

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas by John Boyne

I am so glad that I chose this book as our first because, as you found out, this little book has so much to say! I am blown away by the impactful message this story conveyed and I am equally as inspired by its storytelling. When you opened this little book, I hope that you noticed that the author labeled it as a fable. By definition, a fable is a morality tale but is usually told through animals or inanimate objects. This fable was told through a naïve young boy and this may have been the author's effort to give us a naïve vessel to convey his story.

Nonetheless, this story was captivating from beginning to end. We have a young boy telling a Holocaust story through his inexperienced eyes. We don't really know that it is a Holocaust story at first but little hints provided by the young boy, Bruno, lead us to that conclusion. Even in the boy's inability to say Auschwitz (he continually says "Out-With" even when corrected), shows the reader that Bruno has not been marred by the inexplicable things that are happening right outside his door. Despite the evidence that something evil is happening in "Out-With", Bruno remains untouched and unscathed. Bruno is presented, time and time again with evidence of the happenings on the other side of the fence and yet he continues to live in his own bubble. In Bruno's discussions with Shmuel, Shmuel continually tells Bruno what is happening from his perspective and Bruno does not hear him. Bruno continues to discuss his feasts, toys, three story house, etc. These two boys are narrating their lives without expecting a response. They are each providing the pieces of the puzzle that links the two worlds at "Out-With" but they are not putting them together to help one another. If they had listened, primarily Bruno to Shmuel, they may have understood what was actually happening there.

The message here can be as simple as a retelling of a Holocaust story or it can be viewed as a deeper reflection of our current world and how, we as a society, can overlook the suffering of others by being self-involved and egocentric. We can choose to be removed from crimes against humanity or we can choose to help. Bruno could have stood up to the Lieutenant and claimed his friend, he could have told his family about Shmuel, and he or any of his family could have stopped Pavel's beating. Sometimes we don't act until it's too late and it directly affects us.

Do you think that the fable presentation successfully helped to tell this story? Would you have enjoyed it if it had been in a different literary format?

Why do you think that the author keeps Bruno naïve until the very end? What does that say about society as a whole? Is there a bigger message?

Why is Bruno blind to the concentration camp even when presented with Pavel and Shmuel? What do they represent?

Why is Bruno's family and Maria unaware of Bruno's friendship? Where do they think he goes to explore?

What do you think happened to Pavel? What happened to the Lieutenant?

What did you think of this story? What message did you get from it?