

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas

by
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Book Information

John Boyne, The Boy in the Striped Pajamas

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216 Pages

Book Level: 5.8

Interest Level: UG

Bored and lonely after his family moves from Berlin to a place called "Out-With" in 1942, Bruno, the son of a Nazi officer, befriends a boy in striped pajamas who lives behind a wire fence.

Topics: History, Holocaust; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; People, Jewish; People, Nazis; Recommended Reading, IRA - Young Adults' Choice; Recommended Reading, YALSA Best Books for YA

Main Characters

Bruno a nine-year-old boy, the son of a Nazi officer, who befriends a Jewish boy in a concentration camp

Father Bruno and Gretel's father; a Nazi officer; commandant at Auschwitz

Gretel the twelve-year-old sister of Bruno

Lieutenant Kotler a cruel officer at Auschwitz

Mother Bruno and Gretel's mother

Pavel a Jewish prisoner who works inside Bruno's house

Shmuel a nine-year-old Jewish boy in a concentration camp

the Fury Bruno's mispronunciation of the Führer; Adolf Hitler

Vocabulary

applied laid or placed upon or in; put upon or to; employed or made use of

banister a railing at the side of a staircase; a handrail

determined having set a firm goal or made a firm decision; giving full strength, concentration, or attention to; showing firm intent

exploration a journey of discovery; an investigation or search; an expedition

frothy covered with foam or bubbles; having a mass of small bubbles on the surface; foamy or bubbly; sudsy

frustration helpless anger; annoyance or irritation at being thwarted, hindered, or criticized; anger resulting from failure or from being slowed down or prevented from doing something

irritably in an annoyed or complaining manner; in a cranky or testy way; with anger

lice small wingless parasites, usually living in the fur of animals or hair of people, that feed off a host

medicinal intended or used to treat a sickness or illness; having the power to cure or provide relief from a sickness or illness

plaque a flat, thin slab of metal, clay, or similar hard material that can be decorated and used as an ornament or a memorial; an inscribed tablet that can be hung on a wall

prefer to like better; to value more highly; to favor; to be partial to; to opt for

presumed thought of as true; assumed to be correct; took or taken for granted; accepted without proof or certainty; guessed

sarcasm a teasing remark, often ironic, that is intended to be cruel or make fun; the act of making fun of someone by saying the opposite of what one means; cruel, demeaning, or mocking humor

suitable fitting; correct; proper; appropriate

wardrobe a small room, closet, or cabinet used to store clothing

Synopsis

Nine-year-old Bruno and his family must move from their lovely home in Berlin to a new house in an unfamiliar place called "Out-With." Although Bruno is unaware of it, he and his family are living at Auschwitz, a concentration camp. His father is the commandant of the camp and has told Bruno that certain areas are "Out of Bounds At All Times and Without Exceptions." Unable to fight his adventuresome spirit, however, Bruno ventures forth into the unknown one afternoon.

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He comes upon a fence that he follows until he sees a young boy sitting on the other side. The shoeless boy is wearing striped pajamas and a cloth cap. Bruno also notices that the boy is wearing an armband with a star on it. Bruno makes fast friends with the boy, Shmuel, and they quickly discover that they share the same birthday. The boys discuss their families and where they are from. Bruno does not understand why so many people are on the other side of the fence, nor does he comprehend their living conditions.

Bruno continues to explore the woods near his house and often finds himself at the fence spending time with Shmuel. Bruno brings him food, and he laments the fact that they cannot explore together or play a game of football. Shmuel confides in Bruno that he is unable to find his father and is worried. Bruno vows to help Shmuel look for his father. Shmuel promises to get Bruno some pajamas so that he will blend in on his side of the fence.

One fateful day, Bruno sheds his clothes, dons the pajamas, and sneaks onto Shmuel's side of the fence. As the boys search for Shmuel's father, the soldiers herd the prisoners, Bruno among them, into the gas chambers where they meet their untimely death hand in hand.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Literary Analysis

The author refers to THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS as a fable. In what ways is the story a fable?

The characters are not well developed. The story tries to teach a lesson. The story is fairly short and simply written.

Inferential Comprehension

To truly understand THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS, the reader has to bring some knowledge of the Holocaust to the story. What are some of the things that are only implied, hinted at, or require prior knowledge to bring meaning to this story?

Answers will vary but could include the following. Out-With was actually the concentration camp Auschwitz. The Fury was Adolf Hitler, the Führer. Lieutenant Kotler could have been arrested because his father had left the Fatherland, probably in opposition to Hitler. Maria overheard Mother complaining about "the Fury" coming to dinner, and Mother was afraid because Maria could have turned her in as a traitor. The Jewish people in the camp received very little, if any, food. The soldiers beat them and called them names. The room Bruno and Shmuel entered was a gas chamber.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

Understanding Historical and Cultural Factors

Differentiating Fact and Opinion Differentiating Fact and Opinion

Making Inferences Making Inferences

Comparing and Contrasting Compare and Contrast