The Boy in the Striped Pajamas

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN BOYNE

From a young age, Boyne was interested in major literary works such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Treasure Island*. He studied English Literature at Trinity College, Dublin, and earned a master's degree in creative writing at the University of East Anglia. While studying there, he won the prestigious Curtis Brown prize for his writing. Boyne initially began his writing career as a short story writer, and his story "Entertainment Jar" was shortlisted for the Hennessy Literary Award. After publishing around 70 short stories, Boyne began to write novels, and published *The Thief of Time* in 2000. He continued to write novels for adults until 2004, until he wrote *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* as a children's novel in 2006. He has since published nine novels for adults and five novels for children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas is a fictional fable about a boy whose father is a Commandant in the German army during World War II, under the regime of the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler. "Out-With," where Bruno and his family move, is Bruno's word for "Auschwitz," a concentration camp in German-annexed Poland where Jews were imprisoned and murdered during the war. The German Nazi Party, which operated on an Anti-Semitic rhetoric, used these camps to kill six million Jews between 1942 and 1945 (as well as almost five million non-Jewish people, including homosexuals, Romani people, and the mentally disabled). Auschwitz was one of the deadliest and most infamous of these camps. The Allies liberated the prisoners of the camps towards the end of the war, between 1944 and 1945.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Boy at the Top of the Mountain, Boyne's novel published in October 2015, is about an orphaned boy who is taken in by his aunt in Austria during World War II. Other contemporary Holocaust novels focused around young adults are *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (2007), *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr (2014), and *The Devil's Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen (1988). Much of the historical accuracy in these works of fiction are based on memoirs about the Holocaust, such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1947), *Night* by Elie Wiesel (a work of both autobiography and historical fiction, published in the early 1960s), and *The Boy on the Wooden Box* by Leon Leyson (2015).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Boy in the Striped Pajamas
- **When Written:** April, 2004
- **Where Written:** Dublin, Ireland
- **When Published:** 2006
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Young Adult
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fiction, Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Berlin, Germany and Auschwitz, Poland
- **Climax:** When Bruno, who seeks to understand the world on the other side of the fence in which his friend Shmuel lives, changes into a pair of the "striped pajamas" and climbs under the fence.
- **Antagonist:** Bruno's Father
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient, mostly from the perspective of Bruno, a nine-year-old boy.

EXTRA CREDIT

Quick work. Boyne wrote the first draft of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* in two and a half days, hardly sleeping until he finished.

Film. The novel became a movie in 2008 under the same name, directed by Mark Herman.

PLOT SUMMARY

Bruno, a nine-year-old boy living in Berlin, Germany in 1943, comes home one day to find his family's maid, Maria, packing all of his things away in boxes. Bruno's Mother explains that the family is moving away due to the demands of his father's new job. "**The Fury**," as Bruno calls Adolf Hitler, had come to dinner at Bruno's home the previous week, and has promoted Bruno's Father. Father is a Commandant in the German army. He is a stern and imposing figure, but still expresses his care for his children. Bruno is unhappy to be leaving his best friends, grandparents, and the hustle and bustle of Berlin, but is presented with no other choice than to go with his family. Before they go, Father gets into a fight with Bruno's Grandmother, a former singing star, at their Christmas celebration. Grandmother is furious that Father would accept his new job from the Fury, but Father counters that it is a great honor for himself and for the Fatherland.

The family packs up all of their belongings and soon head out on a train to reach their new home. The new house on a hill is the only house in a very desolate area. Bruno is sad to be away from Berlin, and bored to have only his twelve-year-old sister Gretel, whom he does not get along with, for company. Their

maid Maria and butler Lars staff the house, but there are also new waiters that Bruno has not met before. One of them, Pavel, is an old, stooped man who cleans up Bruno's cut knee one day when he falls from a tire swing. Pavel tells Bruno that he has been a doctor in a past life, and Bruno is confused as to why a doctor would be working as a waiter in his house. Bruno comes to learn that Pavel lives on the other side of a **fence** that runs near their house. On the other side of the fence, as Bruno can see from his bedroom window, are thousands of people living in a sandy, fenced-in camp, all wearing "**striped pajamas**." Bruno cannot properly pronounce the name of their new home, but calls it "**Out-With**" (Auschwitz).

As Bruno settles into life at Out-With, he comes to dislike Lieutenant Kotler, a soldier who hangs around their house and whom Gretel has a crush on. Kotler is harsh and calls Bruno "little man." Mother takes a liking to Lieutenant Kotler, though everyone is horrified when he beats Pavel one day for spilling a glass of wine. Bruno is given lessons in history by a tutor named Herr Liszt, who tells him that Bruno's father and his family are at Out-With in order to correct the "great wrongs" that have been done to him. Gretel becomes very involved with history and politics, and takes to tracking the events of the news via pushpins in maps on her wall.

Bruno misses the exploring he so enjoyed in Berlin, and one day he walks along the length of the fence, despite the fact that he has been forbidden to do so. He meets a boy who lives on the other side of the fence named Shmuel. Shmuel wears the striped pajamas that Bruno has seen from his window, and he is extraordinarily thin. The two boys strike up a friendship, and Bruno begins to visit Shmuel nearly every day. Shmuel tells him how he was taken by soldiers from his home in Cracow, Poland, to the camp, which Bruno comes to realize is also in Poland. Bruno struggles to understand exactly what life is like on Shmuel's side of the fence, but complies when Shmuel asks him to bring him food.

Bruno begins to like life at Out-With a lot more as his friendship with Shmuel develops. One day he is shocked to find Shmuel inside his house—Lieutenant Kotler had brought him there to shine the family's tiny glasses, a job for someone with small hands. Bruno nonchalantly gives his friend a piece of leftover chicken. Kotler catches them, and demands to know if Bruno is friends with Shmuel. Terrified, Bruno denies knowing the boy, and Kotler later beats Shmuel. Kotler is later transferred away from Out-With—due to the fact that he reveals to Father that his own father fled from Germany to Switzerland in 1938, at the onset of World War II.

Eventually, Mother convinces Father to move the family back to Berlin. He consents, though he himself will remain at Out-With due to obligations to his job and the Fury. Bruno is saddened to leave Shmuel behind. When he goes to say goodbye, the boys agree that Bruno will dress up in striped pajamas the following day, in order to explore Shmuel's side of the camp and to help Shmuel search for his father, whom he has not seen for several days.

The next day, Bruno dresses up in pajamas Shmuel has brought him, and climbs under the fence. Inside he finds people sick and thin, with soldiers yelling at them. Scared, he wants to leave, but Shmuel asks him to help him find his father. Though they find nothing, the soldiers round up prisoners for a march before Bruno can sneak back under the fence. Scared, the two boys comply, and end up in a dark room together. They hold hands as the soldiers shut the doors, and everything goes dark.

Bruno is never heard from again. His mother and sister eventually return to Berlin, and his father becomes hated by the soldiers for his merciless orders. Bruno's clothes and boots are found where he left them outside the fence when he changed, and one day Bruno's father pieces together what must have happened to his son. He collapses from the weight of his realization, and months later, different soldiers arrive at the camp. Father complies with all of their demands, as he no longer cares what happens to him after realizing his son's grim fate.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Bruno – The protagonist and narrator, at the start of the novel Bruno is a nine-year-old boy living in Berlin during World War II. His Father, a Nazi officer, then moves the family to Auschwitz, Poland. As Bruno is young and cannot pronounce certain words, throughout the novel Hitler is referred to as "**the Fury**" (the Führer) and Auschwitz is referred to as "**Out-With**." Bruno is very sheltered and naïve, and though he develops a close friendship with Shmuel, a Jewish boy in the concentration camp, Bruno has a difficult time grasping exactly how hard life is on the other side of the **fence**. Bruno is very interested in art and books, and loves exploring. He wants to become a soldier like his father, and though his parents never explain to him what is happening in the war, he has been indoctrinated from a young age to believe that Germany, the "Fatherland," is superior to all other nations. Bruno is small for his age, and is very sensitive to people like Lieutenant Kotler calling him "little man." Ultimately Bruno never gets the chance to outgrow his ignorance and innocence, as his natural empathy and friendship for Shmuel lead him to cross the fence and be killed in a gas chamber.

Gretel – Gretel is Bruno's twelve-year-old sister, whom Bruno refers to as a "Hopeless Case." She feels that she is much wiser and more mature than Bruno, and often taunts him. She is at first mostly interested in her dolls, but after her lessons from the children's tutor Herr Liszt, Gretel becomes obsessed with the changing politics of World War II, and begins to track the German army's progress via pushpins in maps on her wall in

"**Out-With**." She becomes much more indoctrinated with anti-Semitic rhetoric than Bruno does, and tells Bruno that they are the "opposite" of the Jews on the other side of the **fence**. Gretel develops a crush on Lieutenant Kotler, and is "inconsolable" when he is transferred away.

Mother – Bruno's mother is married to Father, a Commandant in the German army. Mother is very loving towards Gretel and Bruno, but becomes stern whenever they ask too many questions or complain about moving to "**Out-With**." She refuses to speak with Bruno about the war, and says it is no topic for proper conversation. At Out-With, Mother develops a friendship (and likely an affair) with Lieutenant Kotler—seemingly an act of rebellion against Father, who essentially controls her life. Eventually, Mother convinces Father to let the family move back to Berlin, though she stays for a time to see if Bruno will return.

Father – Ralf, Bruno's father, was a soldier in the Great War (World War I), and is promoted to Commandant in the German Army by Hitler during World War II. He moves the family to Auschwitz, where he is in charge of the camp. Father is strict and intimidating, but expresses tenderness towards his family. He eventually consents to letting the family move back to Berlin, though he remains at Auschwitz to continue his duties for Hitler. A year after Bruno disappears, he figures out what happened to his son, and is destroyed by the realization. When the Allied soldiers come to take him away for punishment, Father submits to their demands, as he no longer has the will to live.

Shmuel – The titular "boy in the **striped pajamas**," Shmuel is Bruno's Jewish friend who is kept prisoner at Auschwitz. Born on the same day as Bruno, he and Bruno become good friends, though Bruno never quite understands the horrors that Shmuel lives through in the camp. Shmuel is described as being very thin, and eagerly gobbles up the food that Bruno brings him. He understands much more about his situation and the war than Bruno does, but often does not retaliate to Bruno's blasé remarks about his comparatively luxurious life, in order to not start arguments. The two boys ultimately die together in a gas chamber when Bruno crawls under the fence to help Shmuel look for his father, who has gone missing (and was likely killed by the German soldiers).

Lieutenant Kotler – Kurt Kotler is a nineteen-year-old German soldier at Auschwitz who frequents Bruno's home. He is well-dressed, over-cologned, and has striking blond hair—seemingly the ideal "Aryan" of Nazi ideology. Gretel develops a crush on him, and Mother strikes up a friendship (and likely an affair) with the young handsome soldier. He is cruel to the prisoners, and taunts Bruno by calling him "little man," something the boy despises. Kotler is eventually transferred away from Auschwitz when Father discovers that Kotler's father, a literature professor, fled from Germany in 1938 at the start of the war.

Grandmother – Nathalie, Bruno's grandmother and Father's mother, was a singer in her youth, before she married Grandfather. She is very dramatic, and still loves to sing. Each Christmas, she devises a play for herself and the children, to be performed at their holiday party. Grandmother opposes the Nazi party, and gets into a huge fight with Father when he accepts the new post at Auschwitz. They do not make up, and she dies while the family is away at Auschwitz.

Pavel – Pavel is the old Jewish man who works in the family's house in Auschwitz. He was a doctor before he was sent to the concentration camp, and he patches up Bruno's knee when Bruno cuts it falling off a swing. Pavel becomes thinner and frailer by the day, and is beaten (likely to death) by Kotler when he accidentally drops a wine bottle in Kotler's lap at dinner.

Eva Braun – Adolf Hitler's lifelong partner and girlfriend. She is never referred to by name in the novel, and is only described as a "beautiful woman" whom Hitler brings to dinner at Bruno's house. Eva is kind to the children, even when Hitler is, as Bruno believes, "the rudest man he has ever met."

MINOR CHARACTERS

Grandfather – Matthias, Bruno's grandfather and Father's father, is ten years Grandmother's senior. He supports and is proud of Father's role in the Nazi party, and opposes how Grandmother lashes out against Father's new role as Commandant.

Maria – Maria is the family's maid. Though she is secretly unhappy with Father's role at Auschwitz, she believes he is a good man because he helped Maria's mother when she was sick, and he took Maria in when her mother died.

Lars – The family's butler.

Herr Liszt – Bruno and Gretel's tutor, hired to teach them while they are living at Auschwitz. He is a supporter of the Nazi party, and teaches them geography and history in line with the party's goals and ideals.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

INNOCENCE AND IGNORANCE

Bruno, the main character of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, is a nine-year-old boy who is the son of a German Commandant (Father) during World War II. Father has been rising in the ranks of the Nazi army, and Bruno has lived a sheltered life in Berlin with his Mother, sister

Gretel, maid Maria, and butler Lars. The story, which is a fictional "fable" of the Holocaust, features Bruno as the narrator. Though he attends school, Bruno is mostly ignorant of the political situation at the time. He refers to Hitler, who visits their home with "a beautiful blond woman" (Eva Braun) for dinner, as "the **Fury**," the young boy's incorrect pronunciation for "the Führer." When the family is moved to Auschwitz (which is only ever referred to as "**Out-With**" by Bruno, another mispronunciation), Bruno continues to be left in the dark as to why they had to leave Berlin to be near the camp full of people in "**striped pajamas**"—the Jews and other prisoners brought to the camp to work or be killed. Though Bruno and his sister Gretel, three years his elder, have a private tutor, Bruno has little to no idea as to what is going on in the camp, or in Germany as a whole. He thinks that Shmuel, the identically-aged Jewish boy whom he befriends through the **fence** to the concentration camp, lives there with his family voluntarily, and Bruno never understands exactly why Shmuel is there, or why he is so thin.

Bruno's enduring innocence, and his sense that perhaps there are some questions best left unasked, is a prevailing theme throughout the novel. Bruno's Mother and Father, as well as his sister Gretel, continually answer his questions about what is happening in Berlin and "Out-With" with overgeneralizations and euphemisms. When Bruno asks Gretel who the people on the other side of the fence are, she tells him that they are Jews, and are simply the "opposite" of what she and Bruno are. When he asks, over and over again, why the family must leave Berlin, his Mother tells him that Hitler has "big plans" for his father, but never explains what those plans are. The nature of what Bruno's father is (a Commandant in the SS, and a director of the concentration camp Auschwitz) and why people are scared of him is never explained in the novel either. Presumably, Bruno is left in the dark about so much of what his family does and why they do it in order to preserve his innocence. However, this innocence is entirely based on ignorance, and it ultimately leads to his death.

Many critics have claimed that the novel is unrealistic and oversimplified in its portrayal of the Holocaust, but it mostly functions as a "fable"—almost an allegory. Thus Bruno's ignorance of what is happening in Germany during the 1940s comes to represent the German soldiers and citizens who, for whatever reason, complied with, did not interfere with, or otherwise stopped themselves from even thinking about the realities of the Nazi Party's actions. The innocence enforced on Bruno becomes a damning echo of the ignorance that so many others enforced on themselves.

BOUNDARIES

Bruno's world in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is filled with places he is not allowed to go, and the reasons for these boundaries are rarely explained to him. He is never allowed into his Father's office, "with no exceptions," and he and his sister Gretel are often shooed away from dinner parties and important conversations behind closed doors. Bruno, as a nine-year-old boy, loves nothing more than to explore, and this is how he comes to meet Shmuel through the **fence** of the concentration camp. Despite the barrier between them, the boys develop a relationship based on conversation, rather than the rough-and-tumble games that Bruno enjoyed with his three best friends back in Berlin.

The boundaries in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*—whether they are social boundaries, such as the inability to ask certain questions, or physical ones, such as a closed door or a fence—all lead to dire consequences. Because Bruno does not feel that he can ask his family who the people in the "**striped pajamas**" on the other side of the fence are, and his parents and sister do not feel that he deserves an adequate response, Bruno has no idea what the outcome may be when he follows Shmuel in the "march" inside the death camp.

The only time the imposed boundaries within the world of the book are broken down are when Bruno crawls under the fence and blends in with the rest of the prisoners, an act of curiosity and bravery that leads to his death and Shmuel's. However, one small comfort of the bleak ending is that Shmuel, for all of his terror in the concentration camp, dies in the company of a good friend who has supported him throughout the last year of his life.

As is the case for much of the text, the idea of boundaries acts as an allegory for one aspect of the horrors of the Holocaust. Despite the fact that decades now separate the carnage and terror of camps such as Auschwitz from the world today, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* shows how dangerously easy it can be to get caught up in such acts when people are forcibly divided, and when people are unable to openly discuss the consequences of current affairs. Human rights violations aren't often that far away—just on the other side of a fence.

FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP

Family and friendship are both important themes for Bruno, as he struggles to determine what role he plays in his household, and how to approach his friendship with Shmuel. Bruno has not been indoctrinated with a hatred for Jews, despite the fact that his father is high-ranking Nazi officer, but his parents do stress that he is not allowed to go near the **fence**, and his father refers to the people in the "**striped pajamas**" as "not really people at all." Bruno then feels a tension between what his family has told him about staying away from the fence, and the bond he feels with Shmuel, the skinny boy on the other side of the fence. Though Bruno knows very little about why Shmuel is in the camp or why he is not supposed to talk to him, Bruno ultimately allows his friendship to supersede his obedience to his parents

and Gretel.

