

Discover
**JOHN
BOYNE**

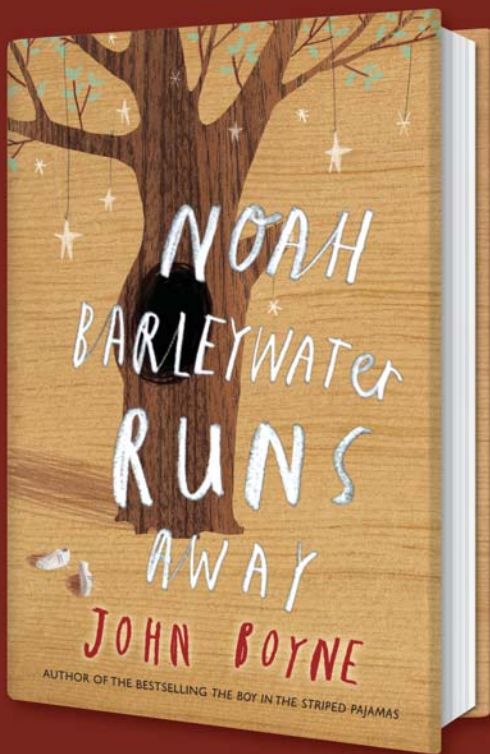
NOAH
BARLEYWATER
RUNS
AWAY

READERS GUIDE

about the book

NOAH BARLEYWATER is eight years old when he runs away to escape his problems and comes upon a strange toy shop in a magical forest.

Noah Barleywater senses that something isn't quite right at home. Rather than deal with his problems, Noah decides that it's much easier to run away. He takes an untrodden path through the forest and comes upon a magical tree, talking animals, and a very odd-shaped toy shop filled with wooden puppets. Even stranger is the toymaker who tells him stories of his youth—stories filled with adventure, regrets, and broken promises. And, along the way, the Old Man takes Noah on a journey that changes his life.



Grades 5–7
HC: 978-0-385-75246-6 • GLB: 978-0-385-75247-3
EL: 978-0-375-89934-8 • CD: 978-0-307-91648-8

thematic connections

Family • Death & Dying • Promises • Courage
Memories • Making Choices • Fairy Tales



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pre-reading activity

John Boyne says this novel is a fairy tale. Discuss the elements of a fairy tale. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to read a classic fairy tale and analyze it based on the elements discussed in class. Ask the class to consider these traditional elements as they read Boyne's novel.

thematic connections

FAMILY—Describe Noah’s relationship with his parents. What are the good things that he sees in his parents? Cite evidence that Noah cares what his parents think of him. The Old Man assumes that Noah’s parents are bad since Noah is running away. Why does this notion upset Noah?

DEATH & DYING—What is the first hint that Noah’s mother is sick and maybe facing death? Discuss why Noah’s parents don’t tell him that his mother is dying. Ask students to talk about ways Noah’s parents could have explained his mother’s terminal illness to him.

PROMISES—Noah tells the Old Man that his mother made him a promise. Then he says, “And I think she’s going to break it. And I don’t want to be there when that happens.” (p. 147) What is Noah’s mother’s promise? At what point does he realize that it will be broken? How does the Old Man’s story of how he has lived his entire life with a broken promise help Noah?

COURAGE—Ask students to discuss how it takes courage to run away, and courage to return home. Explain the Old Man’s comment, “The point comes, after all, where it’s too late to go home.” (p. 174) Noah thinks that if he goes back, he will have to face what comes next, and he is not sure if he is ready. How does the Old Man give him courage to return home and face his mother’s death?

MEMORIES—Ask students to explain why the Old Man finds it difficult to face the mementoes of his past. How do the puppets carved by the Old Man’s father tell the story of the Old Man’s boyhood? Discuss the memories that Noah’s mother is trying to create for him. What might Noah say is his fondest memory of his mother?

MAKING CHOICES—In the very beginning, Noah questions whether he is doing the right thing by running away. How does he justify his choice? Explain why the Old Man says that he made the wrong decision to become a real boy. Why does he think he should have stayed a puppet? Discuss why the Old Man leaves the toy shop to Noah.

FAIRY TALES—At what point does Noah realize that he has wandered into a magical place? Debate whether the forest and the toy shop remains magical once the Old Man is gone. Considering the elements of a fairy tale, discuss whether the novel is really a fairy tale or a work of fantasy.

curriculum connections

LANGUAGE ARTS—John Boyne is Irish, and uses the Irish spelling of certain words in the novel. Have students identify words in the novel that are uniquely Irish, or British—for example, *enquired*. (p. 79) Have them list these words and supply the American spelling of the word.

LANGUAGE ARTS/ART—Have students write and illustrate a comic book of the Old Man’s youth that Noah may sell in Pinocchio’s Toy Shop as a tribute to the Old Man. Ask them to think of an appropriate title.

