

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas by John Boyne

Subjects: Concentration camps—Poland—Fiction; Friendship—Fiction; Nazis—Fiction; Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)—Fiction

Book Lists: Europe, Gifted, Grade 6

Props: Nazi flag



This story is about a boy named Bruno who was born in Berlin, Germany but spent his 9th year in Auschwitz, a Nazi concentration camp for Jews located in southern Poland. Bruno was only 9-years-old. But his story will teach us more than his young years might suggest. Although he was only 9-years-old, this story of the ugliness of WWII is not intended to be read by young children but to be read by you and by me.

The story begins in Berlin in Bruno's wonderful home where he has a maid, a loving mother, an important father who works for the Fury (that's 9-year-old speak for the Führer), (*Bring out and wave Nazi flag*) a grandmother and grandfather who lived nearby, three very best friends, and a sister who, admittedly was a Hopeless Case, but what can you expect of a 12-year-old girl.

But then his mother sat him down and announced that his family was going to move, they were going on an adventure, and his life changed forever. His father had been promoted and was now a Commandant and the top person in charge of a place called Out-With (Auschwitz).

Bruno immediately does not like the new home. It is small, full of soldiers and there is no one to play with. And it has strange neighbors. He saw them when he looked out his bedroom window. They were funny people dressed in striped pajamas. Everywhere he looked, he saw people, tall, short, old, young, most moving around, but some stood perfectly still in groups. He asked his father who the people were; his father responded that they weren't really people. They were separated from him by a wire fence. It was a huge fence, very high, higher even than his house. At the top of

the fence enormous bales of barbed wire were tangled in spirals. There wasn't any grass after the fence; in fact there was no greenery anywhere to be seen in the distance. There was nothing but low huts and large square buildings.

Bruno was forbidden to explore anything beyond his yard, but what bored 9-year-old would let a silly rule like that stop him. He wanted to find something fun, something interesting. And one day he did. He went for a walk, alone, through the woods and around the big tall fence. He was quite far from his home when he met a boy about his own age. Unfortunately the boy was on the other side of the fence. This was a problem, but Bruno had no friends and so he sat down and eventually they talked. Bruno continued to visit his friend. In secret, of course, because his father had made it clear that he was never to talk to the people on the other side of the fence. Bruno knew that if his father learned of his new friend, he would be mad and he would punish Bruno.

The young boy, the new friend, was a Jew, a prisoner. The two boys are just children and they see the world as children do. What do they see when they look at each other, at the fence, at their Führer? Will the relationship be discovered? Will Bruno be punished? See the horrors of one of Hitler's death camps through the eyes of a child. Learn the consequences of breaking the rule about talking to people condemned to live and die behind fences. The book was made into a movie in 2008, but you can read (*Hold up book*) *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne.