The Boy In The Striped Pajamas: Characters And Plot Analysis

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas is a historical drama published January 5th, 2006, by David Fickling Books, written by Irish novelist John Boyce, and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers. It is a unique story and possibly one of the most difficult and disturbing I think I will ever read. I chose this book due to its iconic legacy and because of the unique perspective, the characters bring to something that many have tried to write about before. This book was two-hundred and sixteen pages of none stop page-turning suspense, at least, for a younger reader.

Characters

There are five main characters in this story. Bruno, our young and naive nine-year-old german who had to up and leave everything he knew because his father had gotten a new important job from “the Fury”. Then there’s Bruno’s parents, Elsa and Ralf. Ralph was an officer in the German army before he gets promoted, the Fuhrer then makes him the new authority of Auschwitz. And Elsa, who is a very stern, protective, and caring mother. There is also Shmuel, a boy the same age as Bruno; however, he is a jew. This is the boy Bruno befriends and dies alongside while looking for his Shmuel’s papa. Our final character of the five is Pavel, the once doctor turned cook, who was previously a prisoner of Auschwitz, like Shmuel, but was pulled to be faculty for Bruno’s family. He is shown being a caring figure to Bruno.

Sub Characters.

These characters don't have as much prominence but are still important to help the story move along. First, we have Bruno’s sister Gretel. Gretel is a twelve-year-old, and after the big move, she believes she is much more sophisticated and shouldn't play around with kiddy things as Bruno does. This can be seen during her continuous taunting after she believes he has a new imaginary friend. She goes from being interested in her dolls to being borderline obsessed with the changing politics of World War II after her lessons from their tutor. You can see her begin to follow the German army’s advancement with pins on a map in her room. Kurt Kotler is a nineteen-year-old German soldier at Auschwitz. He is the perfect representation of the Germans “Aryan” ideology. This is the soldier who Gretel develops a crush on and it seems as though he had a potential affair with Elsa. He teases Bruno and is eventually transferred once Ralf figured out his father fled during the beginning of the war. Another character would be Nathalie who is Bruno’s paternal grandmother. Before she married Matthias, Bruno’s grandfather, she was a vocalist. She has a very dramatic personality and sings and makes a play every Christmas party the family holds. She is against the Nazi party and is often throwing her opinion at Ralf. She dies while the family is at Auschwitz, and before she gets to make up with her son.

Minor Characters.

There are a few secondary characters who are only slightly important yet still gives some form of influence. Herr Liszt is a tutor hired for the siblings Gretel and Bruno 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 an beliefs. Gretel comes to be fond of his lessons, which greatly influences her personality. Now there is the family maid, Maria. She is disappointed with Ralf's role at Auschwitz, but she still acknowledges he is a good man because he helped her mother when she was sick, and he took her in when her mother died. Matthias, Bruno’s grandfather, is ten years Grandmother’s senior. He supports his son and is proud of his role in the Nazi party, and opposes how Grandmother lashes out against Ralf’s new role as Commandant.

