

**Discuss one of the following themes in the story from the movie and complete the questions that accompany your chosen theme:**

• The essence of friendship

• Acts of humanity

• Understanding obedience and conformity

• Exploring prejudice and discrimination

**Exploring An Innocent Perspective**

**The story includes an interesting contrast of an innocent child’s perspective in a setting with circumstances far from innocent. This section explores the meaning and value of an innocent perspective and how it enables this story to unfold.**

1. • What do “innocent” and “naïve” mean when used to describe children?
2. • How does the opening scene of Bruno and his friends represent their innocence?
3. • Can adults be naïve? In what ways can they be naïve? What adults in the movie seemed naïve?
4. • Can you give an example of a time when you were a young child and saw the world from a more innocent perspective? What are some examples of that? What experiences helped you see the world differently than what you initially thought?
5. • Does Bruno and Gretel’s tutor take advantage of the children’s innocence in what he teaches them? How? What were these ideas?
6. • Although the story takes place during a tragic time in history, there are moments of humor in the story. One occurs when Bruno tells Pavel that he could not be a very good doctor because he had to “practice” it. How does this example and others in the movie demonstrate Bruno’s naïveté? Can you give other examples from the movie of misinterpretation as a result of innocence? What about in your own life?
7. • Although Bruno and his family have moved to a desolate place, Bruno continues to display his strong sense of adventure and creativity. What are some examples of this in the movie? Can you give an example from your own life when your sense of adventure and imagination allowed you to escape from a sad or painful situation?
8. • What events and experiences lead Bruno to gradually give up some of his innocence and see things differently?
9. • Why was it so hard for him to believe that his father could be involved in hurtful acts?
10. • Neither Bruno nor Shmuel really know going on at the concentration camp. Why is that, and what allows them to keep their innocence?
11. • Why do you think the movie and book ended the way they did?

**The Essence of Friendship**

**Friendship is a central theme of this story, and this section explores the reasons, depths and meaning of friendship explored in this story.**

1. • Why do you think Bruno and Shmuel become friends and stay friends?
2. • How do the friendships that Bruno has in Berlin at the beginning of the movie compare with his friendship with Shmuel?
3. • Does the friendship between Bruno and Shmuel evolve in the story? How?
4. • Why doesn’t Bruno try to protect his friend when Shmuel is attacked by Lieutenant Kotler?
5. • Have you ever done something to a friend that made you feel bad or ashamed? How does shame and remorse figure into the friendship between Bruno and Shmuel? How does Bruno show his remorse?
6. • Why does Shmuel forgive Bruno? How?
7. • How is it possible for Bruno and Shmuel to have fun together and maintain their friendship in the midst of their circumstances?
8. • How does Bruno justify continuing his friendship with Shmuel despite what his father, sister, and tutor have said about Jews?
9. • The barbed wire fence is a physical separation between Bruno and Shmuel. What other types of separation does the fence represent in this story?
10. • How do Bruno and Shmuel demonstrate the essence of friendship despite their many differences? What are their differences?
11. • How can people use the power of friendship to cross boundaries of race, religion, and culture?

**Acts of Humanity**

**The author of the book and the creators of the movie crafted the story as a fable. A fable is story with a moral, one that teaches a lesson about humanity. The section explores the depths of humanity that are possible in the most trying of circumstances.**

1. • Think about fables you know and the lessons associated with those fables. What are the lessons to be learned from this fable, and the moral of this story?
2. • Contrast Pavel’s treatment of Bruno when the boy fell from the tire swing with the way Pavel is treated by Bruno’s family.
3. • Mother saying “thank you” to Pavel for treating Bruno is an important turning point for her. What has changed for the mother at this point?
4. • At times, Father is shown as a loving parent and husband. How is that possible given his role as a Nazi officer giving orders to treat people inhumanely?
5. • Bruno tried to help Shmuel find his father despite being frightened and wanting to go home. Why?
6. • What does Bruno say and do to show his growing understanding of the inhumanity going on around him, including to his friend Shmuel?
7. • Have you ever been in a situation where a person was mistreated? What actions did you take? How did you feel after acting or not acting?
8. • Bruno secretly took food from his house to give to Shmuel because it was one concrete way he could help his friend. Have you ever done something to help people who didn’t have enough food? What can people do today to help people who are starving around the world?
9. • Do you know anyone, or have you read about Jews or other persecuted people, who survived the Holocaust or other grave circumstances due to the courageous actions of others? Share those stories.
10. • What do you think causes people to treat others in such horrific ways as was done during the Holocaust? Are there people being treated like this anywhere in the world today? What is or can be done to stop it?

**Understanding Obedience and Conformity**

**These questions explore the value of thinking and acting for the benefit of others, and how that can sometimes mean going along with everyone else, and other times not.**

1. • What is peer pressure? Have you been in situations in which you felt compelled to go along with a group? Describe those situations and why you acted as you did.
2. • Grandmother disagrees with the views of the Nazis. How does she stand up for her beliefs?
3. • What is *propaganda*? How is propaganda used to “sell” people on a viewpoint?
4. • The short film shown by Father in the movie to his soldiers is considered propaganda. What was the purpose of this propaganda?
5. • When Mother learns that Jews are being exterminated at the camp, she questions her husband. “How can you?” she asks. He responds: “Because I’m a soldier.” Contrast these two perspectives.
6. • Father tries to use guilt to get Mother to change her opposition to his involvement in the exterminations. Does it work? Why or why not?
7. • Gretel believes the viewpoints of Lieutenant Kotler, the tutor Liszt, and Father about Jews. Although Bruno is younger than his sister, he questions their viewpoints. Why?
8. • How is obedience constructive and how can it be destructive? Give examples from the story of each.
9. • What are ways of advancing peace and harmony in life through constructive disobedience?
10. • List examples in history where civil disobedience has been constructive.

**Exploring Prejudice and Discrimination**

**The story takes place during a traumatic period in the world’s history. This section explores the damage to humanity that prejudice and discrimination have, and how and why it’s important to fight against them.**

1. Prejudice is an attitude while discrimination is a behavior. Explore these differences.
2. • Have you ever been discriminated against? When have you witnessed discrimination against other people or discriminated against someone else?
3. • What is a stereotype? Why do people stereotype groups that are different from them? How does the movie depict Nazis stereotyping Jews?
4. • A *scapegoat* is blamed for things they are not responsible for. During the Holocaust, Jews became scapegoats, blamed for all the troubles in Germany. Why were they made scapegoats?
5. • Gretel becomes prejudiced against Jews. Who influenced her? How does she show her prejudiced views?
6. • What is Mother’s reaction when she sees Gretel’s room decorated with Nazi posters?
7. • What happens to cause Mother to question her own prejudice against Jews?
8. • When Bruno first finds out that Shmuel is Jewish, he says: “You’re a Jew. You can’t be. I think I should go now.” Why does Bruno react that way at first?
9. • When you hear someone make a biased comment about a group of people, what do you usually do? How hard is it to stand up to prejudice and discrimination? Why?
10. • In the story, who fights against prejudice and discrimination? Give examples of people in history who fought against prejudice and discrimination.
11. • What conflicts around the world today are the result of prejudice? What are its effects on innocent people, including children?
12. • In your opinion, what does the end of story symbolize? Why?