The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas

Directed by Mark Herman

Novel written by Irish novelist John Boyne

Background and Preparation

* Berlin
* Auschwitz
* Nazi Concentration Camps
* The Third Reich
* The Holocaust
* Gas Chambers
* Propaganda
* Genocide

Themes

1. True Friendship
2. Acts of Humanity
3. Obedience and Conformity
4. Prejudice and Discrimination
5. The Innocence of Children

Characters

1. SS Officer Ralf
2. Elsa
3. Gretel
4. Bruno
5. Shmuel
6. Herr Liszt
7. SS Lieutenant Kurt Kotler
8. Pavel

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1. **Looking at Innocence**
2. What does “innocence” and “naive” mean when used to describe children?
3. How does the opening scene of Bruno and his friends represent their innocence?
4. Does Bruno and Gretel’s tutor take advantage of the children’s innocence in what he teaches them? How? What are these ideas?
5. Although Bruno and his family move to an isolated place, Bruno continues to display his strong sense of creativity and adventure. What are some examples of this in the movie?
6. What events and experiences lead Bruno to gradually give up some aspects of his innocence and see life differently?
7. Why was it so hard for him to believe that his father could be involved in hurtful acts?
8. Neither Bruno or Shmuel really know what is going on at the concentration camp. Why is that and what allows them to keep their innocence?
9. **Friendship**
10. Why do you think Bruno and Shmuel become friends and remain friends?
11. How do the friendships that Bruno has in Berlin compare with his friendship with Shmuel?
12. Why doesn’t Bruno try to protect his friend when Shmuel was attacked by Lieutenant Kotler?
13. How is it possible for Bruno and Shmuel to have fun together and maintain their friendship in the midst of such circumstances?
14. How does Bruno justify continuing his friendship with Shmuel despite what his father, sister and tutor have said about Jews?

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1. The barbed wire fence is a physical separation between Bruno and Shmuel. What other types of separation does the fence represent ?
2. **Acts of Humanity**
3. Contrast Pavel’s treatment of Bruno when the boy fell from the swing with the way in which Pavel is treated by Bruno’s family.
4. Mother says “thank you” to Pavel for treating Bruno. This is an important turning point for her. What has changed for the mother at this point?
5. At times the father is shown as a loving parent and husband. How is it possible given that his role as a Nazi officer is giving orders and treating people inhumanely?
6. Share ONE story of someone who survived the Holocaust.
7. **Obedience and Conformity**
8. The short film shown by the father in the movie to his soldiers can be considered as propaganda. What was the purpose of this?
9. When the mother learns that the Jews were being exterminated at the camp, she asks her husband,” How can you?”.

He responds,” Because I’m a soldier”. Contrast these ideas.

c) Gretel believes the viewpoints of Lieutenant Kotler, the tutor Liszt and the father about the Jews. Although Bruno is younger than his sister, he questions their viewpoints. Why?

5. **Prejudice and Discrimination**

a) How does the movie depict Nazis stereotyping Jews?

b) How does the mother react when Gretel decorates her room with Nazi posters?

c) In your opinion what does the end of the film symbolise?