



The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Context – *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was written by John Boyne and was published in 2006.

John Boyne – John Boyne is an Irish novelist, whose works have been published in over 50 languages. He was born and raised in Dublin, and studied English Literature in Trinity College in the City. He earned a Master's degree in creative writing at the University of East Anglia, where he won the Curtis Brown award for his writing. He wrote novels for adults until 2004, after which he published *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* in 2006. Boyne has also wrote about 70 short stories.



The Holocaust – The Holocaust was a genocide committed around the time of World War II, by Nazi Germany and its perpetrators. Throughout this time, approximately 6 million Jews, alongside hundreds of thousands of other persecuted groups, were systematically murdered. Originally, Jews and other groups were separated from mainstream society, placed in ghettos and detention sites. Following the 'Final Solution,' they were sent to concentration camps, from which many never returned.



Adolf Hitler – Adolf Hitler was the leader of Nazi Germany between 1934 and 1945 – the years throughout the Holocaust and World War II. As a dictator, Hitler instigated World War II with his aggressive foreign policy. He was referred to as 'The Führer.' Under the racially motivated ideology that he created across Germany, the Nazi regime was responsible for the death of millions of Jews and other 'Untermenschen' (undesirables). In addition to this, around 19 million prisoners of war were killed, and millions of other in unprecedented warfare.



Concentration Camps – A concentration camp is a place in which a government forces people to live without trial. Conditions in the concentration camps run by Nazi Germany were awful, with many dying of diseases, starvation, or random executions by guarding soldiers. Prisoners were given little (if any food) and had all personal items taken from them. In addition to this, many concentration camps (such as Auschwitz) held gas chambers in which millions of prisoners were ruthlessly exterminated.



Main Characters – Consider what Boyne intended through his characterisation of each of the below...

Bruno – Bruno is the lead protagonist of the novel, and although the narration is third-person in style, it is written from his viewpoint. At the start of the text, he is an innocent 9 year old boy living in Berlin. He is very sheltered and naïve, and only begins to mature very slightly as the family are moved to the concentration camp setting, in line with his father's job. Bruno's experiences juxtapose the ordinary priorities of a 9 year old boy with the horrors of war.

Gretel – Gretel is Bruno's 12 year old sister, who he frequently refers to as a 'Hopeless Case.' Although she is slightly older and wiser than Bruno, she is frequently patronising towards him (and is often as innocent in important matters as he is). Before the move, she is interested in dolls, however following her tutorage from Herr Liszt, she becomes obsessed with the changing politics of World War II. This is perhaps influenced by her attractions towards Lieutenant Kotler.

Quote: "his eyes opened wide and his mouth made the shape of an O" (Chapter 2)

Quote: "We're the opposite. Yes, that's it. We're the opposite." (Chapter 16)

Shmuel – The boy from whom the book takes its name, Shmuel is Bruno's Jewish friend who is a prisoner in the concentration camp. Born on the same day as Bruno, he and Bruno become friends through a chance meeting during one of Bruno's explorations. Shmuel is extremely thin due to his malnourishment in the camp, and he quickly gobbles up all of the food that Bruno brings to him. Shmuel seems to know much more about the realities of the war than Bruno, but is too even-tempered to challenge Bruno's blasé comments.

Lieutenant Kotler – Lieutenant Kotler is a young soldier at the camp who works for Bruno's father. He is well-dressed, apparently good-looking, and has striking blond hair – he therefore seems to fit the ideology of an Aryan male. He is cruel and violent to the prisoners, and taunts Bruno by ruffling his hair and calling him 'little man.' Kotler is eventually transferred away from Auschwitz when Bruno's father discovers that Kotler's father, a literature professor, fled Germany at the start of the war.

Quote: "Bruno was sure that he had never seen a skinnier or sadder boy in his life..." (Chapter 10)

Quote: "Lieutenant Kotler grew very angry with Pavel and no one...stepped in to stop him" (Chapter 13)

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Innocence and Ignorance – The story is told from the viewpoint of Bruno, who is young and naïve. As a result, he is unaware (or partially unaware) of the true extent of the events taking place around him. He is oblivious a number of important factors in the war, for example 'The Fury' (his mispronunciation of 'The Führer') and 'Out-with' (Auschwitz). As a result, the reader is forced to infer a number of the more horrific images from the story. Through Bruno, Boyne is able to mirror the ignorance that many enforced on themselves.



Complicity – Although few of the characters are explicitly mentioned as supporters of the Nazi party, most of them end up complying with the regimes goals and ideals – primarily through a sense of duty, a fear, or apathy. For example, Mother is not happy with Father's new job at the camp, yet does not actively fight to prevent him from taking it. Much of this is through her moral obligation to her husband, and role in a patriarchal society. Through characters such as Mother, Boyne demonstrates how ordinary, otherwise-kind people became compliant with the horrors of the Holocaust.



