7th Grade Introduction to Catholicism Summer Reading Guide
The Power of the Powerless by Christopher de Vinck

****This Reading Guide is meant to be a resource to help as you read over the summer. You are not expected to come into class with these answers filled out on the first day, but it will be helpful for you to look at this as you read and use it as you prepare for your summer reading assessment that your teacher will assign after the first day of classes.****

Main Characters

Chris de Vinck; Roe Lauren; John Fullman; Oliver; Chris's Parents; Anthony; Paul

Questions to Consider:

1. What is Oliver's condition? What kind of life does he have? What is his personality like?

2. How do Oliver's parents react when they first learn about Oliver's condition? What advice do the doctors give to Chris's parents? What does Chris think about all of this?

3. How is the publication of Chris's newspaper article, "The Power of the Powerless," a turning point in his life? What are some of the consequences of the article being published?

4. What is the story of Lauren's short life? What effect does her death have on her father, and how does it provide comfort and peace for him?

5. What is Anthony's condition? What do his parents decide to do when they learn about Anthony's condition? What power does Anthony have on his parents' lives, and how does he change their views on life?

6. In Chapter 9, Chris' mother tells the story of how Oliver impacted her life. What lessons does she learn about despair and serving others? What influence does Oliver have on her faith?

7. How is John Fullman's life transformed by reading Oliver's story? What is his life like before this event, and how does it change after he reads Chris' article?

8. In Chapter 12, Chris recalls Oliver's funeral, and the eulogy given by the priest. How does the priest's speech relate Oliver's story to the Christian message? What are some connections between Oliver's life and Christianity?

9. What is Paul's condition? What effect does Paul have on his family, and how does he change them? What important transformation does Paul cause in his brother? How does his brother change in the way that he views and treats Paul throughout his life?

10. Which character, of those listed above, do you feel is the most compelling and touching? Why? Can you relate to him/her at all? Have you ever known anyone like these people?

Key Themes

1. What is the significance of the title, *The Power of the Powerless*? Why do you think the author chose this title? What does it mean? What is the "power" that the "powerless" individuals in the book have? Think of some specific examples from different people's stories in the text.

2. Throughout the book, the author reminds us of the importance of making choices. He says that although we cannot always control or decide what happens in our lives, we always have the ability to choose how we respond to what happens. He writes, "So much depends upon how we choose to see things and events" (2). Find some examples from the book of when someone has a choice of how to see things, or how to respond, and describe the consequences of this choice.

3. How is Christopher de Vinck able to find the extraordinary in the ordinary? Give some examples of where de Vinck finds the sacredness in everyday life. How is de Vinck able to have this unique gift?

4. The author expresses the view that all life is sacred. He believes that life, in all its forms, is valuable, and that valuing life, itself, is a choice. How does he define life? Give an example from the book to illustrate. What does it mean to say that we have a choice whether or not to value life?

5. In repeatedly detailing suffering, Christopher de Vinck emphasizes the idea that people always ask, "How can this happen to us?" or "Why me?" Think of some instances in the book where this takes place. Is this a normal reaction for people to have? Does the author think we should react this way?

6. Christopher de Vinck believes there is an ultimate plan for our lives, and a reason for why things happen, even if we cannot understand it at first. How does he believe the lives of people like Oliver, Lauren, and Anthony fit into this plan? How is Chris's trust that things happen for a reason connected to his faith in God?