While Bruno feels respect for his Mother and Father, he understands that all is not well in the family dynamic. Mother is very unhappy when they move away from Berlin, and Father becomes even more secretive and commanding around the household. Bruno is horrified when Pavel, an old man who seems to live in the camp at night but do work in the household during the day, is harshly reprimanded for spilling wine. Pavel was once very kind to Bruno when he fell off a swing, bandaging Bruno's knee and telling Bruno that he used to be a doctor. Bruno is thus torn between his positive experiences with the prisoners as very kind but sad people, and his parents' descriptions of them as subhuman, and somehow the "opposite" of Bruno. This tension ultimately serves as an allegory for the pseudoscience and indoctrination spread by the Nazi Party during World War II, claiming the Germans to be greater than all other nationalities, particularly in respect to the "Jewish problem" in Europe. At the end of the story, with his head shaven, Bruno can find very few differences between himself and his new best friend. Despite Father's exalted rank within the German army, his son dies the same death as the people he puts into the concentration camp. Thus the book's "moral" ultimately declares that despite differences of nationality, race, gender, or religion, at a basic level we all desire compassion and companionship, and deserve the same level of dignity and human rights.

NATIONALISM

During World War II, the Nazi Party, which gained control of Germany, operated on the idea that ethnic Germans were superior to the rest of the world, particularly the Jewish population in Europe at the time. Nazi rhetoric and propaganda operated heavily on the idea of the "other"—emphasizing an "us vs. them" division, and demonizing and dehumanizing "them." In practice this meant attempting to prove, using pseudoscience, the Bible, nationalism, and scare tactics, that Jews were an inferior race that needed to be "exterminated" to solve Germany's problems. Adolf Hitler's government created concentration camps in which to ruthlessly kill Jews, resulting in the death of over six million people. The Nazis also imprisoned and killed up to five million others—including Romani people, gay people, the mentally disabled, and other minorities—all in the pursuit of creating a nation of idealized "Aryan Germans," the most perfect of which were believed to be blond-haired, blue-eyed Christians by faith and by blood.

Though Bruno, due to his age and isolation, understands very little about the political situation of Germany when his family moves from Berlin to "**Out-With**," his tutor and his Father have still indoctrinated him to an extent to believe in the superiority of Germany and its right to rule. When Shmuel tells Bruno that he is from Poland, Bruno's immediate response is that Germany is superior to Poland, simply because Germany is better than any other country in the world. Lieutenant Kotler, with his striking blond hair, good looks, and cruelty towards Jews, is meant to represent Hitler's ideal Aryan man. However, when it is revealed that Kotler's father fled for Switzerland, which was "neutral" territory during World War II, Father dismisses Kotler from his roles at Auschwitz. This represents the instability inherent in the philosophy of the Nazis—when anyone can become the "other" and be demonized as unpatriotic or even subhuman, people will eventually turn on each other with paranoia and a mob mentality. The Nazi Party ultimately collapsed and was defeated at the end of World War II.

The nationalism displayed by Bruno's father and his sister Gretel is not universal to all the Germans in the book. Father's militant nationalism creates a rift in his family before they leave Berlin—his mother, Bruno's Grandmother, objects to Father's new position as head of Auschwitz, and denounces his role in the Nazi Party. She then dies while the family is still in Poland, before she and her son have a chance to be reconciled. Later in the novel, Mother also refuses to stay at "Out-With," saying the assignment is Father's and not hers. Even Maria expresses her distaste for what Father orchestrates at the camp, but she still expresses gratitude for her job and the fact that Father took her in after her mother died, as Maria's mother had worked closely with Bruno's Grandmother for many years.

Bruno has a difficult time understanding exactly what his father does, and why it is so important to "correct" the history of Germany. He, like some other characters, also has a difficult time reconciling how men such as Father and Lieutenant Kotler act in their personal, day-to-day lives, and the horrors they inflict on the prisoners in the name of Germany and the "**Fury**." Bruno cannot yet comprehend that the militant and unequivocal idea of German superiority allows the soldiers and other members of the army to separate their own families and lives from those of the Jews, and thus carry out atrocities while still conducting their own personal lives as normal.

The novel also shows how German nationalism under the Nazi regime began to fail as the war dragged on. This is played out on a personal level through the dysfunction of Bruno's family (Mother's affair with Kotler) and the disloyalty of Kotler's father, who fled to Switzerland. Father himself was first brought to Auschwitz to "correct" the failings of the previous Commandant, showing how unstable policies and beliefs could be within the party itself. When Father realizes that Bruno was killed in a gas chamber in the camp that he commanded, he loses all national pride and even the will to live, and submits himself to punishment (likely a trial, and then execution) when he is arrested by Allied soldiers.

GENDER ROLES

The perpetuation of traditional gender roles is present throughout the novel, and contributes to much of the misinformation and miscommunication between the characters. Father is the definitive patriarch of the family, and he is in charge of what the entire family does and where they go. Bruno aspires to be as big and strong as his father, but also feels conflicted in his relationship with his father because of how he appears to treat Mother, the maid, Maria, and Grandmother, who vehemently abhors Father's role in the Nazi army.

Mother often disagrees with Father's choices, but as the woman in the relationship, when Father makes a decision, she knows she must follow it. She has taken to passive-aggressively complaining about "some people" in the household when she is upset, a moniker that Bruno has come to realize means "Father." When she is unhappy at Auschwitz, Mother takes many "naps" and drinks "medicinal sherries," showing that she is attempting to sedate herself to escape her misery, as she has no real agency or power of her own. Though it is never explicitly stated, it is insinuated that Mother engages in an affair with nineteen-year-old Lieutenant Kotler, an act of subversion towards Father, and one of the only ways in which Mother is able to exercise her will. Eventually, Father consents to letting the family move back to Berlin, but only after what has been almost a year of convincing, and likely a product of his problematic relationship with Mother: Father is to remain at Auschwitz while Mother takes the children back to Berlin.

Maria, the maid, feels conflicted regarding Father's character, as she knows of the horrors he orchestrates at Auschwitz, but cannot forget the kindness he has shown towards her and her late mother. As a servant, she knows she cannot express her feelings without being thrown out of the house, and she only reveals them to Bruno when no one else is listening, in an attempt to make him understand the nuances of his Father's nature. Grandmother, on the other hand, has no difficulty making it known how atrocious she thinks Father's new role as Commandant is. She proclaims that she would rather "tear her eyes from her head" than look at Father in his new uniform. Grandfather berates her for speaking her mind, and Father continually counters her arguments against Hitler and the Nazi regime. Grandmother dies before she can reconcile with her son, and her disapproval seems to have no effect on his life choices.

The adult women in the novel, bound by their traditional gender roles, each have their own negative opinions regarding Father's role at Auschwitz, but they are disregarded due to their secondary status to men. This lack of regard leads to a breakdown of communication—Mother does not discuss what Father does with Bruno, or why they are truly moving to Auschwitz, likely because she is too depressed about her inability to have a say in the matter. Grandmother's opinions are dismissed as well, and this fact is never discussed or explained to Bruno. Most of the women are therefore completely silent in their opposition to Auschwitz and the Nazi agenda as a whole. This sexism does not excuse their complicity, but it does show how the Nazi philosophy of prejudice and hatred extended in many directions at once, so that even "pure Aryan" women were made to be submissive and act out traditional gender roles, having little to no say in real decision-making. Within the novel, this leads to a lack of communication that keeps Bruno ignorant, and ultimately causes his death when he has no idea what he is getting himself into when he crawls under the **fence**.

COMPLICITY

Though most of the characters in the novel are not explicit members or supporters of the Nazi party, many of them end up complying with the regime's ideals and goals out of a sense of duty, fear, or apathy. Mother, though she is not thrilled with Father's new job as a director of the concentration camp Auschwitz, does not actively fight his decision to move the family. This seems to stem from a sense of obligation towards her husband and country, and also due to her status as a woman in a patriarchal society. Indeed, her dislike of Auschwitz relates more to its bleakness and isolation than its role as a concentration camp, showing that she has no real disagreement with the Nazi belief that Jews and other minorities are less than human.

Likewise Bruno, though he is still very young and "innocent," is also instilled with a belief that Germans, as a people and as a nation, are superior to every other country and culture in the world—even though he doesn't truly understand what this means. Herr Liszt, the children's tutor, teaches the children a biased account of history that glorifies Germany and likely the Nazi party as well. Though Lizst is not actively a soldier, this kind of complicity perpetuates the anti-Semitism and German nationalism that were hallmarks of the Nazi party's ideology. Gretel, then, is a more active example of indoctrination at work—though she is a typical twelve-year-old girl at the beginning of the novel—her main preoccupation the rearranging of her collection of dolls—by the novel's end she has become obsessed with following Germany's expansion across Europe via pushpins in maps her father has given her.

While most of these characters (besides Father and Herr Liszt) don't take an active role in perpetuating the Nazi's regime of terror and genocide, complying with demands or turning a blind eye to these kinds of activities was ultimately a major factor in the party's rise to power in Germany in the 1930s and 40s. Women and people in subservient roles (such as Mother and Maria) often felt that they had no choice but to comply with the Party's demands, especially after it became the ruling force in Germany. Likewise many soldiers, even those who carried out horrific executions in the concentration camps, claimed that

they were "just following orders" in the wake of Nazi defeat in 1945. Because of the party's fear tactics and ruthless militarism, going against the Nazis could mean danger to one's life or family, but this also involved turning a blind eye to or complying with crimes against humanity. One of the more frightening lessons of the Holocaust, then, was how far the apathy and inaction of "normal" people can go in allowing for the perpetuation of horrors—as long as these horrors are themselves normalized and encouraged.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE FURY

"The Fury" is Bruno's mispronunciation of "the Führer," a word that means "leader" in German, but has now become forever linked to the rule of Adolf Hitler. Hitler was the leader of the Nazi Party, the dictator of Germany during World II, and the orchestrator of the Holocaust, in which millions of Jews, Romani people, homosexuals, and other minorities were killed. Bruno repeats the title "the Fury" whenever he means Hitler, since he only hears Hitler referred to reverently as "the Führer" in his Nazi-supporting household. Since Bruno's family must move to Auschwitz soon after the Fury comes to dinner, Bruno comes to associate him with uprooting their way of life. Shmuel, too, associates "the Fury" with uprooting his family's way of life—but in his case, he and other Jews and minorities were forcibly removed from their homes and placed into death camps. Thus the Fury—a tide of fear and anger, embodied by the genocidal rule of Hitler—comes to symbolize an unshakeable and incomprehensible force that changes things for the worse.

OUT-WITH

"Out-With" is Bruno's mispronunciation for Auschwitz, the area in Poland where Father moves the family after Hitler "promotes" him to Commandant of the concentration camp. At first, both Bruno and Gretel mispronounce the Polish name, and call it "Out-With." Gretel theorizes that it means "out with" the old people in charge of the camp, and in with the new—their Father. While Gretel eventually learns how to pronounce Auschwitz, and chastises Bruno for not attempting to say the word correctly, the phrase continues to symbolize what the Holocaust is meant to do—kick out a group of people (Jews, minorities, and Communists) from the rest of society (Germany, and much of Eastern Europe) by imprisoning or slaughtering them.

STRIPED PAJAMAS

Bruno notices immediately that everyone behind the **fence** at Auschwitz is wearing what he sees as "striped pajamas." Shmuel must wear them all the time, and they are what Bruno uses as a disguise when he sneaks into the camp with Shmuel. Bruno, as a nine-year-old boy with little to no understanding of what happens inside the camp, thinks the pajamas are some kind of comfortable clothing—when in fact they are prison uniforms meant to delineate the Jews in the camp from the German population at large. The striped pajamas thus represent an artificial branding of people to denote they are different from others. The Nazis engaged in this kind of branding in many ways—Jews were forced to wear the Star of David on their clothing, while the Nazi supporters themselves wore red armbands with black swastikas to show their allegiance to Hitler. Of course, such branding is ultimately superficial when it comes to life, death, and human dignity. Bruno tragically acts out this truth when he, the son of a Nazi Commandant, dies along with the Jews Father and Hitler hope to exterminate, simply because he looks like the rest of the tortured prisoners with his shaved head and dirty "striped pajamas." The striped pajamas thus symbolize Bruno's childish innocence about the world's horrors, but also how dangerous divisions and artificial branding can be as a part of racist ideologies.

THE FENCE

The fence around the concentration camp is used to keep the prisoners in, and everyone else out and away from seeing the horrors that happen inside. Like the **striped pajamas**, however, it is of course an artificial distinction. Bruno and Shmuel, two children on opposite sides of the Holocaust, develop a touching friendship through the wire. Bruno is able to crawl under a hole in the fence, symbolic of how even a physical fence cannot become a barrier between children who don't know yet how to hate or discriminate. Just like anyone can dress up in the "striped pajamas" and be mistaken for a Jew, or take them off and be a Nazi supporter, so the fence is symbolic of artificial barriers that can be set up in any part of the world, between any groups of people. Even those who seem to be securely on the "superior" side of the fence—like Kotler—can easily find themselves ostracized, as Kotler is demoted and transferred simply because his father was not a supporter of the Nazis. Once one fence is built, so are many more, as the "insiders" turn against each other in greed or paranoia, and set up new divisions about just who is allowed to be "inside."

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the David

Fickling Books edition of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* published in 2007.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"It's a very important job," said Mother, hesitating for a moment. "A job that needs a very special man to do it. You can understand that, can't you?"

Related Characters: Mother (speaker), Father, Bruno

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Bruno comes home from school one day to find the family maid, Maria, packing his belongings into wooden crates. When he enters his mother's bedroom to ask why Maria is doing this, he finds the family butler, Lars, packing up Mother's belongings as well. Mother takes him downstairs and explains that the entire family—Bruno, Mother, Father, and Bruno's sister, Gretel—is moving away from Berlin. Mother tells Bruno that Father has a very important job, and that the man who employs him has a new, special job for him away from the city.

Mother's hesitation to tell Bruno more about his father's new "special job"—serving as the commander of a concentration camp—speaks to both her own discomfort about the job and to the sheltered world in which Bruno and Gretel are kept. Despite the fact that she is not happy with the prospect of moving her family to a Nazi concentration camp, her role as a woman (and her complicity with the Nazi regime) makes her submissive to the commands of her husband, a high-ranking officer in Hitler's army. As a young child, Bruno is both protected from the grim nature of his father's job, and expected not to ask too many questions, as his parents seem to want to keep him ignorant and innocent of the realities of Germany at the time. Mother and Bruno's subordination to Father's orders is also indicative of traditional gender and family roles favored by the Nazi party.

Chapter 2 Quotes

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

Related Characters: Mother (speaker), Father, Bruno

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Bruno's family travels to their new home (in the concentration camp of Auschwitz, where his father will serve as commander) far away from Berlin. He is upset to see how different the new home, and location, is from their house in the center of the city.

When Bruno tells Mother that he thinks moving was a bad idea, she replies with this quote: that "Some people" make all the decisions for the family. Mother frequently uses the phrase "Some people" to refer to Father. In this quote, Mother is explaining that, as a woman and a child, she and Bruno are subordinate to the decisions of Father, the patriarch of the family. In effect, they not only can't voice their concerns, but that they aren't even allowed to think them—their role is simply to obey. This idea of complete obedience is further reinforced when, as she speaks, Mother begins to unpack boxes, showing Bruno that even though he (and she) are unhappy with their new situation, the family is there to stay whether he likes it or not.

The idea of simply accepting situations and following orders also serves as a larger criticism of Nazi Germany in general. After the war, many Nazi soldiers defended their actions by claiming that they were only "following orders" as they carried out the horrors of the Holocaust. In this way, Boyne uses Mother's insistence that she has to listen to father as well, as Bruno's innocence and ignorance, to represent the blindness with which many soldiers followed Hitler's orders, and in so doing perpetrated the horrors of the Holocaust.

He put his face to the glass and saw what was out there, and this time when his eyes opened wide and his mouth made the shape of an O, his hands stayed by his sides because something made him feel very cold and unsafe.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

At his mother's command, Bruno goes to his new bedroom in the family's house at Auschwitz and begins to unpack his things. Upset at the prospect of this new unwanted life far away from his former home in Berlin, Bruno attempts not to

cry by looking out a window thatvaguely reminds him of one that was in their old house. He hopes to be able to see faraway Berlin, but instead sees the concentration camp Auschwitz, which he comes to incorrectly pronounce as "Out-With."

The sight of the people inside the fence, imprisoned from the outside world—despite the fact that he has no idea that they are Jews rounded up to be eventually exterminated by the Nazis—gives him an unsettled feeling.That this little boy, who has no idea what is actually going on in the concentration camp, has the feeling that what is going on in the camp is wrongserves as a condemnation of the people of Nazi Germany, many of whom *did*know what was going on in the concentration camps, and still followed orders and avoided asking questions. At the same time, Bruno's initial horror at this sight also calls into question just how "innocent" he himself is during the rest of the story—part of his ignorance may be willful.

Chapter 3 Quotes

"But what does it mean?" he asked in exasperation. "Out with what?"
"Out with the people who lived here before us, I expect," said Gretel. "It must have to do with the fact that he didn't do a very good job and someone said out with him and let's get a man in who can do it right."
"You mean Father."

Related Characters: Gretel, Bruno (speaker), Father

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Bruno had many friends to play with back in Berlin, but in Auschwitz, he and Gretel only have each other. Though they don't often get along, the one thing the siblings do agree upon is the fact that they miss their old home.

Like Bruno, Gretel is sheltered from the true facts of their father's job. However, being three years older than him, she has a better grasp as to what brought the family to Auschwitz (even though her broader understanding is still limited, as she believes Auschwitz is the name of their new house rather than the camp around it). While she cannot pronounce the name correctly and calls it "Out-With" like Bruno does, she understands that the relocation has something to do with a perceived superiority of one group of people over another.

Unlike Bruno, Gretel more readily accepts Father's orders. She senses that there is something unpleasant about the nature of Auschwitz, but rather than questioning it, she fully believes that Father has been appointed to fix a pressing problem. Boyne shapes the character of Gretel to represent the Nazi Youth culture that pervaded Germany during this time period, in which young and impressionable children became indoctrinated with the values of the Nazi party and were trained to spread its message without question.

Chapter 4 Quotes

...all of them—the small boys, the big boys, the fathers, the grandfathers, the uncles, the people who lived on their own on everybody's road but didn't seem to have any relatives at all—were wearing the same clothes as each other: a pair of grey striped pajamas with a grey striped cap on their heads.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

After Bruno makes a passing remark about the "other children" outside the window, Gretel demands that he explain what he means. He points to the concentration camp outside the window, and Gretel is shocked by what she sees. Neither of the children has a concrete explanation as to who the people are, or why there are no women on the other side of the fence.

The innocence of Bruno and Gretel leads them to characterize the men in the concentration camp in terms of familial relationships, such as "fathers" and "uncles." They do this because such relationships define how Bruno and Gretel know most of the adults in their lives. Though there appears to be no warmth between the people in the camp, the children have no better explanation for who they are or why they are all living together. They also apparently have no concept of what poverty is, or the fact that these people did not choose to live in the squalor of the camp.

In Nazi-ruled Germany, clothing was an important marker of status: The Nazis wore swastika armbands, while Jews wore yellow stars indicating their religious and ethnic status.

Thus, the "striped pajamas," really prison-issued uniforms, were meant to mark and demean the Jewish people as prisoners. That Bruno sees these clothes as pajamas further indicates his innocence and foreshadows how that innocence will allow him to see past those clothes to the people who wear them.

Chapter 5 Quotes

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

Related Characters: Father (speaker), Bruno

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

In a moment of bravery, Bruno enters Father's office, which is usually off-limits, to confront his father about his unhappiness at Auschwitz. Though Father repeats what Mother and Maria have already told Bruno—that he must accept their new life away from Berlin—Bruno refuses. Angered, Father orders his son to go to his room. Before he goes, however, Bruno asks Father about the boys and men living on the other side of the fence.

As a high-ranking Nazi official, Bruno's father subscribes to and perpetuates the anti-Semitic views held by Hitler and his followers. Supported by pseudoscience, much of the Nazi Party's rhetoric and self-conception rested on the claim that Jews and other minorities were less than human, and inferior to the blond-haired, blue-eyed "Aryan" image the party favored. In his new role as a director of the camp, Father is instrumental in overseeing the systematic torture and murder of the boys and men who are wearing what Bruno innocently sees as "striped pajamas." Here Father seems to confidently justify his actions—after all, if those being murdered aren't really human, then it isn't really murder.In this quote, Boyne also includes the image of Father's slight smile to underscore how key coordinators of the Holocaust, such as Father and Hitler, truly believed that their unspeakable actions were justified, and that those who did not agree were silly (much as Father seems to think Bruno's questions are silly).

Chapter 6 Quotes

"Bruno, if you have any sense at all, you will stay quiet and concentrate on your schoolwork and do whatever your father tells you. We must all just keep ourselves safe until this is all over. That's what I intend to do anyway. What more can we do than that after all? It's not up to us to change things."

Related Characters: Maria (speaker), Father, Bruno

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

After a few days at Auschwitz, Bruno encounters Maria and asks her how she feels about the family's move. Maria avoids any chance Bruno gives her to speak ill of his Mother and Father, and instead tells him that he must follow his parents' wishes. Bruno goes on to complain that his father has made a "terrible mistake" in moving the family.

In this quote, Maria tells Bruno that he is not allowed to constantly state how he feels. As a young child who is still figuring out the world and his social situation, Bruno has difficulty with processing and containing his emotions. (Furthermore, he is rather rich and spoiled, and so is used to getting his way when he complains.) Maria, who is better versed in the political and social situation in Germany, knows that one wrong, overheard sentence can have someone thrown in jail, or worse. As a maid, her livelihood is at the mercy of Mother and Father—she is not only a woman, but also a social inferior to the Nazi couple. If she were to be found speaking ill of the family, or found to have encouraged any such thoughts in Bruno, Maria could potentially be fired or more harshly punished.

While Maria's fearful silence seems totally justified, it also means that she becomes unwillingly complicit in the crimes that her employer (Father) is perpetrating. She would endanger herself if she spoke out, but she endangers many more by remaining silent. This shows the very difficult choices that faced everyone in Nazi Germany—except for those who could still remain as ignorant and innocent as Bruno.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"Young man," said Pavel (and Bruno appreciated the fact that he had the courtesy to call him 'young man' instead of 'little man' as Lieutenant Kotler had), "I certainly am a doctor. Just because a man glances up at the sky at night does not make him an astronomer, you know."

Related Characters: Pavel (speaker), Lieutenant Kotler, Bruno

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

In an effort to defeat his boredom, Bruno creates a swing out of an old tire and a tree just outside the house. He soon falls, and hurts himself. Pavel, one of the new butlers at Auschwitz, runs out of the kitchen and takes the injured boy inside to clean up his scrapes. Bruno insists he must be taken to a doctor, but Pavel tells him he will be just fine with the bandage he has made. Bruno argues that Pavel cannot know this since he is not a doctor, and Pavel says he used to be one.

As a prisoner of the Nazis, Pavel has been captured from his home and career as a doctor to serve Father, his family, and the Nazi soldiers that visit. Able bodied Jewish men and women from every profession were forced to work in labor camps; the young, old, and those who could not work were often immediately killed. Boyne once again emphasize's Bruno's innocence by showing that he has no understanding as to why someone who is trained as a doctor would peel his vegetables and serve dinner. Bruno has been taught that the prisoners at Auschwitz are "not people at all," but this idea doesn't seem to fit with what Bruno now learns about the intelligent, friendly Pavel.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Herr Liszt made a hissing sound through his teeth and shook his head angrily. "Then this is what I am here to change," he said in a sinister voice. "To get your head out of your storybooks and teach you more about where you come from. About the great wrongs that have been done to you."

Related Characters: Herr Liszt (speaker), Bruno

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

Herr Liszt is a tutor hired to oversee Bruno and Gretel's education while living in Auschwitz. Herr Liszt is particularly fond of teaching the children about the history of Germany. He tells Bruno that he wants to teach him of the "great wrongs" that have been done to the German people throughout history.

Herr Liszt is hired by Mother and Father because he subscribes to the same anti-Semitic notions held by the Nazi Party, and can help indoctrinate Bruno and his sister into Nazi ideology. Bruno is still young and innocent, so if he learns propaganda as history, then he will internalize it as truth—and thus see his father's work as justified and righteous. The idea of the German people as victims of wicked lesser races and countries was crucial to the philosophy of Nazism and the rise of German nationalism before and during WWII. If people saw themselves as the victims of corrupting outside influences (like Jews and Romani people), it was easier to hate non-Germans, dehumanize them, and remain silent and complicit as atrocities were perpetrated against them.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ 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.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker), Shmuel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

One afternoon, Bruno decides that he will explore the grounds outside of the house. He walks for some time until he reaches the fence, where he encounters a boy sitting down. The boy is wearing the "striped pajamas" he has seen from his bedroom window, and he wears a yellow star on his chest.

The boy is very thin and gaunt because he is starved and overworked by Nazi soldiers inside the fence. Bruno is shocked at the boy's physical and emotional state because he has lived in a very sheltered world, in which he has never encountered poverty, and he also seems to be keeping himself willfully ignorant about the suffering people he sees from his window. Yet Bruno also has the natural innocence and kindness of a child, as Boyne uses this extended analogy to show how hatred is learned, not instinctual—despite the fact that Bruno is a German child of Nazis, and the boy (Shmuel) is a Jewish prisoner, Bruno's first reaction is to try and make friends.

"Poland," said Bruno thoughtfully, weighing up the word on his tongue. "That's not as good as Germany, is it?"
Shmuel frowned. "Why isn't it?" he asked.
"Well, because Germany is the greatest of all countries," Bruno replied, remembering something that he had overheard Father discussing with Grandfather on any number of occasions. "We're superior."

Related Characters: Shmuel, Bruno (speaker), Father, Grandfather

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

The boy on the other side of the fence tells Bruno his name is Shmuel, and that he is from Poland. In this quote, Bruno repeats what Father and Grandfather have said about Germany being a separate and "superior" nation compared to others.

Bruno believes that Germany is a superior nation only due to what he has heard his elders say, and not due to a personally held belief (or any kind of truth he has experienced). This system of indoctrination is how the Nazi party cultivated a younger generation of nationalistic party supporters. It is also indicative of the role that parents, in any society, play in shaping their children's beliefs. Here, Boyne shows that prejudices are often passed from one generation to the next, so that when a boy such as Bruno grows up, he continues to believe that Germans are superior and cultivates a disdain for other cultures. It is this dangerous cycle that fed into the widespread Nationalism and anti-Semitism of World War II.

Chapter 11 Quotes

What a horrible man, thought Bruno.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

Bruno thinks back to the night that The Fury (his mispronunciation of Führer, the title that Hitler assumed when he rose to power) visited the family's home in Berlin for dinner. Bruno is very taken with Hitler's his companion, Eva Braun, but he finds Hitler to be very rude. The reason for Hitler's visit is to offer Father the job at Auschwitz, so Bruno associates this night with being taken away from his beloved home in Berlin.

Bruno's parents parade Bruno and Gretel out to greet Eva and Hitler when they arrive. It is very important to show Hitler that the family is obedient, traditional, and in line with Nazi values. Bruno is used to being addressed and treated with relative respect by the other older men in his life (Father and Grandfather) and is very off-put by Hitler's dismissiveness. Eva is kind to the children, and Bruno is then personally offended when Hitler is rude to her as well. The fact that Bruno does not know exactly who Hitler is, or what his relationship is to the government of Germany, shows how (almost impossibly) sheltered and innocent his world in Berlin is.

Chapter 12 Quotes

Shmuel looked very sad when he told this story and Bruno didn't know why; it didn't seem like such a terrible thing to him, and after all much the same thing had happened to him.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker), Shmuel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

Bruno continues to visit Shmuel along the Fence every day. Shmuel tells Bruno of how he arrived at Auschwitz from his home in Cracow. First, he and his family were forced to wear armbands with the Star of David, indicating that they were Jews. One day, they were told they were not allowed to live in their home anymore, and had to move to a small apartment with many other families. They were then herded onto a train and brought to the camp, where Shmuel's mother was separated from Shmuel, his brother, father, and grandfather.

As Shmuel tells the story, Bruno keeps thinking that the same thing happened to him—that he too boarded a train and lost his home due to the Fury. In this sense, Bruno can relate to Shmuel's upset at having left his home, but Bruno's privilege and ignorance also means that he cannot comprehend the horrors that Shmuel encounters behind the fence. To Bruno the two boys' situations seem similar, but we as readers know that they couldn't be more

different. Here Boyne suggests the inability of an outsider to ever truly empathize and understand the plights of another person—Bruno considers Shmuel his friend, but he doesn't really understand Shmuel at all.

"Dinner isn't served until half past six. What time do you have yours?"
Shmuel shrugged his shoulders and pulled himself to his feet. "I think I'd better get back," he said.
"Perhaps you can come to dinner with us one evening," said Bruno, although he wasn't sure it was a very good idea.
"Perhaps," said Shmuel, although he didn't sound convinced.

Related Characters: Shmuel, Bruno (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

When Bruno visits Shmuel, it is in the lazy afternoon hours between his morning lessons and dinnertime. The boys can spend long stretches of time talking, but Bruno must return to the house before anyone notices he has been gone.

Bruno constantly discusses food in front of Shmuel, not realizing that Shmuel receives very little food on his side of the Fence, if any at all. Inside concentration camps, prisoners lived in squalor and faced constant starvation. Bruno does not understand that Shmuel does not have a "dinner time" inside the Fence, and seemingly doesn't understand that Shmuel cannot leave the Fence at all, much less come to Bruno's house. Though Bruno does not understand the underlying reasons for this, he does have a premonition that he has made an offer to Shmuel that neither of them will realistically be able to act upon. This again casts into doubt just how "innocent" Bruno still is regarding the true nature of Auschwitz.

Chapter 13 Quotes

"There aren't any good soldiers," said Shmuel.
"Of course there are," said Bruno.
"Who?"
"Well, Father, for one," said Bruno. "That's why he has such an impressive uniform and why everyone calls him Commandant and does whatever he says. The Fury has big things in mind for him because he's such a good soldier."
"There aren't any good soldiers," repeated Shmuel.
"Except Father," repeated Bruno, who was hoping that Shmuel wouldn't say that again because he didn't want to have to argue with him. After all, he was the only friend he had here at Out-With. But Father was Father, and Bruno didn't think it was right for someone to say something bad about him.

Related Characters: Shmuel, Bruno (speaker), Father

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

One day at the Fence, Bruno and Shmuel discuss what they want to be when they grow up. Shmuel notes that he wants to work in a zoo, while Bruno says he wants to become a soldier like Father. In this quote, Shmuel counters Bruno to claim that there are no good soldiers, and Bruno refutes his statement out of respect for his father.

As a prisoner in a concentration camp, Shmuel has no reason to believe that there are any good soldiers in the world. The only soldiers he has encountered are ones that taunt and torture him and the other prisoners in the camp. Even Bruno understands that someone like Lieutenant Kotler has a sadistic side, and thinks that he would not want to be that kind of soldier, but he defends Father by default, as he does not understand that Father's true role in Shmuel's suffering. This again shows Bruno parroting the ideology he has been taught, as even in his relative innocence he still places country and family over his new friendship with Shmuel.

What happened then was both unexpected and extremely unpleasant. Lieutenant Kotler grew very angry with Pavel and no one—not Bruno, not Gretel, not Mother and not even Father—stepped in to stop him doing what he did next, even though none of them could watch. Even though it made Bruno cry and Gretel grow pale.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker), Gretel, Father, Mother, Lieutenant Kotler, Pavel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

Bruno notices that Pavel, the Jewish servant who once treated his wounds and claimed to be a doctor, becomes weaker each day. One night at dinner, he continually blunders his serving job, until he finally loses grip of a bottle of wine and spills it onto Lieutenant Kotler's lap. It may be inferred from this quote that Kotler beats Pavel mercilessly as punishment, and perhaps even kills him.

Though Pavel works in the home of Mother and Father, he is still considered a prisoner, and as a Jew, he is seen as less than human by the Nazis. Though such dehumanization and violence is constantly occurring on the other side of the Fence, this is seemingly the first time Bruno experiences it up close, and he is shocked. This is an important passage because it shows how complicity can be just as bad as negative action. Kotler is the one actually beating Pavel, but Father and Mother's unwillingness to stop him ends up with the same result. This is a point often made about the Holocaust—it might have been a minority of the population actually perpetrating atrocities, but the majority who stood by and did nothing about it were guilty as well.

This scene, which makes Bruno cry, also shows him further losing his innocence about the reality of his situation. It then becomes more far-fetched that he continues to remain so "innocent" and ignorant in his ensuing interactions with Shmuel. This suggests that Bruno too is trying to avoid thinking about things he doesn't want to, and thus is, in his own way, becoming complicit in the crimes he doesn't speak out against.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ Bruno tried to return to his book, but he'd lost interest in it for now and stared out at the rain instead and wondered whether Shmuel, wherever he was, was thinking about him too and missing their conversations as much as he was.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker), Shmuel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

One rainy day, Bruno is stuck inside the house with Gretel and is unable to go visit Shmuel at the Fence. He makes a passing remark to her that he should be somewhere else, and she demands to know what he means by this. Bruno has a feeling that he should not tell Gretel about Shmuel, and instead tells her that he has an imaginary friend. Gretel laughs at him and goes into her room to arrange her dolls. In this quote, Bruno thinks about how much he misses his afternoon conversations with Shmuel.

Despite the differences in the two boys' lives, they find more in common with each other than they find to be different. This allows them to spend hours talking, and in this quote, Bruno realizes how close he has come to feel with Shmuel as a friend. He hopes that Shmuel feels as strongly about their friendship as he does. Boyne uses the friendship between Shmuel and Bruno to highlight the absurdity of the supposedly inherent differences the Nazis claimed existed between Aryan Germans and Jews. At the end of the day, he claims, the only thing really separating the two groups of people is a manufactured fence and an ideology of prejudice and hatred.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ "What are you doing here?" repeated Bruno, for although he still didn't quite understand what took place on the other side of the fence, there was something about the people from there that made him think they shouldn't be here in his house.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker), Shmuel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

On Father's birthday, the whole house is busy preparing for a party. Bruno walks into the kitchen and is shocked to see Shmuel there. Shmuel tells Bruno that Lieutenant Kotler brought him into the house to polish the smaller glasses and silverware because he has tiny fingers.

Though Bruno still does not know the true reason why Shmuel lives on one side of the Fence and he lives on the other, Bruno has a sense that someone like Shmuel is not normally welcomed into their home. Like Pavel, Shmuel is only welcomed into the house to perform tasks commanded of him by Nazi officials. Just as when he almost tells Gretel of his friendship with Shmuel, here Bruno somehow knows that he should not let his family know the truth. This

understanding shows that, while he enjoys his time with Shmuel, Bruno is also subconsciously retaining some of the disdain that Kotler and Father show for the people on the other side of the Fence. Even an idealized friendship between young children is already affected by outside prejudices and beliefs, and Bruno isn't as innocent as he seems (or seems to want to be).

> It was the first time they had ever touched.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker), Shmuel

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

While Shmuel is in the house polishing the silverware, Brunonotes that, though the boys are the same height and age, Shmuel's hand is very different from his—the fingers are bony and shriveled, and his veins are visible through the thin skin. This is because Shmuel is starved and tortured on the other side of the Fence, while Bruno is well fed and taken care of in his home. The realization that this comparison of hands is the first time they have ever touched further informs Bruno of the divide between the two boys' lives. At the same time, this simple bit of contact is also a reminder of the boys' common humanity, despite the many boundaries placed between them.

Chapter 16 Quotes

> "I'm asking you, if we're not Jews, what were we instead?" "We're the opposite," said Gretel, answering quickly and sounding a lot more satisfied with this answer. "Yes, that's it. We're the opposite."

Related Characters: Gretel, Bruno (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

As Bruno and Gretel continue to study with Herr Liszt and live at Auschwitz, Gretel becomes more and more interested in Nazi ideals and the progression of the war. Instead of arranging her dolls every day, she instead moves around pushpins on a map Father gave her, in an attempt to track the movement of armies. Bruno goes to her one day to ask her about the people who live on the other side of the Fence. Gretel tells him that they are Jews, but she is unsure as to who exactly she and Bruno by comparison. In this quote, she settles on the idea that whatever she and Bruno are is the "opposite" of what Jews are.

Gretel also tells Bruno that the "opposite" don't like Jews, and that they must live on different sides of the Fence. Though no one specifically told Bruno this before he asked, his feelings about not telling his family about Shmuel indicate that he had some premonition that the division created by the Fence served some greater purpose. Neither Bruno nor Gretel understands exactly what the word "Jew" means, but Gretel does understand that as a German, she is supposed to feel disdain for this group of people. This kind of senseless indoctrination is how the Nazi party raised young supporters—they didn't have to have facts or reasoning to back up their propaganda. Boyne uses this instance to represent how hatred was spread between the generations without proper understanding of what its implications were.

> "I look just like you now," said Bruno sadly, as if this was a terrible thing to admit.
> "Only fatter," admitted Shmuel.

Related Characters: Shmuel, Bruno (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

Gretel discovers a tiny egg in her hair, and Mother soon realizes that both of the children have head lice. While Gretel is treated with a special shampoo, Father decides that Bruno should shave his head. When Bruno and Shmuel meet at the Fence, they realize that with two shaved heads, they look more similar than usual.

Both boys are conscious of the fact that Bruno is fatter and more well-nourished than Shmuel, though only Shmuel fully comprehends the reasoning behind this. Bruno understands that Shmuel looks sickly, and Bruno also has absorbed the belief that as a person on the other side of the Fence, Shmuel is somehow divided from and inferior to him, so here Bruno feels "sad" about this new resemblance.

Previously in the novel, the two boys also discover that they have the same birthday. Boyne continues to create similarities between the two boys in order to highlight their most pressing difference: that Shmuel is being starved and tortured behind the Fence, whereas Bruno lives in comfort. By continuing to illustrate how well the two boys get along, and to show that they are more similar than they are different, Boyne shows how the prejudices against Jews (which had been present in Europe for centuries) were exacerbated by the Nazi party in order to use the group as a scapegoat for all of Germany's problems. Just like Gretel's inability to name what a "Jew" or an "Opposite" is, this hatred was senseless.

Chapter 17 Quotes

He paused for a moment and looked out the window to his left—the window that led off to a view of the camp on the other side of the fence. "When I think about it, perhaps she is right. Perhaps this is not a place for children."

Related Characters: Father (speaker), Mother, Gretel, Bruno

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

One day, Father calls Gretel and Bruno into his office. He explains that he and Mother have been discussing the possibility of returning to Berlin, though he himself would remain at Auschwitz to command the camp. In this quote, Father expresses that Mother has told him that she did not think Auschwitz was a suitable location to raise her family.

This quote is a rare moment of introspection by Father, a character whom the reader hears about but seldom sees speak. Father is largely characterized as a cold person, a figure whom Bruno longs for more time with and respects, but is also somewhat scared of. Furthermore, as a commander of a concentration camp, Father oversees the torture, starvation, and murder of thousands of people each day. At Mother's urging, he comes to understand that this kind of environment could be toxic to his children. This moment of reflection shows that while he is capable of extremely horrific acts of war, he simultaneously harbors compassion for his family. The stark mental divide many Nazis held between their work and their personal lives was something psychologically studied after the Holocaust, as men who otherwise seemed like decent, moral human beings could commit atrocities while staying sane and otherwise "normal."

Chapter 18 Quotes

Shmuel bit his lip and said nothing. He had seen Bruno's father on any number of occasions and couldn't understand how such a man could have a son who was so friendly and kind.

Related Characters: Shmuel (speaker), Father, Bruno

Related Themes:

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

Shmuel remarks to Bruno that he hates soldiers, since he knows that they hate him and the rest of the prisoners on his side of the Fence. Bruno, confused, asks him if he hates his Father. Shmuel wants to say yes, but holds back his answer. In this quote, he wonders how Bruno could be so kind when his Father is so cruel.

Bruno, meanwhile, seems unwilling to accept that his Father is directly in charge of the misery that Shmuel faces every day. Bruno remains very naive and ignorant, but the more he learns the more uncomfortable he grows with the truth of his and Shmuel's situation. Here Boyne also makes his usual point about the inherent innocence of children, as the division between Father and Bruno represents the idea that hatred is not instinctive, or naturally divided along racial or national lines, but rather that it must be taught. Boyne contrasts Bruno and Father to show that it is possible for a younger generation to fix the toxic and prejudiced views of its elders.

Chapter 19 Quotes

Bruno had an urge to give Shmuel a hug, just to let him know how much he liked him and how much he'd enjoyed talking to him over the last year.
Shmuel had an urge to give Bruno a hug too, just to thank him for all his many kindnesses, and his gifts of food, and the fact that he was going to help him find Papa.

Related Characters: Shmuel, Bruno (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

One day at the Fence, Shmuel tells Bruno that he cannot find his father anywhere. Bruno agrees to help Shmuel search for him. Shmuel gets Bruno a pair of striped pajamas in his size, and the boys find a boy-sized hole in the Fence through which Bruno can fit. The boys realize that with their shaved heads and pajamas, they look completely identical.

In this quote, both Bruno and Shmuel both internally acknowledge how important the other boy has been to them during their time at Auschwitz. For Bruno, Shmuel made Auschwitz feel like home, and for Shmuel, Bruno was a major source of comfort and escape from the horrors of the camp inside the Fence. Shmuel is particularly touched that Bruno would be willing to come inside the Fence to help Shmuel look for his father.Their mutual bond and admiration shows that friendship can transcend prejudices and war.

❝ Bruno found that he was still holding Shmuel's hand in his own and nothing in the world would have persuaded him to let it go.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker), Shmuel

Related Themes:

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

After searching around the camp for over an hour, Bruno and Shmuel fail to find Shmuel's father. Suddenly, the soldiers blow whistles indicating that the prisoners must begin to march. Bruno wants to leave, but Shmuel tells him the soldiers will become angry if they don't follow orders. The boys end up inside of a metal room with many other people. Bruno is not sure why the soldiers put everyone inside the room, but holding Shmuel's hand gives him comfort.

In Nazi concentration camp, Jews and other minority groups were systematically murdered in gas chambers. It is into one of these chambers that the Nazi soldiers led Bruno and Shmuel. Though Bruno's parents intentionally did not tell him what the camp was for due to his young age, it is in this moment that his naïveté has proven fatal. Holding hands, Shmuel and Bruno die together in the gas chamber, and Bruno seemingly never really learns the truth about the situation. The image of a German boy and a Jewish boy holding hands in a Nazi gas chamber is a symbol of love and innocence in the face of evil. Boyne uses this tragic ending to show both the dangers of ignorance and of senseless prejudices and hatred in society.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ He looked into the distance then and followed it through logically, step by step by step, and when he did he found that his legs seemed to stop working right—as if they couldn't hold his body up any longer—and he ended up sitting on the ground in almost exactly the same position as Bruno had every afternoon for a year, although he didn't cross his legs beneath him.

Related Characters: Father (speaker), Bruno

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

Bruno's absence is quickly noticed by his family, who search everywhere to no avail. Mother and Gretel stay at Auschwitz for a few months in the hopes that Bruno will return, though they eventually return to Berlin. Father remains at Auschwitz for one more year, and eventually forms a theory as to what might have happened to Bruno. When he reaches the hole in the Fence that Bruno crawled through, he realizes what happened to his son.

In this quote, Father literally collapses under the weight of the realization that Bruno died in the concentration camp. Father is in fact indirectly involved in Bruno's murder, since he was one of the soldiers in charge of overseeing the systematic execution of the Jews. Though Nazis believed there were many physical and spiritual differences between Germans and Jews, when Bruno and Shmuel dressed similarly, there was no determining who was Jewish and who was German. Shmuel, a Jew, may have just as well been raised an Aryan German like Bruno, and vice versa. Here, Boyne points out the tragedy of scapegoating marginalized members of society, as these prejudices are completely manufactured by ideologies such as Nazism and have absolutely no basis in fact. By committing a crime against the Jews, Father was ultimately committing a crime against humanity, including his own son.

Interestingly, Boyne continues to use his childlike language and the tone of a parable even after his young protagonist is

dead. This sort of detached, innocent view of things helps put the horrors he is describing in a different perspective from typical WWII or Holocaust books.

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

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

A few months after Father realizes what happens to Bruno, World War II ends. When the Allied soldiers come to arrest him for his war crimes, he gives himself up, and no longer cares what they do to him.

This quote represents the crux of Boyne's reason for writing the allegorical tale of Bruno and Shmuel. After a tragedy, people tend to claim that such an event will never happen again, though centuries of wars and genocides show that this is not the case. A mass genocide on the scale of the Holocaust is an important reminder of just how dangerous prejudices between groups in society can be. It is crucial that all of humanity remember the horrors of the Holocaust so that it never happens again. But as with everything in history, some things can become forgotten by later generations, for whom the sadness and fears of war are not as fresh—and then the cycle of violence and complicity continues. This last line of the novel serves as a warning: this story, though set in the 1940s, could potentially happen anytime, anywhere, if people do not put friendship and common humanity before hatred and prejudice.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Bruno, a nine-year-old boy who lives in Berlin, Germany, comes home one day to find his family's maid, Maria, rummaging through his belongings. He asks her to stop, but she just shakes her head. Bruno's Mother comes in and explains that Maria is packing all of Bruno's things. In the next room, Bruno sees that Lars, the butler, is likewise packing Mother's things. Mother asks Bruno to come downstairs with her so that she may explain what is happening.

The narrator's voice echoes the voice of the protagonist, Bruno, a nine-year-old boy, so everything is filtered through his naïve perceptions of things. This is essentially the point of the book—to show how someone could try to remain "innocent" even as a German during the Holocaust. Clearly Bruno's family is rich, as they have both a maid and butler.

Bruno races Mother down to the dining room. She tells him there is nothing to worry about, and that he has done nothing wrong to cause the move. She explains that his Father's job in the army necessitates their moving far away from Berlin for the time being. Bruno thinks about the jobs that his best friends at school say their fathers have—such as greengrocer and chef—and realizes he is unsure exactly what his father does for a living. He only knows that soldiers are always in and out of the house. Mother tells Bruno that their beautiful five-story house will be closed while they are gone. Bruno is sad that he will have to leave his friends, as he loves to cause mischief with them, but Mother says that this is the end of the matter.

The year is 1942, and it soon becomes clear that Father is a member of the Nazi party. Bruno's parents never explain to him exactly what his father's job is, but he knows it is "very important." This lack of understanding makes it difficult for Bruno to grasp exactly why the family has to move, thus fueling his anger and confusion at the prospect of uprooting the life he has always known. Already Bruno's "problems" come across as the minimal struggles of the very privileged, but because we see everything through his eyes, the narrative lingers on the difficulties of his move.

Saddened by the news that the family is moving, Bruno climbs all the way to the top of the winding staircase and slides to the bottom floor on the wide polished bannister, one of his favorite activities. The banister, he thinks, is the best part of the house, as well as the fact that his Grandmother and Grandfather live nearby. He privately wishes that instead of bringing along his twelve-year-old sister Gretel, whom he thinks is a "Hopeless Case," that the family could bring along his grandparents instead. He hears his mother and father talking in Father's office, which is "Out Of Bounds At All Times." Feeling defeated, Bruno goes to his room and continues to pack before Mother and Maria discover all the things he has hidden at the back of his wardrobe.

Bruno loves the house's nooks and crannies, and is saddened by the fact that he will never uncover all of his home's mysteries before moving away. He is left out of all the decision-making due to his age and because his parents do not discuss the realities of the war or his father's job with him—and he is lucky enough to be in a situation where he doesn't have to understand these realities. Like most siblings their age, Gretel and Bruno do not often get along—she treats him like a baby, and Bruno is especially self-conscious because of his smaller-than-average size.

CHAPTER 2

Bruno's family soon travels far away to move into their new home, which Bruno decides is the "exact opposite of their old home." This house has three floors instead of five, and rather than standing on a populated street near the center of town, it stands alone in a desolate place, with no other families around. The only similarity is that Father has another office in this house, which is also off-limits to Bruno. Bruno desperately misses the hustle and bustle of Berlin, in particular the shops with fruits and vegetables, as well as his three best friends Karl, Daniel, and Martin.

Though Bruno's new home is physically different from the one in Berlin, the social stratifications are similar: the servants are subordinate to Bruno's family, Bruno is largely left alone for his own entertainment, and Father remains an aloof and vaguely menacing figure who is not to be disturbed. We are given few details of Bruno's childhood in Berlin, but by all accounts it seems idyllic, sheltered, and fun—an ideal sort of growing up.

Bruno tells Mother that he thinks moving was a bad idea, and she chastises him for saying such a thing. She says that "some people" make all the decisions for the household. When Mother wants to refer to Father without naming him, Bruno notices that she always calls him "some people." She instructs Bruno to go help Maria with the unpacking, as the family will be in the new house for the "foreseeable future."

Mother, though dutiful in maintaining the household for Father, clearly harbors her own resentments for his strict rules and her own relative powerlessness in the family dynamic. The Nazis emphasized traditional family structures, with the "man of the house" making all the decisions, and the women and children remaining submissive.

Bruno goes to help Maria unpack, peering into rooms in the house as he goes. He decides that the house is not a home, and never will be. He asks Maria what she thinks of the move, and she says it is not her place to criticize the new house. As they are talking, a young man with bright blond hair and wearing a soldier's uniform enters the room. He looks strict. He nods at Bruno and then leaves. Maria guesses that he is one of Father's soldiers.

Bruno feels out of place in their new home, which lacks the hustle and bustle that he loved in Berlin. When he asks Maria what she thinks about the new house, she clearly has much to say on the topic, but holds back due to her place as a servant. The Nazis emphasized an invented "Aryan" race of blonde-haired, "superior" people, so this young soldier (Kotler, as we later learn) seems to perfectly fit their ideal.

Bruno, now very upset, tells Maria about his fear of not having any other children to play with. Trying to hold back his tears, he goes over to the window. In his room in Berlin, he was able to see clear across the city from the window. There is no city to see here, but what Bruno does sees outside the window makes his mouth become "the shape of an O," and makes him feel "very cold and unsafe."

Noticing the lack of other homes in the vicinity, Bruno feels dread for the loneliness he knows he will face, especially as he is used to having his three "best friends" around him in Berlin. With this "cliffhanger" ending, Boyne seems to suggest that we will soon learn more about what Father does, and why the family has moved.

CHAPTER 3

Bruno, who often does not get along with his twelve-year-old sister Gretel, secretly wishes she could have stayed behind in Berlin. Three years his elder, he has heard her described (likely by their parents) "on any number of occasions as being Trouble From Day One." He is a little scared of her, and in Berlin she often liked to taunt him with her friends, such as insisting that he was only six years old instead of nine. Gretel has a lot of dolls, and spends a lot of time attending to them. Bruno is happy to be away from Berlin only due to the fact that her friends are no longer around to bother him.

Gretel is three years older than Bruno, and she never lets him forget it. She, like Bruno, is apparently left largely to her own devices to entertain herself in the family's home, and she loves to play with her dolls. Though Gretel seems slightly less naïve than Bruno when it comes to the war and the realities of Hitler's Third Reich, both children are extremely sheltered, and have few cares other than their familial bickering.

Bruno runs into Gretel's room to find her arranging her dolls in her new bedroom. The siblings theorize about how long they might live in the new house. Father had told both of them that they would be living there for "the foreseeable future," which Gretel believes to mean up to three weeks. They agree that the new location of their home is "horrible." Gretel tells Bruno that Father told her the people who had lived at "**Out-With**" (which she speculates is the name of the house) before them had not done their jobs very well, and had to leave before making the house nice for the next family. The children wonder what "**Out-With**" means, and Gretel guesses that it means "out with the people who lived here before us."

Here we finally get a familiar name that helps us figure out what's going on—"Out-With" is a childish mispronunciation of "Auschwitz," a Nazi concentration camp in Poland that was famous for being especially horrifying and deadly. The mispronunciation itself is symbolic, as it portrays the novel's general idea of horror as seen through the lens of childhood innocence, and also because it could mean "out with" the Jews and other minorities who are killed there. Of course, this is a punny English mispronunciation of a German word, so Boyne is taking some creative liberties here with his German-speaking characters.

Bruno tells Gretel that he doesn't like it in the new house, and she agrees with him again. He says he misses his best friends Karl, Daniel, and Martin, and Gretel says she misses Hilda, Isobel, and Louise, her own best friends. Bruno remarks that he doesn't think "the other children look at all friendly." Gretel asks him what he means by the other children, as there are no other homes near their house. Bruno tries to pretend that he hasn't said anything about seeing other children, but Gretel insists that he explain himself.

When Bruno mentions the children he has seen outside of his window, he immediately regrets it—he has some kind of gut instinct that tells him there is something sinister about what he has seen. This initial reaction then calls into question just how "innocent" Bruno remains in the action that follows. He is certainly still young and naïve, but it may be that he remains more willfully ignorant than he should be because it is easier and more comfortable for him.

