote itself also parallels one of the story's morals.

Being dragged ceaselessly towards a predetermined future, Danny symbolizes the hooked fish, as he must become a rabbi and take over when his father steps down. In the hospital, for instance, Danny and Reuven converse briefly about what they plan to be when they are adults. Reuven asks, "Are you going to take your father's place?" leading Danny to respond, "I have no choice. It's an inherited position" (Potok 69). With this particular exchange, it becomes quite clear that Danny has been "hooked" by his father's expectations of him. His inability to escape these expectations is one of the facets of his character that defines him as a hooked fish. Furthermore, during Reb Saunders's sermon, Danny must realize and point out any errors his father makes. Danny says, "It is written in the name of Rabbi Yaakov, not Rabbi Meir," and everybody in the synagogue murmurs and marvels at his intelligence (135). Clearly, the other synagogue attendees look upon Danny's correction with a sort of reverence, as if their murmurs are saying, "Yes, he's the one who should be our next rabbi." However, what they don't understand is that he does not wish to go down that path; he wants to trek

— or in this case, swim — a route of his own making. Their blindness to his struggles against the hook that is his future is another aspect of why Danny represents the hooked fish; they others do not understand what he is going through.

With the freedom to swim whichever way he chooses, Reuven represents Menninger's free fish. It is during the same scene in which Danny expresses his lack of choices that Reuven says that he wants to become a rabbi. " I may become a rabbi," Reuven proclaims, and when Danny asks him why, he responds, " Why not?" (69). Reuven's willingness and desire to be a rabbi, in tandem with his ability to do so, directly contradict Danny's trapped state. Thus, the presence of freedom characterizes Reuven as a free fish.

Additionally, when Reuven talks to his father about being invited over to Reb Saunders's house, he finally realizes that it is all in an attempt to talk to Danny through him (as he cannot do it himself due to the silence between them.) " He wants to talk to me about Danny," Reuven eventually understands (277). Up until this point, Reuven misinterprets the reasoning behind being invited to the Saunders's residence, just as a free fish misinterprets the struggles of the hooked. Reuven cannot see that Reb and Danny need him there in order to reconcile and break free from the hook. As per Menninger's quotation, the free fish — Reuven — misunderstands the hooked fish's — Danny's — ordeals.

Although it would be easy to simply say Danny is the hooked fish and Reuven, the free, the significance of the quote extends past merely categorizing the characters, also representing and elaborating upon the story's moral. For example, Danny and Reuven are having a conversation <https://assignbuster.com/hook-line-and-sinker-the-one-that-got-away-in-the-chosen/>

when Danny asks if Reuven has ever felt trapped. Danny describes being trapped as “ the most hellish, choking, constricting feeling in the world,” and he vows to someday escape it (202). His words relate to the quote in that both he and the fish will never quit fighting; they will wriggle and writhe, strain and struggle, until finally, they are either free or unable to continue the fight. Eventually, Reb Saunders, Reuven, and Danny sit down, and Reb reveals that he knows of Danny’s true desires. He tells Danny through Reuven, “ Let my Daniel become a psychologist. I have no more fear” (287). Just as in the quote by Menninger, Danny struggles and pulls against the destiny that hooks him, and in the end he breaks free. Therefore, the quote is relevant in terms of the moral, as both it and the story are saying the same thing: Keep fighting and someday, the line might snap and a hooked fish can become free.

Menninger’s hooked fish is, ultimately, represented by Danny, and his free fish by Reuven; his quote is significant because of that, as well as because of its relation to the moral of Potok’s *The Chosen*. As he has no say in what he will become, Danny is hooked. Since Reuven does have a choice, he is free. Furthermore, the quote itself relates to the story’s moral since both protagonists indicate that if a hooked fish fights, then there is a chance that it will escape. The thing about being a hooked fish, though, is that only those that struggle against the line will ever have a chance of becoming free. Thus, what does it matter whether or not the other fish understand? What does it matter if there is still the possibility that the fisherman will win? In the end, the only thing that matters is that a fish that fights garners the chance to become free, and freedom is worth fighting for.