



HMD08 Book Group Activity for Secondary Students.

'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas' by John Boyne ISBN 0 385 60940 X`

Published by David Fickling Books.

The story

Bruno is unhappy when his Father is given an important new posting far away from Berlin. It means that he will have to move from his familiar, comfortable home and part from his friends. At nine years old, Bruno, like most German children, is unaware of the atrocities being committed by the Nazis. All he knows is that his father works for a person Bruno thinks is called "The Fury". The new family home is a grim place. There are no young people to join in Bruno's games and he is not encouraged to ask questions. Bruno is lonely. Then, by chance, he meets Shmuel, a boy who shares his birthday but lives in shadow, on the other side of a barbed wire fence.

Questions to discuss in class or student reading groups

1. How would you describe the different relationships between Bruno and the other members of his family i.e. his sister Gretel, his mother and his father? Which member of the family has the closest contact with Bruno?
2. What evidence is there to show that Bruno was unhappy when he found out that he had to leave Berlin? What worries him the most? Who or what will he miss the most?
3. When Bruno arrives at his new home he notices unusual things and wants to ask lots of questions. Which events puzzle him the most? What questions does he ask and what questions does he *want* to ask?
4. When Bruno hurts his head Pavel helps him. What does Bruno learn about Pavel and why does Bruno's mother say to Pavel "If the Commandant asks, we'll say that I cleaned Bruno up." ?
5. Bruno tells Shmuel "We're like twins." What are the most important things the boys discover about each other at their first

- meeting? What are the main differences between them and what makes them similar?
6. Who is the man Bruno calls The Fury? Describe what happens when The Fury comes for dinner, what preparations are made to welcome him? How do the adults treat The Fury? What are Bruno's thoughts about him?
 7. When Bruno and Shmuel find out more about each other what surprises them? What things do they have in common and what experiences has each of them had that the other cannot understand?
 8. Think about Bruno's lessons with Herr Liszt. Why is Bruno not allowed to read plays or poems? Why is Bruno's Father shocked when Bruno says he hates studying history?
 9. When Lieutenant Kotler has dinner with Bruno's family he is drawn into a conversation about his father. What evidence is there that the questions asked are difficult for the Lieutenant to answer? What is the link between the questions asked and the way Pavel is treated?
 10. What happens to Bruno and Shmuel at the end of their march? Why does Bruno's Father remain at "Outwith"? Is there any evidence to suggest that he understood where Bruno had gone?
 11. The author calls the story of Shmuel, Bruno and the fence a fable. Some people say that fables have more to tell us than a simple story. What do you think are the most important things readers should learn from this fable?
 12. John Boyne says that there are fences all over the world. Are there any fences or barriers in modern society which you think should be broken down? If your answer is yes, explain what they are and how people could work to remove them.

Special note for readers in Northern Ireland. This book has been selected for the One Book Project. The aim is to find 3,000 adults and students to read and discuss the story of Bruno and Shmuel. You can find out more about this on www.ni-libraries.net