SOCIAL STUDIES—Have the class summarize the story of Pinocchio. List the major scenes or events from the story as they are mentioned. Then have students take a virtual field trip of the sculpture garden in Pinocchio Park in Collodi, Italy, at the following website: goitaly.about.com/od/tuscanypictures/ig/Pinocchio-Park-Pictures. Have them write a response about the symbolism of each sculpture for a travel guide.

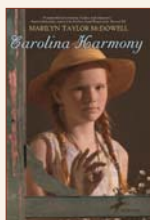
ART—Ask students to use Google Images or clip art sites on the Internet to view the many different images of Pinocchio. Then ask them to design a sign for Pinocchio’s Toy Shop, using one of the images of Pinocchio as a model.

DRAMA—Most fairy tales are short and have the elements of one-act plays. Divide students into groups and ask them to plot major scenes in the novel. Then have them write the novel as a one-act play. Each group should perform their play for the class. Then discuss how the each group presented the story differently.

vocabulary/use of language

Introduce the following words to the students: *delirium* (p.10), *indignation* (p.13), *intervening* (p.28), *conviction* (p. 29), *resilient* (p.31), *contempt* (p.38), *interminably* (p.62), *cylindrical* (p.71), *hybrid* (p. 80), *ingratiating* (p.80), *despondent* (p.81), *inanimate* (p.86), *sceptical* (p.110), *constitutionals* (p. 123), *paradox* (p. 166), *proviso* (p 220), and *predecessor* (p. 221). Then ask them to define these words as they are used in the novel.

related novels by theme



Carolina Harmony
Marilyn Taylor McDowell
Death & Dying • Making Choices
Grades 4-7
PB: 978-0-440-42285-3



**The Door
in the Forest**
Roderick Townley
Death & Dying • Fantasy
Grades 3-7
HC: 978-0-375-85601-3



Sunshine Picklelime
Pamela Ferguson
Illustrated by
Christian Slade
Death & Dying • Family
Grades 3-7
PB: 978-0-375-86174-1

on the web

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southern-europe/italy/collodi.aspx](http://www.travel-wise.com/europe/southern-europe/italy/collodi.aspx)

A travel site featuring Collodi, Italy,
and the walk with Pinocchio.



The Boy
in the
Striped
Pajamas

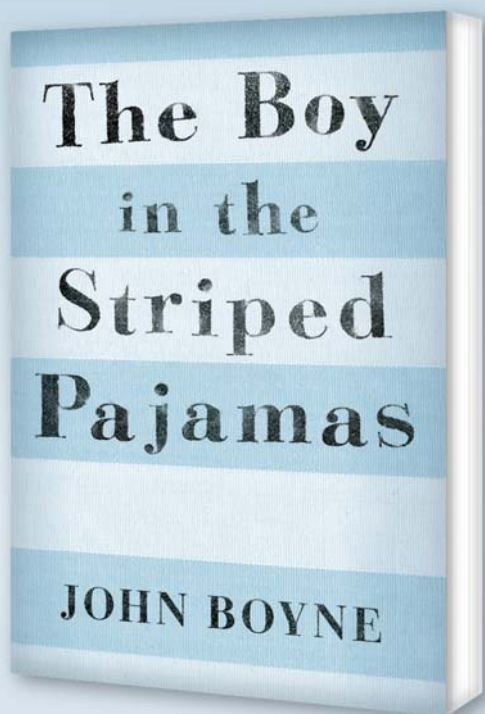


READERS GUIDE

about the book

This cautionary tale is about two boys, one the son of a commandant in Hitler's army and the other a Jew, who come face-to-face at a barbed wire fence that separates, and eventually intertwines, their lives.

Set during the Holocaust, Bruno is only nine years old when his father, a commandant in Hitler's army, is transferred from Berlin to Auschwitz. The house at "Out-With," as Bruno calls it, is small, dark, and strange. He spends long days gazing out the window of his new bedroom, where he notices people dressed in striped pajamas and rows of barracks surrounded by a barbed wire fence. Bored and lonely, and not really understanding the circumstance of his new existence, Bruno sets out to explore the area and discovers Shmuel, a very thin Jewish boy who lives on the other side of the fence. An unlikely friendship develops between the two boys, but when Bruno learns that his mother plans to take her children back to Berlin, he makes a last effort to explore the forbidden territory where the boy in the striped pajamas lives.



Grades 7 up

PB: 978-0-385-75153-7 • Movie Tie-in PB: 978-0-385-75189-6

HC: 978-0-385-75106-3 • EL: 978-0-307-49423-8

CD: 978-0-7393-3705-9

note to educators

In history classes, students learn about the dark tragedies of our past, and develop the thinking skills necessary to shape a better world for their future. As we study tough subjects like the Holocaust, we must communicate to our students and their parents that open discussion, rather than fear of a topic, is the only way to effect change. With this in mind, encourage students to share novels and nonfiction works they have already read about the Holocaust. Make sure that they fully grasp the meaning of the following terms: *Führer*, *Auschwitz*, *Hitler Youth*, *anti-Semitism*, *the Exodus*, *Nuremberg Laws*, *swastika*, *Gestapo*, *death trains*, *death camps*, *Warsaw Ghetto*, *genocide*, and *resistance*.

pre-reading activity

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas is presented as a fable. Have the class identify the literary elements of a fable. Ask them to make note of these elements as they read the novel.

Ask students to read about “The Final Solution” (www.ushmm.org/outreach). Have them consider the following questions:

- What factors contributed to the Holocaust?
- What were Hitler’s motives?
- How many people were murdered?
- Who were his victims?

Then ask students to stage a debate about the importance of studying the Holocaust.

questions for group discussions

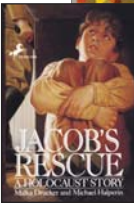
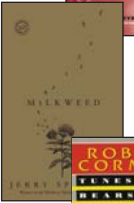
- Discuss the relationship between Bruno and Gretel. Why does Bruno seem younger than nine? In a traditional fable, characters are usually one-dimensional. How might Bruno and Gretel be considered one-dimensional?
- At age 12, Gretel is the proper age for membership in the League of Young Girls, a branch of Hitler’s Youth Organization. Why do you think she is not a member, especially since her father is a high-ranking officer in Hitler’s army?
- What is it about the house at Out-With that makes Bruno feel “cold and unsafe”? (p. 20) How is this feeling perpetuated as he encounters people like Pavel, Maria, Lt. Kotler, and Shmuel?
- Describe his reaction when he first sees the people in the striped pajamas. What does Gretel mean when she says, “Something about the way [Bruno] was watching made her feel suddenly nervous”? (p. 28) How does this statement foreshadow Bruno’s ultimate demise?
- Bruno asks his father about the people outside their house at Auschwitz. His father answers, “They’re not people at all, Bruno.” (p. 53) Discuss the horror of this attitude. How does his father’s statement make Bruno more curious about Out-With?
- Explain what Bruno’s mother means when she says, “We don’t have the luxury of thinking.” (p. 13) Identify scenes from the novel that indicate Bruno’s mother isn’t happy about their life at Out-With. Debate whether she is unhappy being away from Berlin, or whether she is angry about her husband’s position. How does Bruno’s grandmother react to her son’s military role?
- When Bruno and his family board the train for Auschwitz, he notices an overcrowded train headed in the same direction. How does he later make the connection between Shmuel and that train? How are both trains symbolic of each boy’s final journey?
- A pun is most often seen as humorous. But, in this novel the narrator uses dark or solemn puns like Out-With and Fury to convey certain meanings. Bruno is simply mispronouncing the real words, but the author is clearly asking the reader to consider a double meaning to these words. Discuss the use of this wordplay as a literary device. What is the narrator trying to convey? How do these words further communicate the horror of the situation?
- When Bruno dresses in the filthy striped pajamas, he remembers something his grandmother once said. “You wear the right outfit and you feel like the person you’re pretending to be.” (p. 205) How is this true for Bruno? What about his father? What does this statement contribute to the story’s overall meaning?
- Discuss the moral or message of the novel. What new insights and understandings does John Boyne want the reader to gain from reading this story?
- Ask students to discuss the differences between a fable, an allegory, and a proverb. How might this story fit into each genre?

about the author

John Boyne was born in Ireland in 1971. He is the author of seven previous novels including the international bestsellers *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *The House of Special Purpose* and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, which won two Irish Book Awards, topped the *New York Times* Bestseller List and was turned into a Miramax feature film. His newest novel is *Noah Barleywater Runs Away*. He lives and writes in Dublin.



related novels about the holocaust



The Book Thief

Markus Zusak
Grades 7 up
PB: 978-0-375-84220-7

In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer

Irene Gut Opdyke with
Jennifer Armstrong
Grades 7 up
PB: 978-0-553-49411-2

Milkweed

Jerry Spinelli
Grades 5 up
PB: 978-0-440-42005-7

Tunes for Bears to Dance To

Robert Cormier
Grades 7 up
PB: 978-0-440-21903-3

Jacob's Rescue

Malka Drucker and
Michael Halperin
Grades 4-7
PB: 978-0-440-40965-6

vocabulary/ use of language

Encourage students to identify unfamiliar words, and try to define them using hints from the context of the story. Such words may include: *greengrocers* (p. 19), *insolent* (p. 51), *reverberated* (p. 62), *jumper* (p. 71), *sinister* (p. 98), *despair* (p. 104), *confirmation* (p. 112), *resolution* (p. 113), *disdain* (p. 122), *catastrophe* (p. 142), *sarcasm* (p. 157), *sophistication* (p. 158), *medicinal* (p. 167), *inconsolable* (p. 178), and *misshapen* (p. 184).

internet resources

Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum

www.auschwitz.org.pl

The official site of the memorial and museum at Auschwitz.

The Holocaust/Shoah Page

www.mtsu.edu/~baustin/holocamp.html

A map and discussion of the Nazi death camps.

Holocaust Cybrary

www.remember.org/auschwitz

Links to Auschwitz tour resources.

 = Listening Library Audio Available