Plot

If you couldn't guess thus far, this book is about the Holocaust. The story begins in 1943 in Berlin, Germany, in the home of nine-year-old Bruno, the main character and narrator. He arrives home from school to find Maria packing up his belongings. The week before, German authoritarian Adolf Hitler, “The Fury’’, had dinner in Bruno's home and offered Bruno's father a new position as a commandant. Because of this, the family had to move away. This Greatly angers Bruno, as he didn’t want to leave behind his family and friends. Before the family leaves, Ralf and Matthias argue with Nathalie, at a Christmas party over their difference in opinion of working for Hitler. A few days later, Bruno and his family arrive in Poland. This is where they move into a house on a hill. The house is located near the “Out-With”. The house is staffed by Maria, a butler named Lars, and a new servant, Pavel, who lives on the other side of a fence near Bruno's house. Herr Liszt tutors Bruno and his sister. Lieutenant Kotler attracts the romantic attraction of Gretel. Bruno first hates the house and is misses his friends in Berlin. He and Gretel hope that they will be in Out-With for only the 'foreseeable future,' which they assume means a few weeks. From Bruno's bedroom window, he and his sister watch a fenced area where a large number of men and boys wear striped clothes. This situation sparks Bruno's curiosity. He explores the fenced area and eventually develops a friendship with a confined Jewish boy. It seems as if Shmuel is wearing pajamas, bringing the novel's title to life. Bruno does not comprehend why Shmuel has to live in a fenced-in compound or why he’s so faint and slim. However, for about a year, the two boys meet at the same location, and Bruno brings food for Shmuel. One day, Lieutenant Kotler brings Shmuel to Bruno's house to shine glasses, as it was “a job for someone with small hands”. When Bruno gives a piece of chicken to Shmuel, Kotler beats Shmuel thinking he was stealing. Kotler is later transferred away from Auschwitz. After Mother becomes aware of what is going on she convinces Bruno's father to allow the family to return to Berlin, as that is “no place to raise children”. Bruno dislikes the thought of leaving Shmuel and goes to the fence to say a final goodbye. The day before Bruno leaves, the boys plan to search for Shmuel's papa. Bruno puts on the prison clothing that Shmuel stole for him, leaving behind his own clothes and boots at the fence. Wearing the “pajamas” and having a shaved head, as there was an outbreak of lice, Bruno crawls under an unsecured section of the fence. As Bruno and Shmuel investigate the camp, the circumstances disgust Bruno. He experiences how much despair and sorrow is held in the environment. The two boys are driven into a large group and are marched into a dark, locked room. This is where they undress after they are told they will be taking a shower. In the days following, Bruno's parents and the guards are unable to find Bruno. Eventually, his mother and Gretel return to Berlin. His father continues at the camp for another year. He eventually discovers what happened to Bruno when he locates Bruno's abandoned clothing near the fence. Bruno’s father soon feels terrible and falls under the amount of grief and stress. He gives in to the other soldier's demands and then allows himself to be taken as a war prisoner.

Symbolism

One symbol in the story is the fence. The fence itself disconnects the two worlds. On one side of the fence, the nicest wine is served, dinner conversation is charming, and life is promising. On the other side of the fence, the worst inhumane barbaric events are evident. The fence is a symbol because it makes the difference, in reality, more noticeable. At the same time, the fence is also a symbol of how this can be conquered. Bruno and Shmuel meet at the end of the fence, where it can be dug under and ignored. The fence and its divisions are overcome with the friendship of both boys. While they die in the process, the symbol of segregation is overcome. Another symbol is the gas chamber. It is in the gas chamber where demise is most known. Death is universal. At the time, Bruno and Shmuel, a German boy and a Jewish boy, are seen as the same, equal. There is no distinction in the cruelness of the gas chamber. Yet, it is in this place where Bruno clasps Shmuel's hand and tells him that they will be 'best friends for life.' In this time, the gas chamber is a symbol of transformation.

Theme

A theme from the story would be friendship. Bruno's first 'best friends for life' are lost when he moves away from Berlin. As time passes, Bruno forgets what those boys looked like, their names, and them entirely. Bruno at first despises his move to Out-With, but his view alters once he encounters Shmuel. This relationship fills the gap of companionship he was forced to leave behind in Berlin. Bruno's friendship with Shmuel is also very important for Bruno’s moral development. When Bruno denies to Lieutenant Kotler his friendship with Shmuel, Bruno feels awful for this betrayal. Weeks later, when he and Shmuel meet, Bruno's first priority is to ask for Shmuel's forgiveness. In addition, the act of friendship contradicts and completely ignores the authoritative power that is shown throughout the story. It is one of the few genuine human actions that bring happiness. It is also the act of friendship that gives hope at the end of the book. As Bruno and Shmuel hold hands, Bruno says, 'You're my best friend ... My best friend for life.'

Conclusion

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas is a Holocaust fiction written by Irish novelist John Boyce and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers. Published in 2006 by David Fickling Books. It is a tragic story, and one of the most fascinating reads I’ve had in a while. The story is great for someone who is already knowledgeable of the Holocaust; however, I believe that it is a terrible way to introduce kids to this, with how vague and how much is looked over under the guise that the story is written through the eyes of a nine-year-old. Other than that I thought the book was quite great. It would be a delightful read for any child 12+. This was, again, two-hundred and sixteen pages of none stop page-turning, suspense.