CHAPTERS 1–7
Discussion Questions
1. Boyne employs a limited third-person narrator, which stays close to a particular character’s perspective. From which character’s point of view is the story mostly told?
2. How does Boyne use the narrator’s limited point of view to suggest Mother is unhappy when Bruno passes her on the stairs?
3. How does Boyne use indirect characterization in the early chapters to paint a portrait of Bruno’s father, even when he’s not present in the scene?
4. How might Maria’s behavior in the presence of the young Lieutenant Kotler be an example of foreshadowing?
5. How does Boyne employ dramatic irony when Bruno shows the fascinating view from his bedroom window to Gretel?
6. Bruno finds it “extraordinary” that all the people outside his window are wearing “gray striped pajamas.” What sort of garments were they wearing?
7. At the rail station, Bruno notices that the comfortable train he and his family boarded has many empty seats, but is separated by a platform from another train, headed in the same direction, that is swarmed by crowds. What is the author’s purpose for including this description?
8. How are the themes of innocence and discrimination introduced after Bruno’s father tells him the people seen from his bedroom window are “not people at all.”
9. When Bruno interprets “Heil Hitler” as a way of saying “have a pleasant afternoon,” what literary device is being used?
10. Bruno is surprised when his mother tries to “take credit” for first aid given to him by Pavel. Can you think of another reason she would hide Pavel’s good deed from Bruno’s father?

WRITING ACTIVITY How would you respond if someone said that a group of people gathered outside your window were "not people at all." Why did Bruno respond the way he did to such a hideous statement?

CHAPTERS 8–14
Discussion Questions
1. How does Boyne use indirect characterization to show that Grandmother is a candid, emotional and fearless woman?
2. How is the inventory of Kotler’s activities on pages 95 an 96 an example of dramatic irony?
3. When Bruno asks, “Who decided which people wore the striped pajamas and which people wore uniforms,” how does this evoke the themes of injustice and discrimination?
4. How does Boyne use direct characterization to suggest the conditions of Shmuel’s life and how he felt about them?
5. Why does Bruno tell Shmuel that they are “like twins,” and what theme does this scene suggest?
6. How does Boyne use foreshadowing when Bruno suggests it’s unfair that Shmuel has dozens of friends to play with on his side of the fence?
7. In his youthful innocence and inexperience, Bruno makes mistakes with names, calling the Polish camp where Shmuel is imprisoned “Out-With,” not Auschwitz, and referring to the Führer, or Hitler, as “the Fury.” What literary device is associated with Bruno’s mistakes?
8. What fact about Shmuel’s story of being hauled off to “Out-With” does Bruno have difficulty believing?
9. What happens at the dinner after Pavel spills the wine, and how was it foreshadowed?
10. The disturbing news that Shmuel’s grandfather is missing is an example of what literary device?

WRITING ACTIVITY Why does Grandmother believe she might be to blame for the Commandant’s behavior?
CHAPTERS 15-20

Discussion Questions

1. Is Bruno’s list of reasons why he didn’t like Lieutenant Kotler, including the fact that the man never smiled and that he shot a dog for barking too much, an example of direct or indirect characterization? Why?

2. When Shmuel surprisingly appears in the kitchen, Bruno is plunged into a crisis. How do his actions when confronted by Lieutenant Kotler introduce the themes of complacency and betrayal?

3. Boyne’s description of Lieutenant Kotler’s sudden departure following “shouting” about him between Mother and Father late at night is an example of what literary devices?

4. How does Gretel’s disposal of her dolls and their replacement with maps illustrate the theme of indoctrination?

5. Why does Father come to agree that his wife and children should return to Berlin?

6. Bruno’s plan to disguise himself and slip onto Shmuel’s side of the fence is an example of what literary device?

7. How does Bruno’s recollection of his Grandmother as he applies his costume illustrate the themes of friendship and empathy?

8. When Bruno is being force-marched with a pack of prisoners, how do dramatic irony and point of view come powerfully into play?

9. What do you realize was foreshadowed when Shmuel and Bruno are marched into the room that felt airtight, and you learn that neither was ever heard from again?

10. How does Boyne drive home the themes of friendship and courage at the end of chapter 19?

WRITING ACTIVITY Bruno felt deeply ashamed after he denied knowing Shmuel when asked by Kotler. What might have happened if he stood up for Shmuel? Do you think his betrayal was typical of non-Jews during the Holocaust?

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

WRITING ACTIVITY Why did Boyne choose to tell this horrific story mostly from a child’s perspective? Write about the ways this point of view helps you to understand the Holocaust. How might it distort the history of that event?

PANEL DISCUSSION At the close of the book, Boyne says, "Of course all this happened a long time ago and nothing like that could ever happen again. Not in this day and age." Discuss similar horrible episodes of mass killing since the Holocaust and whether others could happen today.