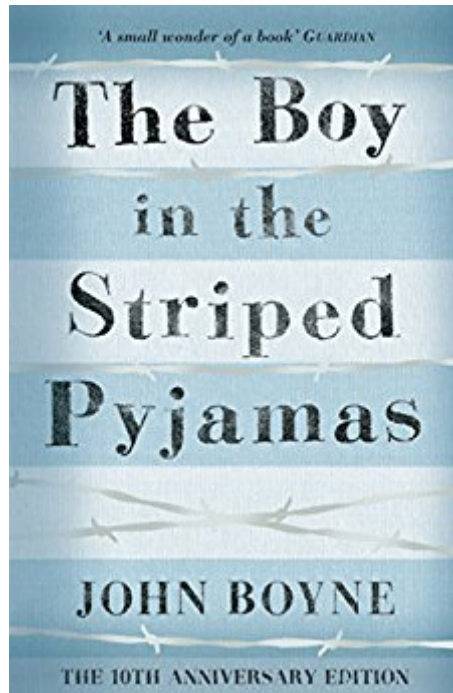




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# **The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas**



## Synopsis

The story of The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas is very difficult to describe. Usually we give some clues about the book on the cover, but in this case we think that would spoil the reading of the book. We think it is important that you start to read without knowing what it is about. If you do start to read this book, you will go on a journey with a nine-year-old boy called Bruno. And sooner or later you will arrive with Bruno at a fence. We hope you never have to cross such a fence.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

My friend who teaches High School English recommended this book to me several years ago. She was going to have her 10-12 graders read it. While homeschooling my boys this year WWII was in our lesson plans so I gave it as an option for my boys. My 11 year old (VERY reluctant reader) and I read this separately at the same time. I knew there would be situations that would require explanation. He says "everyone should read this book because it's a good but sad story. The boys were good friends in a bad environment. If they can be good friends then anyone can." The last few chapters we read aloud together because he didn't quite understand what was happening. This was

fine because it allowed me to explain and have a more in depth discussion about the world during that time period. If you are looking for a book that has a happier ending, look at *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry. We read that first. My 11 year old wanted to know more, my 10 year old son (natural reader) stopped there. It depends what your child can handle at this age.

This story is of the innocent love friends have for each other when they are young. They are too young to understand true evil, such as experienced during the Holocaust. Their young hearts do not understand the fence separates them in the concentration camp or how anyone could be filled with such hate. A young boy seeking to help his friend find his father, walks into his own death not understanding what was happening to him. What evil things mankind can do when they are taught to hate and are led by a leader crazed by hatred like Hitler. This book is a grim reminder that if we do not teach the young to remember the horrific crimes of our past, they may be led to repeat them in the future. This is a book I will be using in my classroom when I teach about the Holocaust. Give to a young person in your life to begin a discussion about this subject.

It is quite possible that more has been written about The Holocaust than any other historical event in history. Not just in regard to hard research, but many of the world's finest novelists have fictionalized the story, film makers have touched upon the subject, playwrights, composers, painters and poets. If there has been a way to express the shock- and shock is an understatement in this case- it has been attempted. John Boyne, a gifted and now internationally known Irish author, wrote the book *"The Boy In The Striped Pajamas"* in about two weeks time. As he said, in order to maintain "the voice," once he began he was afraid to stop. The same is true when reading it- we are compelled to continue and it is evident from early in the book that Boyne has disguised the terminal words so that it can apply to any and all of the other holocausts' that occurred prior to and after this one. In fact, only once does Boyne choose to use a "telling" word; on page 54 one of the officers says, "Heil Hitler" but then we are told that the boy assumed that this was like saying, "Well, goodbye for now and have a pleasant afternoon." The boy, his name Bruno; his age nine, misunderstands the key words and Auschwitz is written as "Out-With" every single time. The negative pun- the only way I could describe this- suggests the old work rhythm, "In with the good; out with the bad." Then the boy mishears the Führer as "The Fury" and this negative pun needs no description at all. We have a moment when Bruno meets "The Fury" as well as "her" when they come for dinner and Bruno is appalled at how small The Fury is, but how kind the beautiful blonde woman with him is (her name is simply Eva). The innocence and ignorance of this young boy is as critical to the brilliance of this

work as the story of the Titanic. (I speak not just of Cameron's film, but Maury Yeston's musical, "a Night to Remember" and the three other films made between 1938 and 1984) Boyne uses the literary tool that his audience not only knows so much more than Bruno, but that we are anticipating the sadness that ends the novel. So we are prepared to cry but when the end does come, Boyne shocks us in such a way that instead of tears, our mouths are opened in the O shape that he uses to describe several characters through the book. This book is by no means a "Sophie's Choice" though the horror is just as shocking, but few writers in history have been able to achieve what William Styron did. Still Styron's novel and Boyne's novel use a similar foundation but their books are about very different things. Where the ending is horrifyingly shocking and, like Styron's "Sophie's Choice," completely unexpected (who in fact could have imagined an ending such as this one) the poignancy of "The Boy In Striped Pajamas" makes it impossible for this book- and the fame it will bring Mr. Boyne, you heard it here first- to become satirized in any way. Because the innocence and ignorance, as a result of the way his parents have shielded Bruno, is a metaphor for the way in which the population who was aware of the death camps were inactive; complacent and how the same continues to occur day after day from the beginning of recorded time to the continued genocide in Darfur- the world's largest death camp- to which the UN has placed sanctions against while The full force of the American military tore apart Iraq in search of Weapons of Mass Destruction. The current political winds in the United States suggest that Gay Americans and Female Americans are just as vulnerable. All of these circumstances suggest that you could very well be next. John Boyne manages to suggest all of this in his two hundred page fable using a modicum of brilliantly chosen words. John Boyle has sub-titled his book, "A Fable" and it is. His final words are like a double edged sword: "And that's the end of the story of Bruno and his family. Of course all of this happened a long time ago and nothing like that could ever happen again. Not in this day and age." The irony of this ending reminds us that this is a fable, but more so, it makes us stop and think of the responsibility that we all owe to anyone who has been maltreated, either in the form of Bruno, Anne Frank, Sophie Zawotoski or Carol Stewart, Amy Fitzpatrick, Dave Pelzer and the millions of others. This novel is worthy of a prize. It's not a children's book, though my children should read it. It's not an adult book, but all adults should read it. This would rule out the Newbury or Caldecott. In regard to its literary merit, the American version needs some editorial work (only once did the editors miss a pajamas and leave pyjamas) but the writing is pristine and brilliant and worthy of The Pulitzer. As far as The Nobel Prize for Literature, it is worthy there too. But mostly it's is worthy of you. And, like "Sophie's Choice" I am told that a motion picture is in the making. Depending on whose hands it falls into this could be a miracle. The innocent eyes through which

Bruno's story unfolds are critical and these innocent eyes are just as important as Sophie's guilty and lying soul. If Benton could do it, perhaps "The Boy In The Stripped Pajamas" will as well. But there are a lot of "Maybes" involved with the hopes of John Boyne, this critic and every other artist who has attempted to move us. As far as I can see, Boyne has done his part. This book, like Elie Weisel's "Night" needs to be published in as many languages as possible and marketed toward as many customers as possible. No one should keep this book from the hands of a nine year old nor should anyone consider it a book too young for adults. In short, this is a remarkable book in every way and perhaps, after more times has passed for thinking and another read through or so, I may well see that there is no other possible way for this story to have ended. Not in this day and age.

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