Bruno finally gives in to Gretel's demands that he explain what he meant by seeing other children, and he pulls his sister into his bedroom. He points to the same window that he had been looking out of before. Gretel is just as shocked as Bruno was at what she sees outside the window.

Neither child fully understands who the people in the camp are, but something tells them that they are not simply the neighbors. Again the question of complicity arises, as Bruno and Gretel seem afraid of learning the horrifying truth, and so try to stay naïve.

CHAPTER 4

Outside the window, Gretel realizes that what Bruno has seen are not just children: they are men of all ages, everywhere. The two children have no idea what they are doing there, and are unsure where all the women are. They guess that perhaps the women live in "a different part." Gretel is very surprised—her own window faces a forest, and she had not known that other people lived near them until now. Upon further inspection, she sees that the people live on the other side of a very high **fence**, with "huge wooden posts, like telegraph poles, dotted along it, holding it up." The top of the **fence** has barbed wire. Beyond the **fence** there is no greenery, only some kind of sand-like substance, low huts, and large square buildings.

The children can tell that this is a very inhospitable environment for people to live in—but because they are both young and almost impossibly sheltered, they don't fully understand the extent of wartime realities. Bruno and Gretel thus are forced (or force themselves) to believe that the people across the fence have chosen to live there. It is especially chilling to hear a death camp described through the eyes of a naïve child.

Gretel and Bruno are confused as to who would "build such a nasty-looking place." Bruno guesses that they are living in the countryside now, which is why there are so few people and businesses around compared to their home in Berlin. Gretel wonders where the farms are, as she learned in school that the food they receive in the city comes from farmers in the countryside. She hopefully wonders if this is their "holiday home." Bruno disagrees, and the two children decide that what they're looking at definitely isn't any kind of farm, and so this probably isn't the countryside or some kind of holiday home.

As the children both grew up in a wealthy household in the busy city of Berlin, they have no idea what to make of this new desolate location. The only alternative to a city home that they can imagine is a "country home." Due to their extremely sheltered lives and the filtered information they receive, they have absolutely no idea what kind of place Auschwitz truly is or could be.

The children continue to wonder who the people they see are. They can see people of all ages and sizes, in groups, marching around, and being shouted at by a soldier. Some are pushing wheelbarrows together, as if in a chain gang, and others have crutches and bandages around their heads. Some carry shovels, or are "being led by groups of soldiers to a place where they could no longer be seen." Bruno and Gretel are both confused as to why their Father would move them from a nice street in Berlin to such a desolate place with so many people.

The children perceive everything only through their own narrow worldview, so they have no thought for the plight of the people they're watching—only for themselves. They are bewildered by the fact that Father chose to move them from the happiness they had in Berlin to this horrible new location. The comparison of the people to a "chain gang" shows that the children should at least have some frame of reference for what prisoners look like, however.

The two children notice a group of other children on the other side of the **fence**, huddled together and being shouted at by a soldier. They move in closer together the more the soldiers shout, and when one soldier lunges at the group, they scatter, until the soldier tells them to get into a single line, and he laughs. Gretel wonders if it's some kind of rehearsal, even though most of the children look like they're crying. Gretel announces that she wouldn't want to play with children like that, since they all look very dirty. Bruno wonders if maybe there are no baths on the other side of the **fence**, and Gretel tells him not to be stupid: what kind of people don't have baths? Bruno guesses that people who don't have hot water don't have baths. Gretel shivers, and turns away from the window, having had enough of the sight. She goes into her room to arrange her dolls, where "the view is decidedly nicer." But instead of arranging her dolls, she just sits on her bed and thinks about what she has seen. Bruno continues to stare out of the window, and he notices one thing he had not seen before: everyone, grandfathers and fathers and little boys, are all wearing "a pair of grey **striped pajamas** and a grey striped cap on their heads."

Bruno and Gretel again seem younger than Boyne portrays them as, as they seemingly can't even comprehend a life without a family, sufficient food, or a bath in which to wash. They attempt to project their youthful positivity onto what they see in the camp, but they both know that there is something uneasy and sinister about the situation. As competitive siblings, they each do their best to mask their uneasiness about the camp when speaking to each other. This shows another aspect of the phenomenon of complicity—people reassure each other and unconsciously help each other to remain complacent or purposefully ignorant in the face of injustice. Gretel does this more obviously than Bruno (perhaps because she is older), purposefully choosing to avoid looking at the depressing prisoners and instead choosing to return to her sheltered, idyllic world of dolls and innocence.

CHAPTER 5

Bruno decides that he must speak with Father about how much he dislikes their new home. Father had left for the new house a few days before the entire family closed the house in Berlin and left for **Out-With**. Bruno recalls an official-looking car decorated in red and black flags coming to take them away from the house. Bruno remembers that right before they left, Mother had stood in the living room and shook her head, saying to herself that they should have never let "**the Fury**" come over for dinner. She had not noticed Maria and Bruno standing nearby as she said this, and quickly hurried them out of the house. The car with the flags on it had taken the family to a train station. Bruno remembers seeing another parallel train also heading to Out-With. This train was crammed full of people, and Bruno felt confused as to why the people did not get onto his train, which, by comparison, had plenty of room.

Mother's dismissal of what she says about Hitler's (the "Fury," or Führer) visit underscores how little she and Father tell Gretel and Bruno about modern German politics. Bruno has no comprehension that his father is a high-ranking officer in the Nazi army, and that the people on the other train are Jews and prisoners being sent to a concentration camp. Due to his ignorance on this subject, as well as his natural childhood naivety, he has no comprehension about people living a life that is worse off than the one he is living.

Bruno had not yet seen his father since arriving at **Out-With**. He hears a commotion downstairs and looks down to see Father talking with a group of five men. His father is dressed in his military finest, while the other men don't seen to be quite as well dressed, though they are wearing soldiers' uniforms. They are all complaining to him about **the Fury**, and past discipline and efficiency. Father silences them with one hand, and assures them that things will be different from now on. He says he must help his family settle in or face more trouble inside the house than outside of it. The men all laugh, shake Father's hand, and stand in a line. They shoot their arms up, the way Father had taught Bruno, and cry out two words. They leave, and Father retreats into his office.

Like in their Berlin home, Father remains an elusive and imposing figure who spends most of his time at home in his office, which Bruno is not allowed in except on special occasions. The complaints of the soldiers show that Father has been brought in to rectify what Hitler believes has been an incorrect handling of Auschwitz. The soldiers' silence when Father raises his hand is evidence of his authority. The sign they make with their arms is the Nazi salute, and their cry is "Heil Hitler," to show their allegiance to the Führer.

Bruno creeps down the stairs and decides to try and see Father in his office. In Berlin, Bruno had only been inside Father's office a handful of times because it was "Out Of Bounds At All Times and No Exceptions." Bruno knocks on the door of his father's new office, and Father tells him to enter. Bruno is shocked at how beautiful the room is—while the rest of the house is dark, this room has high ceilings and a lot of light, with mahogany shelves on the walls lined with books. Father breaks into a smile when he sees Bruno on the other side of his desk, and steps around it to shake Bruno's hand. Father, unlike Mother or Grandmother, is not affectionate. Father tells Bruno he is proud of him for helping his mother and sister to close the house, and asks him what he thinks of their new home. Bruno admits that he doesn't like it, but Father says that he must accept "**Out-With**" as the family's new home.

As patriarch of the family, and as a high-ranking Nazi army officer, Father is given the best quarters in the house. Though Bruno does feel affection for his father, and aspires to be like him when he grows up, he also feels a kind of fear of Father—he is not warm like Mother or Grandmother, and treats Bruno more like a miniature adult than a child. Since Bruno is somewhat afraid of his Father and his authority, it is a testament to how much he does not like Auschwitz that he is willing to admit this dislike out loud.

Bruno asks Father when the family is returning to Berlin, but Father counters by saying a home is not a physical location, but rather where one's family is. Bruno says his grandparents are back in Berlin, but Father says that having Mother and Gretel close by is more important. Bruno goes on to complain that his friends and the hustle of the city are no longer close by. Father says that sometimes, one has to do things in life that they have no choice in. As **the Fury** believes Father's position is important, he must be in **Out-With** out of duty to his country. Bruno feels tears in his eyes, but Father says that he must realize that Out-With is home now, and that they will be here for the foreseeable future. Father says that when he was a child, there were things he didn't want to do, such as his schoolwork, but his father encouraged him to do these things anyway. Father asks Bruno if he thinks that he would have become such a success if he hadn't "learned when to argue and when to keep my mouth shut and follow orders."

Bruno continues to feel upset about the family's move to Auschwitz, because all of the adults around him only explain why they are there in vague terms. Though Bruno knows Father's job is "important," he has no idea that his father is in charge of the concentration camp he can see from his window. Thus Bruno, as a child, feels that being moved away from everything he knows and loves is a kind of punishment. Father indirectly tells Bruno that if he does not stop complaining, there will be consequences and potential punishments to his actions. The spoiled Bruno, however, is seemingly oblivious to this, and continues to focus only on his own grievances.

Unsure how to respond, Bruno asks Father if he did something to make **the Fury** angry, due to the fact that he assigned Father to a job at **Out-With**, which is much less desirable than Berlin. Father laughs, and explains to Bruno that his job is very important. Before he can think this through, Bruno tells Father that he must not have been very good at his previous job if the Fury made him move away from all his family and friends and into a "horrible place" like Out-With. Bruno suggests that Father apologize sincerely to the Fury, and then perhaps the family could move back to Berlin.

Bruno is so upset at the move that he speaks back to Father in a way he has never spoken before. Uninformed of the true nature of the situation, he only knows how to relate to his father in nine-year-old terms: if someone has made you do something as a punishment, the punishment can perhaps be reversed with a sincere apology. Bruno assumes that the move to Auschwitz is a kind of punishment, so if Father apologizes to Hitler, the punishment might be revoked.

Father is silent for a time, and then he goes and sits behind his desk. He lights a cigarette, and muses that perhaps Bruno was trying to be brave, rather than "merely disrespectful" towards him. He tells Bruno to be quiet now. Though he believes he has been considerate towards his feelings up until now, he believes this last remark has been insolent, and that Bruno will have to accept living in **Out-With**. Bruno shouts that he does not want to accept it. Instead of reacting at all, Father just shakes his head and tells him to go to his room.

Though Father is a menacing figure, he channels his anger towards Bruno in a kind of quiet, forbidding disappointment. We can only imagine how differently he acts towards his prisoners, when he isn't restraining his anger. Like with most of Bruno's questions about the move, his demands are dismissed, and he is sent to his room.

Before he goes to his bedroom, Bruno asks his father who the people outside are. Father tells Bruno that they are soldiers, secretaries, and staff workers. Bruno asks who the people all dressed the same are. Father nods his head and smiles, and tells Bruno that they are not people at all. He says that Bruno has nothing to do with them, and that he should not think about them at all. Before Bruno leaves, Father indicates that he has forgotten to do something. Bruno pushes his feet together and shoots his right arm into the air, announcing *"Heil Hitler,"* just like his father has taught him. Father repeats the ritual back, and tells Bruno to have a pleasant afternoon.

Instead of being told who the people are in the camp outside, Father merely tells Bruno that they are not "people" at all, reciting Nazi anti-Semitic rhetoric that Jews (among others) are somehow less than human. Bruno repeats the Nazi salute he has been taught, but without understanding why he is doing it or what he is saying. This is an example of indoctrination—Bruno has grown up doing or repeating certain things without understanding them. In his young mind they are true, simply because they're what he's always known.

CHAPTER 6

A few days later, Bruno is lying in his bed, examining the cracks in his bedroom walls. He thinks that maybe insects live on the other side of the cracks, but then he decides that nobody, not even insects, would voluntarily choose to live at **Out-With**. Out loud to himself, he says that he hates absolutely everything about their new home. At that moment, Maria enters with freshly laundered clothes. Bruno asks her if she agrees with his feelings about Out-With. Maria doesn't reply, and in turn asks Bruno how he feels about Out-With. Bruno tells her that he thinks it is awful, and Maria replies that she does miss sitting in the garden at the home in Berlin. Bruno asks her if she doesn't think it's as bad as Bruno does, and she seems angry for a moment, as if there were things she wanted to say but could not.

Though Maria certainly has feelings about Father's job and the family's move to Auschwitz, she knows that it is not her place to say them for fear of retaliation from Father. Though she is fond of Bruno, she knows it is not safe to speak her mind to a nine-year-old who can easily repeat them to his parents. Bruno continues to focus on what he sees as the injustice of the move, and has little concept of the strict hierarchy of the house—he assumes that Maria should be able to speak her mind just like he can.

Bruno begs Maria to tell him how she feels, because he still hopes to convince Father to take them home again, especially if everyone feels the same way as he does. Maria shakes her head sadly, and tells Bruno that his father knows what is best. Under his breath he says, "Stupid Father," and Maria tells him that he must not say that. Maria says that Father is a good man who takes care of them.

Even though Maria's body language and hesitation show that she agrees with Bruno's dislike of Auschwitz and Father's new position, she knows that it is not safe or proper to bad-mouth Father, due to his role as both family patriarch and Nazi officer.

Bruno admits that how his father had treated Maria and her mother was very nice, and decides to stop trying to recruit Maria to his campaign to leave **Out-With**. Maria looks out the window, and muses that Father has a kindness in his soul, but that it makes her "wonder what he…how he can…" Her voice drifts off, and cracks as if she is going to cry. Bruno insists she tell him what she was going to say, but then the door slams so loudly downstairs that it seems like a gunshot. It turns out to be Gretel, who comes into Bruno's bedroom. She demands that Maria run her a bath. Bruno tells her she can do it herself, but Gretel says that that's what Maria is for, as she is their maid. Maria says she will come soon, and Gretel marches out of the room. Bruno muses that Gretel doesn't stop to think that Maria is a person with feelings, just like they are.

Maria apparently understands the truth about Auschwitz, and what Father's role in the camp is. She feels conflicted, since the family gives her a job and a home, but she cannot understand how such seemingly nice people can also condone and carry out such horrific actions. Gretel treats Maria the way she has seen Father treat her—like a servant who is subordinate in the household, rather than a friend and fellow human being. One point the novel often makes is that young children do not naturally feel prejudice or hatred—they have to be taught these attitudes. Bruno is thus portrayed as young enough to still be innocent, while Gretel is learning the vices of adulthood.

Alone again with Maria, Bruno admits that he still thinks Father has made a terrible mistake. Maria says that even if that's how he feels, he cannot say it out loud. Bruno is confused as to why he's not allowed to say how he feels, and Maria asks him to remain quiet because he could cause a lot of trouble for all of them. Bruno says he was only trying to make conversation while Maria folded the clothes, and that he wasn't trying to make trouble as if he was going to run away. Maria says that he would make everyone worry, and that he must just focus on staying safe until everything is over. She says they have no power to change the situation. Bruno fights back a sudden urge to cry, and it seems as if Maria is about to cry as well. Bruno goes to the door, and tells Maria he is going to go outside, and that it is none of her business. He runs down the road, as if he is going to go to the train station, but the idea of being alone is even more unpleasant than the idea of staying at **Out-With**.

Maria knows the full extent of what Nazis do to people who disagree with their policies—and the camp right outside of the house is evidence of the full extent of their power. When she tells Bruno how important it is to keep quiet, she is also reminding herself that she must keep a stiff upper lip in order to keep her job and stay safe. Yet we also see Maria involved in another kind of complicity—telling herself that there's nothing she can do to change things, and so purposefully turning a blind eye to the atrocities she can see right out the window. Bruno senses that there are things he is not being told but is still meant to understand, and he runs out of the house in an attempt to get away from his new home.

CHAPTER 7

After a few weeks at **Out-With**, Bruno accepts that he is likely not returning to Berlin anytime soon, and that he should find some way to entertain himself before he goes mad. He thinks about a man named Herr Roller who lived around the corner from the family in Berlin, and who is the only person he'd ever met who was considered mad. Herr Roller would have arguments with people who weren't there, and would often punch a wall. Mother told him not to laugh at Herr Roller, since he was lovely as a young man but became ill after suffering a head injury in World War I. Father had served with Herr Roller in the trenches. Mother refused to speak on the topic anymore, since "war is not a fit subject for conversation."

Bruno's recollection that Mother refused to talk to him about the First World War is indicative of how she and Father handle the current war. Indeed, Mother avoids talking about the war at all, and this avoidance of the subject allows her to purposefully ignore what her husband is doing. Herr Roller is clearly suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

From inside the house, Bruno notices a large oak tree with a wide trunk, and decides it is the perfect tree on which to construct a tire swing. That day, Mother and Father are both out of the house, so Bruno is on his own to find the materials. He sees Lieutenant Kotler (the blond young soldier Bruno saw before) and Gretel speaking together outside, and Bruno is reminded of the cold atmosphere that surrounds the Lieutenant. Bruno goes to say hello, and Gretel, irritated that her time with the Lieutenant has been interrupted, asks him what he wants. Bruno asks Kotler if there are any spare tires around the house. Kotler makes Pavel, an old man who now waits on the family, take Bruno to find a tire in the storage shed. Kotler tells Pavel to wash his hands before he handles the food, and calls him a mean name that startles both Gretel and Bruno.

Since there is no one else to play with around the house, and Gretel is often unkind to him, Bruno decides it is up to him to find entertainment. Lieutenant Kotler treats Pavel very unkindly, even more unkindly than Father treats Maria. This confuses Bruno who doesn't understand how Pavel is different from any other servant. The name Kotler calls Pavel is a derogatory term for a Jewish person, and in telling him to wash his hands, Kotler is telling Pavel that he believes he is an inherently dirty person.

Bruno successfully constructs the tire swing, but after a few hours of use, he falls off and scrapes his knee. Pavel, who has been keeping an eye on him from the kitchen window, comes out and takes him inside. Bruno asks for his Mother, but Pavel says he is the only one in the house. Pavel patches up Bruno's knee. Bruno keeps asking if he needs to go to the hospital or see a doctor, but Pavel says that it isn't necessary. Bruno asks Pavel how he knows, since he is not a doctor, but Pavel replies that he practiced as a doctor before he came to **Out-With**. Bruno tells Pavel that he wants to become an explorer, and Pavel wishes him luck. Bruno asks him how long he has been at Out-With, and Pavel says he thinks he's "always been here." Bruno asks him if that means he's grown up there, and Pavel says no. Mother comes home before they can finish their exchange.

Bruno is startled by Pavel's kindness, since he has never heard the man speak. He has also internalized how Kotler and Father treat Pavel to some extent—since he has seen other people treat Pavel badly, he subconsciously thinks that Pavel must have done something to deserve this treatment. Pavel's soothing words and kindness therefore surprise him, and the old man begins to become an intriguing mystery to Bruno. Pavel's inability to speak clearly to Bruno, due to the fact that he is essentially a slave in the household, further contributes to the air of sadness and mystery that surrounds him.

Mother sees the bandage on Bruno's knee, and he explains what happened with the tire swing. He tells her how Pavel brought him inside when he fell, and how he bandaged his wound. Mother looks uncomfortable, and sends Bruno to his room. From outside the kitchen, Bruno hears Mother tell Pavel that "if the Commandant asks, we'll say that I cleaned Bruno up." Bruno is confused as to why his mother would do something so seemingly selfish as take responsibility for something she had not done.

Mother knows that Father would be very angry if he knew that a Jew was the one taking care of his son's injuries. Bruno, of course, has no idea what the issue is with Pavel taking care of him, and thinks Mother is just trying to take responsibility for a good deed she has not really done.

CHAPTER 8

Though Bruno misses his three best friends very much, the two people he misses the most from Berlin are Grandmother and Grandfather. Bruno's grandparents live in a small flat "near the fruit and vegetable stalls," and his Grandfather, who is 73, runs a restaurant. Grandmother, who is 62, met Grandfather as a young woman during one of her concerts (she used to be a professional singer). She has long red hair and green eyes, and says there is "Irish blood" in her family. She is still known for singing, and for being the center of attention at family parties. Grandmother liked the idea of Bruno and Gretel following her love of the spotlight, and every Christmas and birthday party, she would organize little plays for herself and the children. At some point in the play, she would always sing, give Bruno a magic trick to do, and make sure Gretel had the opportunity to dance. She would also make them special costumes, and the children would rehearse the play for a week before Christmas.

Grandmother was a kind of matriarch in Bruno's family, and apparently very different from her strict, forbidding son. Instead of dismissing Bruno and Gretel as merely children who should be seen and not heard, Grandmother sought to engage with her grandchildren. She was a dynamic woman who liked to create and perform in shows, and she always made sure to showcase her grandchildren's talents treating them like people capable of understanding and reason.

Bruno remembers how the play they had performed at their last Christmas in Berlin had ended in sadness. Something exciting had happened with Father—he was now to be addressed by Maria, their Cook, and Lars the butler as "Commandant," after **the Fury** and a "beautiful blonde woman" had come for dinner. Mother told Bruno to congratulate Father, but he wasn't sure what for. On Christmas day, Father wore a brand new uniform, (one which he now wears every day), and the soldiers that came in and out of the house seemed to respect him more. Grandfather seemed proud, but Grandmother acted unimpressed.

As we will learn more about later, Father had dinner with Hitler and his girlfriend Eva Braun soon before Christmas. During this meeting, he was awarded the title of Commandant, and was put in charge of Auschwitz. While Grandfather saw this as an honor, Grandmother was apparently not so pleased by her son's increasing role in the war and in the Nazi party.

Grandmother asks Father if there was something that went wrong when she was raising him, and Father tells Grandmother that this isn't the time to say such things. Grandmother goes on, asking Father how he can feel special without caring what the new uniform and title really mean and stand for. Grandfather says that he is proud of Father, and proud of him for surviving World War I and coming this far in his positions in the military. Mother comments that she thinks Father looks handsome, but Grandmother calls her foolish for thinking that this is important. Bruno then asks if he looks handsome in his ringmaster's costume, but that only alerts the adults that the children are still present, and he and Gretel are sent to their rooms.

Grandmother, who is clearly not a defender of the Nazi party, is vocal about her distaste for Father's new job. This makes her stand out from the rest of Bruno's family members. Mother and Maria are clearly unhappy with Father's role at Auschwitz, but they are afraid to speak their minds. Grandmother, on the other hand, has an authority over Father in a way that they don't, and also seems more outspoken and courageous in her manner. As usual, Bruno is only focused on his childhood games, and has no idea what's going on.

The children sit at the top of the stairs and try to eavesdrop on the adults' conversation. Unfortunately, most of the voices are muffled. After a few minutes, the door slams open, and Grandmother comes out, saying that she is ashamed of her son. Father calls after her and says that he is a patriot, but Grandmother retorts that seeing him in the uniform makes her sick, and makes her want to "tear the eyes" from her head. She storms out of the house. Bruno recalls that he had not seen much of Grandmother after that night, and didn't even get a chance to say goodbye to her before they left for **Out-With**. He decides to write her a letter, and tells her all about how horrible he thinks Out-With is and about the people he sees on the other side of the **fence**. He tells her that he misses her, and signs the letter, "your loving grandson, Bruno."

Once again the children are banned from any conversation with a sensitive subject, and can only hear bits and pieces of the argument downstairs. Father maintains that he is doing a good thing for the country—essentially "shutting up and following orders," as he explained to Bruno. Only Grandmother speaks out against the Nazis (but also has the privileged position of doing so without real repercussions), and believes that her son's new uniform really turns him into a monster, not a hero. Grandmother would understand Bruno's description of the people in the "striped pajamas," and realize just how horrifying her son's new position is.

CHAPTER 9

For a while, most things at **Out-With** remain the same—Gretel is unfriendly to Bruno, and Bruno misses Berlin, though his specific memories of his old home begin to fade. The soldiers come and go, and Lieutenant Kotler is a constant presence in the house, where he is either whispering with Mother or humoring Gretel as she tries to flirt with him. The servants keep the house neat, and do so in near silence. Pavel continues to come and peel the vegetables before dinner is cooked, and Bruno catches him glancing at the tiny scar on Bruno's knee. Otherwise, Pavel and Bruno never speak.

With Father often out of the house, Lieutenant Kotler often seems to take his place as "patriarch." Gretel, in the throes of adolescence and as bored with Auschwitz as Bruno is, develops a crush on him. It is never specifically stated, but it's implied that Mother actually starts having an affair with Kotler in Father's absence. Bruno still acts innocent and naïve, but clearly recognizes that something is different about Pavel and how his family treats him.

One day Father decides that Bruno and Gretel should resume their studies. A few days later, a man named Herr Liszt comes to the house to teach the children each day. Although he is friendly enough, Bruno senses that there is an "anger inside him just waiting to get out." He prefers to teach Gretel and Bruno about history and geography, though Bruno wants to read and study art. Herr Liszt chastises Bruno for not knowing much about his country's history, and all the "great wrongs" that have been done to him and the Fatherland. Bruno, confused, thinks this means he will finally understand why he was moved away from Berlin against his will.

Herr Liszt is clearly a Nazi, and a teacher approved by Father and the Party itself. Nazi ideology was not only spread by violence or speechifying, but also through the indoctrination of children. This included academic types (like Herr Liszt) endorsing pseudoscientific views about racial superiority, as well as teaching edited versions of history that supported German nationalism and condemned minorities, Jews, and Communists. Despite all this, Bruno somehow still remains ignorant of who the people are in the camp. This extended, almost impossible naiveté either shows how Bruno actively avoids thinking about what he senses to be true, or else it is Boyne being rather unrealistic to emphasize the message of his "fable."

A few days later, Bruno is in his room, thinking about all the things he was able to do in Berlin but has not been able to do since moving to **Out-With**. He realizes that he misses exploring, and decides to investigate the grounds outside the house. He chooses to go explore the **fence**, even though he has been told it is off-limits. On his way to the fence, he stops at a bench with a plaque on it—he has seen it for months, but has never taken the time to read it. Bruno discovers that the plaque says "Presented on the occasion of the opening of Out-With Camp, June nineteen forty." Bruno continues on his way to the fence, ignoring his parents' words as they repeat themselves in his mind, forbidding him to go near the fence or camp, "With No Exceptions."

With little to no adult supervision besides his time with Herr Liszt, Bruno finally gets fed up with his boredom and decides that he should explore the house and the grounds that surround it. He has been told to stay away from the camp, but not why—and so, as a sheltered nine-year-old boy who may have "explored" Berlin but was always kept safe and ignorant of unpleasant realities, he now assumes that he may as well go explore the forbidden fence.

CHAPTER 10

Bruno walks along the length of the **fence** for a long time. It feels as if the fence is several miles long, and he continues to follow it until his house becomes so far away he can no longer see it. Despite his lengthy exploration, he sees no entrance or exit to the camp on the other side of the fence. Just when he is starting to feel a little hungry, and wonders if perhaps it is time to turn around, he sees a small dot in the distance. He wonders if perhaps it is a mirage, a phenomenon which he once read about. As Bruno gets closer, however, he realizes the dot is a boy.

Bruno goes to explore the fence, finally finding some kind of excitement in his new home. It is in this chapter that Boyne comes the significant plot point of his story, as Bruno finally meets one of the people in the "striped pajamas."

When the two boys finally reach each other, they say "Hello" to one another. Bruno notices that the boy is wearing the **striped pajamas** he has seen all of the people outside the window wearing, including a striped cap cloth on his head. The boy is not wearing any socks or shoes, and he seems very forlorn and dirty. On his arm, he wears an armband with a star on it. His face seems almost grey, and his eyes are very large and sad. Bruno thinks that he has never seen such a skinny boy in his entire life.

The boy is in his concentration camp uniform (which Bruno still somehow thinks are pajamas), and bears the Star of David to brand him as a Jew. His eyes seem wide and large because he is severely malnourished, as the people in the camp are kept in starvation conditions. Boyne is stretching the truth here with the very existence of the boy, however—at Auschwitz, children too young to work were immediately killed.

Bruno tells the boy that he has been out exploring, but that he has not found anything yet, besides him. Bruno sits down on his side of the **fence**, and tells the boy that he lives in the house. The boy replies that he saw it once, but had not seen Bruno. He tells Bruno that his name is Shmuel, and Bruno tells Shmuel his own name. They both agree that they had never heard of the other's name before, though Shmuel says that there are "dozens" of Shmuels on his side of the fence. Bruno replies that he is the only Bruno he knows, and Shmuel tells him that he is lucky. The boys exchange ages and birthdates, and are shocked to find that they have the exact same birthday: April 15th, 1934. Bruno says that they are like twins, to which Shmuel replies, "a little bit."

The fact that Bruno and Shmuel have the same birthdate, but live wildly different lives, underscores the horrors of the Holocaust and the anti-Semitic ideology of the Nazi party. Though Shmuel is a (relatively) innocent nine-year-old boy just like Bruno, he is imprisoned while Bruno is not, simply because he is a Jew. The "moral" of the story, which Boyne makes clear from this first scene with the matching birthdays, is just how similar Shmuel and Bruno are in essence—they are separated by class, nationality, and religion, but as human beings they are equal.

Bruno asks Shmuel if he has any friends, and Shmuel says sort of—there are a lot of boys on his side of the **fence**, but they fight a lot. This is why he has come to the fence, to be alone. Bruno complains that he is bored on his own side of the fence with no one to play with, and thinks it unfair that Shmuel has so many companions. He tells Shmuel that he is from Berlin, and is shocked when Shmuel does not know where Berlin is. Shmuel explains that he is from Poland, and Bruno is surprised, since Shmuel has been speaking to him in German. Shmuel explains that he responded in German when Bruno said "hello" to him in that language. He says that his mother is a schoolteacher who taught him the language.

This moment shows how little Bruno still knows about the situation at Auschwitz—though the camp is located in Poland, Bruno had no idea that he had even left Germany. Though the two boys are the same age, Shmuel is already world-weary after being ripped from his home and imprisoned in the concentration camp. We are again reminded that everyone in the story is supposed to be speaking German, so Bruno's mispronunciations of "Fury" and "Out-With" are another stretch of reality.

Bruno tells Shmuel that he does not think Poland is as good a country as Germany, and Shmuel asks him why he thinks that. Bruno explains that "Germany is the greatest of all countries," and parrots what he has heard Father and Grandfather say, which is that they are "superior." Shmuel just stares at him, unsure what to say. Uncomfortable, Bruno asks Shmuel where Poland is. Shmuel says that it is in Europe, and Bruno theorizes that Poland is in Denmark. Shmuel stares at him, and states that they are in Poland right now, and that Denmark is far away from both Poland and Germany. Bruno, confused, wishes to change the subject, because he realizes that he is very wrong about a lot of his ideas on geography.

Though Bruno consciously understands very little about the war, he has been indoctrinated since birth to believe that Germany is a superior nation to all other nations. He repeats this rhetoric without even thinking, and Shmuel's simple question makes him, for the first time in his life, question what he has been taught. Shmuel seems just as incredulous as we might be that Bruno remains so ignorant and naïve, despite his situation.

Bruno tells Shmuel that if they are in Poland, this is the first time he has been in the country. Shmuel says that he has never been to Berlin either, and that this part of Poland is not as nice as the part that he is from. Bruno tells Shmuel that Berlin is bustling with fruit and vegetable carts and lots of people, but that right before they left, they had to follow a nighttime curfew, and that things became noisy after dark. Shmuel says that where he is from is much nicer than Berlin. He says that the people there are friendlier, and the food is better. Bruno states that the boys will have to agree to disagree, since he does not want to start a fight with his new friend.

Shmuel counters that Poland is better than Berlin simply to stand up for himself in their first conversation. There is no room for any kind of argument with a German in the camp, and when Bruno proposes that the two agree to disagree, Shmuel sees that Bruno is different than the cruel soldiers he is used to. It's made more clear that Bruno has experienced some of the consequences of the war, while still remaining totally unaware of its existence.

Bruno asks Shmuel if he likes exploring, and Shmuel says he's never really done any. Bruno declares that he will be an explorer when he grows up, but that he knows he will have to make some mistakes along the way, such as figuring out what kinds of things are worth discovering. They agree that Shmuel falls under the category of "some things…just sitting there, minding their own business, waiting to be discovered," just like America. Bruno finally asks Shmuel a question that has been on his mind: "Why are there so many people on that side of the **fence**, and what are you all doing there?"

Bruno's ability to wander around as he pleases, compared to Shmuel's confinement to the camp, continues to underscore the vast difference between Bruno's life and Shmuel's, despite their identical ages. Bruno's question to Shmuel about the nature of the camp shows that despite his apparent ignorance, his intuition still tells him that there is something sinister afoot at Auschwitz.

CHAPTER 11

Several months before Bruno first met Shmuel, Bruno remembers the day that Father received a new uniform, along with the title "Commandant." Father came home one night very excited, and announced to the family that they were to cancel any plans for the upcoming Thursday evening. Mother replies that she has tickets to the theatre, but Father interrupts her to say that "**the Fury**" has invited himself over for dinner to discuss something with Father. Father tells Bruno he is pronouncing "the Fury" incorrectly, but fails to instruct him on the proper way to say it. Gretel tells Bruno that the Fury runs the country. Father speculates that the Fury will bring "her" with him to dinner. Mother begins to plan all of the things she will have to prepare and clean before dinner on Thursday night.

Bruno now recalls a time back in Berlin before he moved to Auschwitz, when the whole household flew into frenzy over a dinner that Hitler was to attend. The "her" that Mother speculates will come along is Eva Braun, Hitler's long-time girlfriend. Bruno continues to mispronounce "the Führer," or leader (as Hitler was called), as "the Fury"—again remaining almost impossibly ignorant, as he sure hears the word properly pronounced dozens of times a day.

An hour before **the Fury** is scheduled to arrive, Gretel and Bruno are summoned to Father's office, one of the rare occasions they are allowed inside. The children are both wearing their nicest clothing, even though they are not to be present at the dinner. Father lays down ground rules for the evening: when the Fury arrives, they are to be quiet and only reply to him in a clear voice if he speaks to them first. Second, if the Fury ignores them, they are to look directly ahead and treat him with "the respect and courtesy that such a great leader deserves." Third, when Father and Mother are at the dinner table, the children are to remain in their rooms quietly. Bruno is explicitly not allowed to slide down the bannister.

Hitler was idealized and almost deified in Nazi Germany, so a personal visit would have been a huge honor for a Nazi officer like Father, and Father is justifiably nervous about making everything seem perfect. This includes laying down stricter than usual ground rules for the children. These will prove the family's discipline, and show that everyone conforms to their traditional roles—Mother as the cook and hostess, Father as the leader and breadwinner, and Bruno and Gretel as well-behaved children who are to be seen but not heard.

Forty-five minutes later, the doorbell rings and everyone takes their places. A small man and a taller woman appear in the doorway, and Father salutes them while Maria takes their coats. Bruno observes that **the Fury** is "far shorter" than Father, and has short dark hair and a tiny moustache. He finds the woman to be "the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life," with blonde hair and red lips. Bruno is shocked that the Fury would be so rude as to go sit in Father's place at the head of the table. Flustered, Mother and Father follow the man to the table, while the woman stays and chats with the women and children for a moment until the Fury yells "Eva," and clicks his fingers to summon her. The woman "rolls her eyes" and goes to the table, but not before telling Bruno that he should tell his mother that his shoes are too tight.

Boyne again implies that Bruno has a natural goodness in him, as he takes an immediate dislike to Hitler. Eva Braun, on the other hand, is portrayed as a kind woman, who just laughs it off when Hitler snaps his fingers and calls her like a dog. Eva Braun's relationship with Hitler was in reality a well-kept secret—Hitler liked to seem chaste and single—so this scene, too, is unlikely. Hitler takes Father's place at the table, as he was seen as the ultimate "patriarch"—the father and protector of the whole country.

The Fury and Eva stay at the dinner table for the better part of two hours, and Gretel and Bruno are not invited to come say goodbye when they depart. From outside his window, Bruno can see that the Fury has a chauffeur. While the Fury climbs into the car and begins to read a newspaper, Eva thanks Mother for a lovely evening. Bruno thinks about what a horrible man the Fury is. Later that night, Bruno eavesdrops on Mother and Father's conversation in Father's office. From snippets, he can hear Mother saying that she does not want to leave Berlin for "a place like…" and Father saying that "that's an end to the matter…" Mother leaves Father's office, and Bruno falls asleep. A few days later, Bruno comes home to find Maria packing his things—where the story begins.

It is at this dinner that Hitler proposes to Father that he accept a role as Commandant and take over the direction at Auschwitz. Though Bruno cannot make out all of the words in Mother and Father's conversation, it is clear that they are fighting over the prospect of moving to Auschwitz, a debate that Father clearly wins, as it is a few days after this dinner that Bruno comes home to find Maria packing his things. As the "man of the house," Father has the final say in any important decisions, and Mother ultimately has to go along with him.

CHAPTER 12

Back in the present, Shmuel explains to Bruno how he got to **Out-With.** He tells Bruno that he used to live with his parents and brother Josef in a small flat above his father's watchmaking shop. He used to have a watch his father made, but the soldiers took it away from him. One day his mother made them wear armbands with a special star on it. Bruno says his father wears an armband on it, but with a different design. He draws a swastika in the dirt to show Shmuel. Bruno says he's never worn an armband, and wishes he could, bug Shmuel counters him by saying that Bruno's never been *forced* to wear one like he has.

Shmuel, like other Jewish victims of the Holocaust, was forced to wear the Star of David to denote his religion. Father, meanwhile, wears a swastika to show his allegiance to the Nazi party. Though Bruno says he wishes he could wear an armband, Shmuel associates the armband with his imprisonment, and points out that Bruno has never been forced to wear one against his will. Even before he came to Auschwitz, it's clear that Shmuel grew up less rich and sheltered than Bruno.

Shmuel goes on with his story, and says that after a few months of wearing the armbands, he came home to find his mother telling him they couldn't live in their house anymore. Bruno exclaims that the same thing happened to him too, after **the Fury** came to dinner. He asks Shmuel if the Fury had gone to his house and done the same thing. Shmuel says no, the soldiers had made him and his family live in a different part of Cracow, behind a big wall that had been built. Shmuel and his family lived in one room with another family: eleven people in total. Bruno is in disbelief that this was even possible. Shmuel says he hated it because the older boy from the other family beat him for no reason. After living there for several months, the soldiers put many people on a train, and the train had taken them to **Out-With**. Shmuel said there was no room to breathe on the train. Bruno explains that they should have gotten on another train with lots of seats, like the one he had taken from Berlin. Shmuel shakes his head and says it wasn't possible. Bruno, exasperated, says of course it was possible, and Shmuel must have been unable to find the extra doors. Shmuel insists it wasn't possible, and goes on to say that they had to walk to Out-With. Bruno loudly says that he and his family had taken a car. Shmuel concludes that his mother was taken away from his family, and that he, his father, and brother were put into huts on his side of the fence, and this is where he has been ever since. He looks very sad when he tells the story, and Bruno is confused why he seems so upset—Bruno feels that a similar thing had happened to him when he left Berlin.

Here Shmuel describes what happened to many Jewish victims of the Holocaust: his family was moved into a ghetto in Cracow, Poland, and forced to live with another family in a tiny room. The Jews were then rounded up and put on trains to the concentration camps, where his mother was separated from the males of the family and sent to a women's camp. Bruno struggles to understand what happened to Shmuel, and doesn't see how it is any different from him being forced to live away from Berlin. He continues to try and speak over Shmuel, to show that his own story is just as adventurous and traumatic, though we sense that Bruno actually can (or should be able to) understand the vast differences in their situations. Bruno seems naïve and ignorant not just about the war and Nazism, but even about the existence of people poorer than himself.

Shmuel tells Bruno that there are hundreds of other people on his side of the **fence**, and Bruno says that that's unfair—he has no one to play with on his side of the fence. Shmuel says they don't play, and Bruno is confused as to why they don't. Shmuel asks Bruno if he has any food, and Bruno says he was going to bring chocolate but forgot. Shmuel says he only ever had chocolate once, and Bruno says he loves it but that Mother tells him it will rot his teeth. Shmuel asks him if he has any bread, but Bruno says dinner isn't served until half-past six. He asks Shmuel what time his dinner is served, but Shmuel just shrugs his shoulders and says he must get back. Bruno asks if Shmuel could come over for dinner sometime, and Shmuel says perhaps, though he doesn't sound convinced. Bruno says he could come to him, but Shmuel says that Bruno is on the wrong size of the fence. Bruno lifts the fence, and they see that there is a decent enough sized hole for a small boy like Bruno or Shmuel to fit under. Shmuel looks nervous and says he must go back before he gets in trouble. As he walks away, Bruno notices how small and skinny Shmuel is, and shouts that he will return tomorrow. Shmuel does not reply, and runs away.

Bruno's incredible lack of understanding of the camp continues to be evident when he tries to invite Shmuel over for dinner, and insensitively asks Shmuel when his dinner is served. Shmuel likely receives little to no food in the camp, which is why he is so thin and gaunt, and naturally asks Bruno if he has any food with him. Though Bruno can't comprehend what happens on Shmuel's side of the fence, something tells him that it would not be right for him to go under the fence—and something tells Shmuel it is not worth trying to escape under, either. The prospect of what could happen to him if he gets caught scares Shmuel, and he runs away. This convenient hole in the fence is another rather unlikely plot device, and one probably created to emphasize the "fable" aspect of the story rather than its historical accuracy.

Bruno decides he has had enough exploration for the day, and returns home, excited to tell his family what he has discovered. However, the closer he gets to his house, the more he realizes that it is probably not a good idea to tell his family about Shmuel. They may not want him to be friends with Shmuel, and he does not want to be forbidden from exploring. He decides that what his family doesn't know won't hurt them.

Bruno's instinct continues to tell him that something dangerous is happening in the camp, and that he should not tell his family about Shmuel. It is telling, however, that despite this instinct, Bruno still avoids actually seeking out the harsh truth that is right in front of him, or to doing anything to change it.

CHAPTER 13

As the weeks go on, Bruno realizes he is not going to be returning to Berlin any time soon. Eventually, he gets used to life at **Out-With**, and stops feeling so unhappy. He is glad to find a friend in Shmuel, and goes to sit and talk with him at the **fence** every day. Bruno starts to fill his pockets with food to bring to Shmuel, though he eats some of it himself on the way when he feels like he needs a snack. Bruno asks Maria about Pavel, and inquires why he works as a waiter if he is really a doctor. Maria is shocked that Pavel told Bruno that, and she explains that Pavel was a doctor in another life, before he came to live at Out-With. Maria agrees to tell Bruno what she knows about Pavel's life, if Bruno promises not to tell anyone that she told him. She says they can both get in great trouble if anyone finds out. Bruno agrees, and Maria tells him all she knows.

Bruno enjoys his secret friendship with Shmuel, since it is something that is only his, and that neither his parents nor Gretel has jurisdiction over. Despite his budding relationship with Shmuel, Bruno still fails to grasp the fact that Shmuel is a prisoner whose life is incredibly difficult—this is illustrated by the fact that Bruno eats much of the food that he is going to bring to Shmuel, simply because he is hungry and is used to always having more than enough. Bruno is finally looking for the truth about Pavel, but he still fails to connect the dots—again reading as a younger or simpler character than an average nine-year-old.

At the **fence**, Bruno finds Shmuel waiting for him. He gives Shmuel the food, and asks if he knows Pavel. Shmuel says that Bruno needs to understand that there are literally thousands of people living on his side of the fence, and it is unlikely that he knows Pavel. Bruno says that Pavel is from Poland, like Shmuel, that he was a doctor before he came to **Out-With**, and that he helped clean Bruno's knee. Shmuel replies that the soldiers here don't like it when people get better—"it usually works the other way around." Bruno nods, even though he doesn't quite understand what Shmuel means.

Shmuel's quiet remark about soldiers preferring things "the other way around" shows that he has none of Bruno's naiveté. Indeed, he does not describe any of the camp's horrors in his conversations with Bruno, and remains vague and euphemistic in his language—either out of fear of getting in trouble, because he wants to enjoy a few hours without having to talk about the camp, or because he senses Bruno's extraordinary innocence, and somehow feels obligated to shield him from reality.

Bruno asks Shmuel what he wants to be when he grows up, and Shmuel says that he wants to work in a zoo because he likes animals. Bruno says he will be a soldier like Father, but a good one, not mean like Lieutenant Kotler. Shmuel says there aren't any good soldiers, but Bruno says that Father is a good soldier, whom **the Fury** has "big things in mind" for. The boys are quiet for a moment, and Shmuel tells Bruno that he doesn't understand what it is like on his side of the **fence**. Bruno, trying to change the subject, asks Shmuel if he has any sisters. Shmuel says he doesn't, and Bruno tells his friend about Gretel, a "Hopeless Case," and how annoying she is when she flirts with Lieutenant Kotler. Shmuel looks noticeably upset when Bruno mentions Kotler's name, and says that he doesn't like talking about him because he is scary. Bruno agrees. Bruno sees Shmuel shiver, and berates him for not wearing a jumper since it is becoming chillier out.

There is an tragic irony in Shmuel's statement that he wants to work with animals in a zoo, because he and the other prisoners are currently being treated like animals—lower than animals, even, as they are killed with impunity. Shmuel knows who Bruno's father is, and presumably knows him as a frightening, cruel, and hateful figure, but for whatever reason, he doesn't wanting to start a fight with Bruno, so he does not describe any of the horrors he has likely seen both Father and Lieutenant Kotler commit. Bruno's statement about the sweater is, as usual, incredibly ignorant and naïve, and Shmuel still does little to correct Bruno's perceptions of reality.

Back at his house that evening, Bruno is disappointed to see that Lieutenant Kotler is joining them for dinner. Pavel waits on them as usual, and Bruno notices that he seems to become smaller and more withered with each passing day. He seems to shake from the weight of the plates, and Mother has to ask twice before he pours her another glass of wine. At the table, Bruno complains of learning history from Herr Liszt, because he would rather read. Angered, Father points his knife at Bruno and says that the family is in **Out-With** because they are "correcting history." Bruno still complains that it is boring, and Gretel tells Lieutenant Kotler to forgive her brother, because he is an "ignorant little boy." Bruno counters by saying Gretel is a "Hopeless Case," beyond the point of help. The children tell each other to shut up, and then their parents make them stop bickering.

Pavel, who lives in the camp but works in the house during the day, is becoming smaller and weaker by the day just like Shmuel is, as the prisoners are kept in starvation conditions. Father's remark that he is "correcting history" is in reference to the Nazi party's goal of exterminating Jews, Romani people, homosexuals, and other minorities deemed inferior and antagonistic to the German Aryan "race." The history that Gretel and Bruno are learning from Herr Liszt is biased and shaped by Nazi rhetoric—justifying the war and concentration camps with an edited history about the "Aryans" suffering from "degenerate" other races.

Lieutenant Kotler remarks that he enjoyed learning history as a boy, though his father was a professor of literature. Mother replies that she did not know that, and asks if he still teaches. Kotler says that he has not kept in touch with his father since he left Germany in 1938, so he does not know. Father is startled that Kotler's father left Germany, and seems concerned when Kotler says he believes he left for Switzerland, and may be teaching at a university in Berne. Father calculates that Kotler's father must be in his forties, as Kotler is nineteen, and he finds it strange that he chose "not to stay in the Fatherland." Father inquires as to why Kotler's father left Germany, and Kotler says he does not know. Father speculates that perhaps he was ill, or perhaps he had "disagreements" with the government policy. Kotler seems concerned, and Father switches the subject, telling Kotler that they can discuss the topic at a later time.

Father infers that Kotler's father fled to Switzerland at the start of World War II because he did not want to fight, and, as an academic, he may have also disagreed with the brutal Nazi ideology. Though Kotler is clearly dedicated to the Nazi cause himself, and seems like an "ideal Aryan," Father appears to believe that Kotler's father fleeing to neutral Switzerland is cause for alarm and potential disloyalty. This shows how the Nazi worldview of "us vs. them" can easily turn on itself, and anyone can find themselves suddenly one of the demonized "them" through no action or choice of their own.

Father calls for Pavel to fill up his wine glass, and asks what is the matter with him that evening. Pavel opens the cork with care, but loses control of the bottle as he is filling the glass. The bottle empties onto Kotler's lap. "No one… stepped in to stop [Kotler] doing what he did next, even though none of them could watch." What Kotler does to Pavel makes Bruno cry, and Gretel grow pale. Later that night, Bruno reminisces on how kind Pavel was towards him, and he wishes Father had stopped Kotler from doing what he did to Pavel. He decides he is right to keep his mouth shut and not to disagree with Father or Kotler. Bruno's old life in Berlin feels very far away, and he can hardly even remember what his best friends Karl, Daniel, and Martin look like.

Though it is not stated in the text, it is inferred that Kotler beats Pavel brutally, perhaps to death. This violence and his family's condoning of it means that Bruno can no longer claim ignorance as an excuse for his naiveté. Instead he seems to make a choice (whether consciously or not) that is similar to that of Mother or Maria, and of many German citizens during the Holocaust—to keep his mouth shut and avoid trouble for himself. This is the easiest and safest decision, but it also makes these people complicit in the crimes they allow to go unchallenged.

CHAPTER 14

For the next few weeks, Bruno continues to slip out of the house after his lessons end for the day, and he spends time talking to Shmuel through the **fence** until it is time for him to return home for dinner. One day Shmuel has a black eye, but he doesn't tell Bruno how he got it. Bruno assumes it must have been the work of a bully, like the ones he encountered in school in Berlin. Every day Bruno asks Shmuel if he can crawl under the fence so they can play, but Shmuel is afraid to get in trouble. Shmuel says the world on his side of the fence isn't that great, and Bruno says his life isn't great, either—his house has only three floors, as opposed to their old house, which had five. Bruno completely forgets Shmuel's story about living in one room with eleven people.

As Shmuel and Bruno continue to develop their friendship, Bruno still avoids looking too closely at the truth, and keeps projecting his own life onto Shmuel's. Even after seeing the brutal beating of Pavel by Kotler, Bruno does not (or does not want to) infer that a soldier causes Shmuel's black eye. Instead, he draws from his own experience and life of relative luxury, and thinks it is perhaps a schoolyard bully who caused the injury. Bruno continues to complain about his own living situation, and doesn't seem to pay much attention to his "friend's" struggles.

One day Bruno asks Shmuel why he and everyone else only wear the **striped pajamas**. Shmuel says that that is what they were given to wear when they came to **Out-With**, and their other clothes were taken away. Bruno says they must have other clothes they want to wear, and says he doesn't like the stripes, even though he actually does like stripes. Shmuel opens his mouth as if he wants to reply, but then decides to say nothing.

Shmuel does not counter Bruno's extreme ignorance, likely because speaking about the horrors he encounters every day would only cause him further pain. The boys' conversations seem to be a daily escape for both of them. For the few hours that he talks with Bruno, Shmuel is able to distract himself from the terrors of the camp.

A few days later, it is raining very hard outside and Bruno realizes he will not be able to visit his friend. He feels badly, and has a hard time concentrating on reading in his bedroom after his lessons have ended for the day. Gretel comes into his room, and they bicker as usual. Bruno complains about the rain, and says that he should be with Shmuel, before realizing that he should not have mentioned his new friend. Gretel demands he explain, but Bruno pretends he didn't say anything. Eventually, he leads her to believe that he has an imaginary friend, and convinces her that he is ashamed to admit this. Bruno tells Gretel that they talk about life in Berlin, and he even lets slip some of the stories that Shmuel has told him about having to leave his home in Poland. Gretel seems delighted to have some kind of embarrassing information on Bruno, but she warns him not to let Father know—he will think Bruno has gone mad. She flounces back to her room to rearrange her dolls. Bruno tries to go back to reading his book, but has lost interest. He wonders if Shmuel is missing their daily conversation as much as he does.

Bruno still clings to his innocence and ignorance, but also realizes that it would be highly unwise to reveal to Gretel that he has a friendship with someone who lives on the other side of the fence. Though he doesn't fully understand what the physical divide of the fence means in terms of the war, Bruno's intuition, as usual, tells him what he would rather not think further about—that his family would not condone him being friends with someone who lives on the other side. Not being able to talk to Shmuel for this one day reminds Bruno how reliant he has become on their daily conversations. Boyne again stretches the historical truth in suggesting that a boy would be able to slip away from the guards of Auschwitz every single day, for multiple hours at a time.

CHAPTER 15

It continues to rain on and off for the next few weeks, and Shmuel and Bruno are able to have their conversations at the fence only sporadically. Bruno becomes concerned that his friend seems to grow thinner each day, and continues to bring him food. However, being a nine-year-old boy, Bruno still eats a lot of it along the walk to their spot in the **fence**. Bruno continues to dislike Kotler, because he calls him "little man" and makes Mother laugh more than Father does. One day Bruno sees a dog barking from his window, and Kotler comes outside and shoots it. Bruno is still upset with how Kotler treated Pavel, and is mad that when Father is away on business, Kotler seems to stay overnight and acts as if he is in charge of the house.

After several months, Bruno finally settles into a routine at Auschwitz, thanks to his new friendship with Shmuel. Kotler "making Mother laugh" provides further evidence that he and Mother are engaging in an affair, either physical or emotional, when Father is away. Kotler shooting the dog is indicative of him attempting to assert dominance over the household in Father's absence, and also evidence of his brutality towards the prisoners in the camp. He seems to be a sociopath—the kind of person who would do well as a guard at a concentration camp.

One day Bruno is reading *Treasure Island* in the living room, a book that Father gave him. Kotler pulls it away from him and taunts him, playing keep-away with the book. Bruno finally pulls it back, and Kotler asks if Bruno is ready for Father's birthday party, which the whole house has been preparing for days. They continue to taunt each other until Mother comes in. She calls him Kotler "Kurt" and "precious," and tells Bruno to leave the room so she can have a private word with him. They close the doors behind Bruno, making him feel angry.

Though Bruno is used to being left out of the conversations between adults, he is made especially angry when Kotler is condescending towards him—Kotler is only 19, and isn't his father. Mother's affair with the young Kotler goes totally over Bruno's head, as usual. For Mother, this affair may be an act of rebellion against Father and the life at Auschwitz he has forced her into, or simply a bored dalliance in their desolate location—or she and Kotler may have a genuine affection for one another.

Angered, Bruno goes into the kitchen and is shocked to find Shmuel sitting there. Shmuel says that Kotler brought him there to polish Mother's small glasses for the party, since they needed someone with tiny fingers to do the job. Bruno looks at Shmuel's shriveled hands, and they remind him of a model skeleton that Herr Liszt once brought to teach anatomy. Bruno puts their hands side by side: his hand is fat and healthy, while Shmuel's is skinny and sick-looking, the fingers like "dying twigs." Bruno asked Shmuel how his hand came to look like that. Shmuel said his hands used to look like Shmuel's, but now everyone on his side of the **fence** looks like he does.

Bruno is shocked to see Shmuel in his kitchen. Bruno may have never thought about it in such specific terms, but he clearly never expected the world in the camp to overlap with the world inside his house. The clear disparity between Bruno's and Shmuel's hands makes Bruno feel sick, and he must turn away—he knows Shmuel is very thin, but fails (or is afraid) to realize that this is because Shmuel is being starved on purpose.

Bruno rummages for something to eat in the refrigerator, settling on some cold chicken with sage and onion stuffing. He cuts a few pieces, and talks to Shmuel while stuffing food in his mouth. Shmuel becomes listless while watching Bruno eat, and Bruno apologizes for not having offered him food. He offers to cut him some food, but Shmuel says he is afraid Kotler will catch him. Bruno says it's no big deal, and cuts him pieces. Shmuel eats the food very quickly, and thanks Bruno.

Bruno, still failing to understand Shmuel's dangerous position, offers Shmuel food out of politeness, somehow still not associating Shmuel with Pavel and his position as a servant to be beaten or killed. Shmuel knows the consequences he might face for eating, but also knows how hungry he is—and hunger wins. This scene seems to capture Bruno's character: kind and well-meaning, but incredibly naïve and even willfully ignorant.

Kotler comes in and stares at the two boys talking. He shouts at Shmuel for speaking in the house. Shmuel apologizes quietly, but Kotler becomes enraged when he sees that Shmuel has been eating. Shmuel says that Bruno gave him the food, since they are friends. Terrified, Bruno replies after a moment, and says that he has never seen Shmuel before in his life. Shmuel seems despondent, and Kotler says that Shmuel is to finish cleaning the glasses, after which they will have a "discussion about what happens to boys who steal." Kotler ushers Bruno out of the room, and calls Shmuel by the same name he used on Pavel when he instructed him to get a tire for Bruno. Bruno feels horribly ashamed for denying that Shmuel is his friend, and feels as if he will be sick. He sits without reading for several hours, and when he returns to the kitchen later, Shmuel is gone.

Unfortunately, Kotler does catch Shmuel eating food—and Bruno fails to defend his "friend" at the crucial moment, leading Kotler to infer that Shmuel stole the food. Kotler implies that Shmuel will receive a punishment later, and knowing Kotler's cruel and sociopathic nature, this punishment could be anything. Bruno feels horrible, but because of his ignorance, he still doesn't seem to understand the ramifications of his actions. With Kotler's insult, Shmuel is now explicitly associated with Pavel (or should be), and so Bruno should realize that Shmuel could just as easily be beaten or killed like Pavel was.

CHAPTER 16

It has been almost one year since Bruno found Maria packing his things, and most of his memories about Berlin have faded. The family returns to their old house for two days to attend the funeral of Grandmother, whom Bruno had not seen since their last Christmas pageant. Father is particularly sad, since he and his mother had not reconciled from their fight before she died. **The Fury** delivers a wreath in condolence, but Mother says Grandmother would have rolled over in her grave if she had known.

This is the first time that Bruno has returned to Berlin since leaving for Auschwitz. He never got to say goodbye to his Grandmother, and she never reconciled with Father before she died. Grandmother remains the only one in the family to speak out against Father's Nazism, and her death (marked with a wreath from Hitler, no less) shows how impotent her disapproval really was in the end. The fact that almost a whole year has passed is another reminder of the factual improbability of Shmuel as a character at Auschwitz—even if a nine-year-old boy wasn't immediately killed, it's highly unlikely that he would have continued to survive for an entire year.

Bruno feels almost happy when they return to **Out-With**, since it has now become his home. He realizes it isn't so bad, now that he has Shmuel as a friend. Lieutenant Kotler has been transferred away from Out-With, much to the dismay of Mother and Gretel and to the delight of Bruno. Gretel is now going through "a phase" that means she bothers Bruno much less than before.

Though the reasons for Kotler's transfer are never stated, it may be inferred that Kotler is removed because of his own father's "disloyalty" in fleeing to Switzerland—or perhaps Father has learned of Kotler's affair with Mother.

Bruno is pleased to see that Shmuel seems happier lately, though he is still very skinny. Bruno remarks that this is the strangest friendship he has ever had, since the boys only talk, and cannot play with each other. They still enjoy talking, though Bruno also still feels awful for how he treated Shmuel that day when he was in the house. Shmuel says that maybe one day they can play, if he is ever let out of the camp. Bruno considers talking to his parents about letting Shmuel out, but decides to talk to Gretel instead.

Shmuel is in higher spirits, seemingly due to his continued friendship with Bruno and the extra food that comes with it. Shmuel doesn't have the luxury of being indignant about Bruno's betrayal in the house—if he stops being friends with Bruno, he loses out on far more than Bruno will. Bruno feels guilty for his actions, and wants to make it up to Shmuel, but still doesn't seem to understand how much danger he put his friend in. He continues in his well-meaning but almost unbelievable ignorance, thinking that he might be able to get Shmuel released from behind the fence so they can play together.

Gretel had become obsessed with maps and following events in the newspaper, and has thrown away all of her dolls. Bruno asks her why the people are on the other side of the **fence**, and she is shocked that he still doesn't know. She explains that they are Jews, who must be "kept together" with their "own kind" behind the fence. Bruno asks if he and Gretel are Jews, and Gretel, aghast, says that they are "the Opposite" of Jews.

Gretel apparently becomes obsessed with the movements of the Nazi army, thanks to the indoctrination of Father and Herr Liszt. She, like Bruno, repeats German nationalistic and anti-Semitic rhetoric without understanding what she is saying. The war is sufficiently removed from her life that she can follow its progress like a game, and never see any fighting.

Bruno is still confused, but Gretel interrupts their conversation to shriek that she has found a tiny egg in her hair. Mother comes in and realizes that both Gretel and Bruno have lice. While Gretel's hair is treated with special shampoo, Father decides that Bruno's head should be shaven. Bruno hates the way he looks, but the next time he sees Shmuel, the two boys admit that now they look even more alike—even though Bruno is a lot fatter.

The fact that the two boys now look similar with shaved heads serves to underscore both their differences and their similarities. Shmuel is on the brink of starvation while Bruno, though small for his age, remains well-nourished. At the same time, Boyne uses this opportunity to hammer home his "moral" that all humans are essentially equal—there is no difference between a Jewish child and a Nazi child, except for the differences society imposes upon them. This then makes the nationalism and racism of the Nazis seem especially feeble, shallow, and tragic.

CHAPTER 17

Mother becomes increasingly unhappy with life at **Out-With**, especially since Kotler, her only friend, has been sent away. Bruno hears Mother and Father yelling in his office. He realizes there may be a chance for the family to go back to Berlin, and he doesn't know how he feels about that—he can hardly remember his friends there, Grandmother had passed away, and he never hears from Grandfather, whom Father says has gone senile. Bruno would also miss Shmuel if they moved away.

With his new life at Auschwitz, and with Grandmother dead and Grandfather senile, Bruno no longer feels an attachment to Berlin. He has become accustomed to his afternoons with Shmuel, who is now his best friend, and so feels conflicted about moving back to the city he once longed for. There is clearly marital trouble in the family, but Bruno remains typically oblivious.

Life goes on as usual for several weeks. Gretel becomes more obsessed with her maps, and Mother takes more naps and drinks more "medicinal sherries." One day, Father summons Gretel and Bruno into his office, and asks them if they are happy at **Out-With**. Gretel admits she is lonely, and Bruno is unsure what to say. Father says the children and Mother may return to Berlin, though he must stay at Out-With due to the commands of **the Fury**. Father says he does agree that Out-With is not the best place to raise children. Bruno responds that there are hundreds of children on the other side of the **fence**. Father demands to know what Bruno knows about them, but Bruno just replies that he has observed them from his window, and has noticed that they all wear **striped pajamas**. Bruno says he has seen them, but has not been watching them. Father announces that they are to return to Berlin within the week. Bruno dreads having to tell Shmuel that he is leaving.

With Kotler gone—and with him, seemingly, any excitement or sense of agency—Mother again hates life at Auschwitz. The onset of the lice then helps her complete her case against raising children at a concentration camp, and Father consents to letting her take them back to Berlin. Bruno is upset at the prospect of uprooting his life once more, especially now that he has a best friend and a secret life of "exploration" at Auschwitz. Father clearly recognizes Bruno's extraordinary innocence and ignorance, and seeks to preserve that. Bruno, meanwhile, finally has to pretend to be more naïve than he really is. Father only seems to have qualms about his job when it comes to his children, as Bruno's increasing knowledge of the camp's reality cements Father's resolve to move the family back to Berlin.

CHAPTER 18

Shmuel does not show up at the **fence** for several days. Bruno is overjoyed when he finally does, but Shmuel seems very upset. He has not been able to find his father, and does not think Bruno's father would be able to help, even though Bruno offers to ask him. He is sad when Bruno tells him he is going back to Berlin, and when Bruno suggests he come and visit, Shmuel does not seem to think that that would be possible.

Shmuel probably knows that like the other people from the camp who go missing, his father won't come back—but he still clings to an unrealistic hope, as any child might do in the face of such trauma. It's never directly stated, but it's inferred that Shmuel's father dies, most likely in the gas chambers. Bruno, optimistic in his ignorance, suggests Father could help find him—even though it is Father's direction that has led to his death.

Bruno wishes they could play together just once before they have to part, and Shmuel lifts up the **fence**—there is enough room for Bruno to crawl under. Bruno is afraid he will get in trouble, but he has an idea—Shmuel could bring Bruno a pair of **striped pajamas** that he could change into and slip under the fence the following day. With Bruno's head shaved, he would fit in with the other boys in the camp. Bruno returns home, excited for his adventure the following day.

Bruno sees the search for Shmuel's father as a kind of adventure, and Shmuel is touched that his friend would help him. Shmuel still clings to hope that his father is alive, and so is no longer concerned for his friend's safety and innocence. Bruno is also excited at the prospect of finally seeing what life is like on the other side of the fence. All his "exploring" thus far has been benign and fun, so he still can't seem to conceive of the dangers he is seeking out.

CHAPTER 19

Though it is raining the next day, Bruno goes to meet Shmuel at the **fence** anyway. Bruno is unhappy to leave his clothes in the mud, but seeing the look on Shmuel's face when he asks Bruno to come help find his father makes Bruno realize that he must go through with the plan to please his friend. The **striped pajamas** are smelly, but he changes into them anyway. They remind Bruno of the costumes he used to dress in for Grandmother's plays. With both of them dressed in the striped pajamas, Bruno and Shmuel look almost identical. Despite the mud, Bruno climbs under the fence. The two boys have an urge to hug each other, but do not.

Bruno sees going under the fence as one great final adventure to enjoy with his friend before he must go back to Berlin. His shaved head conveniently allows him to fit right in with the other prisoners, and he and Shmuel look nearly identical, except for Bruno's heavier weight. This visual similarity is Boyne's metaphor for the great tragedy of the Holocaust—all of the prisoners are victims of hatred, dehumanization, genocide, and are just as human as the rest of the German population. Finally Bruno, though remaining naïve and ignorant as ever, does something active to help his friend, and "steps into his shoes" for a while. This act leads to Bruno's death, but it is also a redemption for him, as his better nature wins out over his upbringing of privilege and Nazi indoctrination.

Bruno is shocked at the world on the other side of the **fence**. He thought it would be filled with happy families, but instead miserable, sickly people sit in groups, being taunted by soldiers or staring into space. Bruno says he doesn't like it there and wants to go home, but Shmuel wants help to find his father. They search for evidence, but find nothing. After a while, Bruno asks Shmuel to walk him back to the fence. At that moment the soldiers round people up to "march," and Shmuel tells Bruno not to say anything or the soldiers will become angry. Bruno wants to go home, but he and Shmuel find themselves swept into the march and then into a long, warm room. Bruno figures he will stay there until the rain lets up. Frightened, the two boys hold hands. Bruno tells Shmuel that he is his best friend for life. The soldiers close the doors to the room, and everyone gasps. The room goes dark, and Bruno continues to hold Shmuel's hand, and "nothing in the world would have persuaded him to let it go."

As we have seen, Bruno has only known a life of wealth and comfort, and despite having watched the prisoners from his window, has never comprehended that people would ever be forced to live in such horrific conditions. Though his instincts tell him to leave the camp immediately, his genuine love for Shmuel gives him the courage to stay and try to search for Shmuel's father. When the boys are rounded up in a "march," they are led into a gas chamber, where they are killed by lethal gas—without ever knowing what is really happening. Though this ending is sudden and grim, it is the reality of how millions of people lost their lives during the Holocaust. For Bruno, the reality he has been able to avoid thus far is suddenly thrust upon him, and this conclusion again emphasizes Boyne's point that all human lives are equally valuable, and that all people are essentially the same. The small comfort at the end of the book is that the two boys have each other—if it were not for Bruno's presence, Shmuel would have died completely alone and frightened. However, had Bruno's parents not guarded Bruno's ignorance and innocence so closely (and had Bruno's father not been an instrumental member of the Nazi party), Bruno would have never wandered into his death.

CHAPTER 20

Bruno is never heard from again. Soldiers search every part of the house and the village, and his clothes are found at the **fence**, but it seems as if he has vanished off the face of the earth. Mother stays in **Out-With** for some time, hoping Bruno will turn up. When she does return to Berlin, Gretel notices that Mother spends most of her time crying, and Gretel, too, misses Bruno very much. Father stays at Out-With for a year, but orders around the soldiers mercilessly and becomes very disliked.

Bruno dies anonymously, along with the other victims of the concentration camp. As these victims' bodies were either left in mass graves or burned, and Bruno was wearing the "striped pajamas" of the other prisoners, his body is never identified as different from the rest. This is another metaphor for how, despite all the Nazi's anti-Semitic rhetoric, there is truly no difference between human lives, regardless of race or religion. Strangely, Boyne's narrator continues to speak as if through Bruno's perspective even after Bruno's death—Auschwitz is still "Out-With," and Mother and Father are still referred to as such.

One day Father forms a theory about what happened to Bruno. He goes to the part of the **fence** where Bruno's clothing was found, and when Father puts all the facts and his theories together, he collapses from the weight of his realization. A few months later, "different" kinds of soldiers come to **Out-With** and order Father to go with them. Still distraught from his realization as to what happened to Bruno, Father goes happily, as he no longer cares what happens to him anymore. The narrator states that that is the end of the story of Bruno and his family. "Of course," the narrator says, "all this happened a long time ago and nothing like that could ever happen again. Not in this day and age."

The narrator continues in Bruno's voice of purposeful innocence and naiveté, so the "different" soldiers are never specifically named as the Allies. All of Boyne's vague language regarding the Holocaust is an attempt to make his fable universal, and this point is especially emphasized in the bitingly ironic last lines of the book—ironic, of course, because atrocities are taking place at any given time somewhere in the world, and people seem to have learned few real lessons from the Holocaust. Thus the lessons of this book—the dangers of nationalism, racism, sexism, complacency, and ignorance—are meant to be applied to present situations, so as to keep history from repeating itself. Within the narrative itself, we are given few details of the nature of Father's moment of realization—it's unclear if Bruno's death made Father realize that his thousands of other victims were valuable humans as well, or if he was simply overcome with emotion and essentially lost his sanity. Father's punishment is never stated in the book, but he was likely tried at the Nuremberg trials and sentenced to death for his war crimes.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Munk, Olivia. "*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 20 Jan 2016. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Munk, Olivia. "*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas.*" LitCharts LLC, January 20, 2016. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-boy-in-the-striped-pajamas.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Boyne, John. The Boy in the Striped Pajamas. David Fickling Books. 2007.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Boyne, John. The Boy in the Striped Pajamas. Oxford: David Fickling Books. 2007.