Name: Date:

*The Godfather*

**Directions:** Actively read the following article using the I’s and/or C’s method. You must have 3 I’s &/or C’s with comments by the conclusion of the reading. Then answer the question that follows in complete sentences.

**About the author**

Mario Puzo was born in the Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood of New York City in 1920 to Italian born parents. He was brought up in an Italian ghetto amid poverty. From an early age, Puzo wanted to be a writer—a dream that earned the scorn of his family. However, as a young man, he pursued his dream, despite his family’s complaints, and eventually he managed to become moderately successful by writing short stories and two literary novels that earned him a meager amount of money. Then, at the age of forty-five, Puzo set out to write a book that would make him rich. It took him three years to research and write *The Godfather*. A major Hollywood film studio bought the film rights to the book at the manuscript stage. *The Godfather* became an instant bestseller, and within a year, it had achieved worldwide fame. Puzo went on to collaborate on the screenplay of the film with its director, Francis Ford Coppola. For their efforts and achievements, the two men won an Oscar in 1973. Puzo went on to write other books throughout his career, including *Fools Die* (1978), *The Sicilian* (1984), *The Fourth K* (1991) and *The Last Don* (1996), but none of them came close to achieving the same level of success that *The Godfather* had attained. Two of his other film-writing successes included *Superman I* and *Superman II*, which helped to further his international fame. Puzo died of heart failure in July 1999 at his home in Long Island, New York.

**About the film**

Francis Ford Coppola’s masterpiece, *The Godfather*, is universally recognized as one of the greatest films of all time. From the start, both Puzo and Coppola envisaged the famous actor Marlon Brando playing the role of Don Corleone. Brando accepted the pair’s invitation to play the Godfather and managed to deliver one of the most powerful performances in film history. In fact, the ‘sit down’ scene, in which Don Corleone meets with several criminals at the beginning of the film, is widely believed to be one of the greatest moments in film history. His mesmerizing portrayal of the Mafia boss earned him an Academy Award for Best Actor. However, Brando refused to accept the award and boycotted the ceremony to protest the way Native Americans were being portrayed by Hollywood at the time. He was only the second actor to turn down a highly coveted Academy Award. Finishing at almost three hours in length, *The Godfather* remains faithful to the book—although many of the subplots had to be dropped in order to focus the story on the transfer of power from Don Corleone to his youngest son, Michael. The young, virtually unknown actor Al Pacino took on the role of Michael, and by the end of the film, he had managed to portray the character’s astonishing transformation from idealistic war hero to hardened Mafia boss. Coppola, who is himself an Italian, succeeded in giving the film an authentic Italian feel. He said, ‘It was my intention to make this an authentic piece of film about gangsters who were Italian—how they lived, how they behaved and the way they treated their families and celebrated their rituals.’ The film won three Academy Awards, establishing itself as one of the greatest movies in history. It spawned two sequels, both of which earned widespread critical acclaim.

**Summary**

Telling the story of a mighty New York Mafia family, *The Godfather* became a worldwide sensation when it was published in 1969, and again when it was released as a film in 1972. Its author, Mario Puzo, had succeeded in creating an epic work of imagination that nonetheless captured the very essence of what it was like to be part of the Mafia—the Italian criminal organization whose inner workings had previously been so carefully hidden from public view. It gave people a chance to see what really went on behind the scenes within this subculture. *The Godfather* tells the story of two generations of the Corleone family. The head of the family—or the ‘Godfather’—is Don Vito Corleone, who is the leader of a vast criminal empire. He was born into a poor family in Sicily, but his family moved to New York, where he succeeded in building a criminal empire, sending his underlings to wound and murder people—but only when his opponents refused to be ‘reasonable’. In this way, for behaving honorably within the Mafia’s standards of behavior, he managed to earn the respect of the other Mafia families. In short, Don Corleone was both feared and respected. Corleone had four children. His oldest son, Sonny, is a violent and impulsive man who lacks his father’s far-sighted genius. His second son, Fredo, is a weak and impressionable man who ultimately chooses to betray his family. His youngest son, Michael, wants no part in his father’s business. However, other rival Mafia families, sensing that there are internal conflicts within the Corleone family, almost succeed in assassinating the Godfather, and as a result, Michael is sucked into a raging whirlpool of murder, violence, and betrayal. The novel ultimately charts Michael’s transformation from an innocent, idealistic young war hero to a ruthless Mafia chief.

**Background**

Living by old-world laws in the new world: Sicily is an island off the coast of Italy. In the past, the law of the island centered on revenge—‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. The Corleone family immigrated to the United States from Sicily, and Vito Corleone takes with him his belief that the law won’t be able to protect him or his family. Therefore, he takes it upon himself to protect anyone who turns to him for help—provided they agree to acknowledge him as boss, overlord, or Godfather, and to repay him by doing him a ‘favor’ when the time comes.

**Directions:** Please complete the following question in complete sentences.

1.) Have ever seen the film version of *The Godfather*? Did you like the film? Why or why not? If you have not seen the movie, does it sound interesting to you? Why or why not?