Chapter-by-Chapter Summary – Alongside key quotations.

Chapters 1-4

Bruno comes home one day to be told by his mother that they are moving house. He is extremely disgruntled by this, but she explains that it is a necessity to move far away due to his Father's job in the army. Bruno hates the new house, which has none of the features of the old house, which he loves. Both Mother and Maria (the maid) appear not to like the house, but do not say so explicitly. Bruno sees Lieutenant Kotler for the first time, and thinks that he looks strict. Bruno and Gretel learn that the new place is called 'Out-With.' From a window, they can see all of the people in the camp wearing striped pyjamas.

"We don't have the luxury of thinking," said Mother. "...Some people make all the decisions for us."



Chapters 5-8

Bruno decides to speak to his father about his displeasure. He recalls how The Fury once came to dinner. He also remembers seeing a train crammed with people heading to Out-With. Bruno's Father understands Bruno's concerns, but tells him that there is no choice in the matter. After a few weeks at Out-With, Bruno decides to construct a swing. He asks Kotler for help – Kotler barks at an old man who now waits on the family (Pavel) to get him a tyre. Bruno soon falls off and scrapes his knee. Pavel helps him, and reveals that he was a doctor before he came to Out-With. Bruno's mother returns, and looks uncomfortable. She says to Pavel that she will claim to have bandaged Bruno up.

"Ah, those people," said Father, nodding his head and smiling slightly. "Those people...well, they're not people at all, Bruno."



Chapters 9-11

Father decides that Bruno and Gretel should resume their studies, and calls on a man named Herr Liszt to act as their private tutor. Herr Liszt chastises Bruno for not knowing much about History or the Fatherland. One day, Bruno goes out exploring beyond the garden. He is about to turn back when he meets Shmuel sitting at the other side of the fence. The boy is wearing the striped pyjamas. Bruno asks him lots of questions, and they realise that they have the exact same birthday. The two begin to talk more about each other's' lives, and strike up a friendship.

"Bruno was sure that he had never seen a skinnier or sadder boy in his life but decided that he had better talk to him."



Chapters 12-15

Shmuel tells Bruno more about how he came to live in the camp, including separation into the ghetto in Krakow, and the journey to the camp. Their friendship develops over the weeks, and they realise that there is space under the fence to slip under. At dinner that evening, Father realises that Kotler's father deserted Germany at the start of the war. Under the pressure of questioning, Kotler beats Pavel after he spills wine. Bruno is shocked to find Shmuel in the house cleaning glasses one day. He gives Shmuel food, but Kotler catches him eating it. Bruno then lies by stating that he did not give Shmuel the food.

"What happened then was... unexpected and extremely unpleasant. Lieutenant Kotler grew very angry with Pavel and no one...stepped in to stop him doing what he did, even though none of them could watch. Even though it made Bruno cry and Gretel grow pale."

Chapters 16-17

Bruno's grandmother dies. Kotler is relocated. Bruno and Shmuel meet again and Bruno apologises. Bruno contracts lice and has to have his head shaven. Bruno's father and mother argue more, until it is agreed that the family (except Father) should be moved back home.

"When I think about it, perhaps she is right. Perhaps this is not a place for children."



Chapters 18-20

Shmuel reveals that he has lost his father, and is very upset. Bruno suggests that Shmuel gets him a pair of striped pyjamas so he can crawl under the fence. When Bruno dresses into them, the boys look more similar. They go to try and find Shmuel's father in the camp. Bruno is shocked by how dreadful conditions are. With many others, the boys are swept into a room, where they are locked in and it goes dark. The family search endlessly for Bruno, and one day his Father finds the clothes and understands what has happened, to his utter despair.

"Of course all this happened a long time ago and nothing like that could ever happen again. Not in this day and age."



Boyne's Literary Devices

Simile	"It was as if he was the conductor of a barbershop quartet." (Chapter 5)
Imagery	"colorful shop fronts" and "leeks and vegetable spilling out of the stalls" (Chapter 2)
Varied Adjectives	"Herr Liszt made a hissing sound...he said in a sinister voice..." (Chapter 9)
Limited Third Person Narration	The style of narration is third person, yet from Bruno's vantage point. This reflects the innocence of Bruno's mind when compared to the sheer horror of the Holocaust.

Features of Historical Fiction

Historical People Key people from the time are included in the narrative. For example 'The Fury' is the name Bruno mistakenly identifies Adolf Hitler by.	Historical Events/ Places Key events and places from the time are also included in the narrative. For example, 'Out-with' is included to resemble Auschwitz.	Invented Scenes and Dialogue Despite the historical accuracy of several features, scenes and dialogue are fictionalised, e.g. Bruno falling off his swing, being helped by Pavel.
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