

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas

John Boyne

 **NOVEL UNITS**[®]



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THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PAJAMAS

by
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Teacher Guide

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Note

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Please note: This novel deals with sensitive, mature issues. Parts may contain profanity, sexual references, and/or descriptions of violence. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Predicting, cause/effect, plot,
summarizing

Literary Elements

Characterization, symbolism,
metaphors, similes, conflict,
personification, theme,
point of view, genre

Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech,
synonyms/antonyms, target
words, idioms

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, performance,
presentation, review

Writing

Short story, personal narrative,
fable, dialogue, essay, poetry,
journal

Thinking

Brainstorming, research,
compare/contrast, analysis,
problem solving

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—time line,
geography, patriotism,
propaganda, the Holocaust,
Auschwitz, Adolf Hitler;
Science—lice; Math—graphs;
Art—design, illustration;
Music—appropriate background
selections; Current Events—
censorship, discrimination

Chapters One–Three

Bruno is very unhappy when his family has to move away from Berlin because “the Fury” (the *Führer*, Adolf Hitler) has an important job for Father. The new house, which Bruno is led to believe is called “Out-With” (a distortion of the city name, Auschwitz), is the opposite of Bruno’s old home and makes him feel cold and unsafe. Bruno surprises his sister Gretel by showing her the unfriendly children that can be seen from his bedroom window.

Vocabulary
muster
mucky
tartan
spluttering
banister
presume
deserve
restrictions
outrages
foreseeable
priorities
greengrocers
commandants

Discussion Questions

- How would you summarize Bruno’s life in Berlin? (Answers will vary but should include that Bruno’s life is comfortable. He enjoys spending time with his friends and his grandparents. Bruno’s parents are loving but firm and expect obedience from him and Gretel. The family is wealthy, as shown by their large house and the presence of servants and special visits.)
- What can you infer about Bruno’s father from information in Chapter One? (Bruno’s father is an important man, a commandant in the military. Employees report to Father, and he treats Maria as if she is beneath him. He expects obedience from others.)
- Why do you think Bruno has difficulties understanding what his father does at work? (Answers will vary. Suggestions: Bruno is young and naïve. Adults assume he knows things such as what the Fury is. The adults also do not discuss topics with Bruno that they deem unfit for children and intentionally hide what is really happening. For instance, when Bruno asks what Father does, Mother hesitates and obviously has an important job that requires a special man to do it.)
- Why would turning all the lights off at night keep Bruno’s family safe? What does this tell you about the novel’s setting? (Answers will vary but it is reasonable to say that darkness may protect people and cities from bombing attacks during wartime because lights let invaders know where people live.)
- The new house makes Bruno feel “lonely and cold.” Why do you think Bruno feels this way? (Answers will vary. Discussion should include that Bruno moves from a warm, happy home to an isolated house where he lives with people he trusts [such as Mother and Maria] are no happier than he is.)
- Bruno’s mother says, “We don’t have the luxury of thinking” (p. 13) and “Some people make all the decisions for us” (p. 14). What does “luxury” mean by this? Is life easier when someone else makes everyone’s decisions? (Answers will vary, but Mother likely means that in wartime it is necessary to act swiftly to ensure one’s safety and fulfill one’s patriotic duties. The government may place demands upon its citizens to act in what it views as the country’s best interests. Bruno’s mother feels that her husband, and in effect, she and the rest of the family are obliged to follow suit. Nevertheless, most people [including Bruno’s family] have the ability to think independently and make their own decisions. While having someone make decisions for oneself may be easier, it is important to evaluate situations and reach one’s own conclusions, particularly in a time of war, when people’s decisions can end up saving or destroying lives.)
- What can you infer from Maria’s comment that the soldiers “have very serious jobs...or so they think anyway” (p. 19)? (Answers will vary, but students should infer that Maria doesn’t agree with what the soldiers are doing.)

8. How might the metaphor “civilization of dolls” be important to the story? *(Answers will vary. The dolls seem to represent Gretel’s innocence and her controlling nature. Throughout the story, Gretel usually internalizes her unhappiness. Like Bruno, she is upset that the war has upended her former life and fears the chaos she senses around her. She spends hours in her room managing the dolls’ mini-world to help her cope with these feelings. For Gretel, this activity seems to nurture an imagined sense of order. Also, the idea of a manipulated civilization may symbolize the Fury’s control of the German people.)*
9. In addition to the explanation given by Gretel, how might the name “Out-With” be a pun? *(Answers will vary. “Out-With” may also refer to the Jews’ forced relocation and/or their systematic extermination.)*
10. How would you explain Bruno’s and Gretel’s reactions to the “children” seen from the bedroom window? *(Answers will vary. The Bruno feels “cold and unsafe” and that Gretel is nervous and not “sure she wanted to see these children at all” [p. 28] implies that both children sense something is wrong.)*
11. **Prediction** Who are the people that live near Bruno’s house?

Supplementary Activities

1. **Literary Devices:** Keep a list of literary devices (such as metaphors, similes, and personification) as you read the novel, citing the page numbers on which you find them. Write one or two sentences explaining the significance of each literary device.
2. **Compare/Contrast:** Create artwork showing Bruno’s old and new houses. Write a paragraph explaining the symbolism of certain differences in them.
3. **Comprehension:** Bruno likes to say “we can chalk it up to experience” (p. 11). Think of three existing figures of speech that relate to Bruno’s unhappiness with the changes in his life. Then create three figures of speech.
4. **Writing:** Write about a time that your life changed overnight. Explain how you dealt with the changes.
5. **Writing:** Write a poem from the point of view of an innocent child.

Concept Map

Directions: Research the Holocaust, and complete the map below.

