

# Book Review

A Sixth Grade Humanities Publication Celebrating Jewish Book Month 2014

## Lost In a New World

by Aaron

A few years ago, I started reading a book called *The Book Thief*. It was horrible. I was 30 pages in, and didn't like it at all -- not because of the content, but the formatting. The book was made up of letters back and forth between two people. I really don't like different formats for books other than full pages of writing. Then I stumbled upon *Tropical Secrets*, and it looked like a great book. I opened it up, and... poems. My excitement dimmed like there was a power outage, but I decided to try it anyway. I kept reading the book because it was more like a story made up of poems, not just flowery language. Many poems describe things very vividly, and this book did. But it also just told a story made up of stanzas, and it was from the perspective of somebody.

I'm glad I did! This 190 page book is full of rich, poetic language that seems like I am right there with Daniel, Paloma, and David, the three main characters. This book takes place in Cuba, 1939, when Holocaust refugees are fleeing from Nazi Germany. Daniel, a young boy, has to leave his family. His parents didn't make much money, so they were only able to afford one ticket, and that was for Daniel. If I was in his place, I wouldn't be able to leave.

The poems of this book flow together like streams flowing into a river to form a beautiful story. From the perspective of a stubborn refugee, this new place doesn't seem to matter. The ship was turned away at America, so Cuba was the last place to go. This left the refugees wondering where they should go. They were sent away from America, the Promised Land, so Cuba is their last chance.

In this book, the characters are so real, it seems as though they are alive. Daniel and Paloma are both struggling, working hard for themselves and the refugees flooding

into Cuba like a blizzard of black coats and hats.

My favorite character is Daniel, as he is described vividly and he is very easy to follow. He also is believable and doesn't seem like he is the best or the worst, but normal. For example, he relies on other people a lot, which can be a bad thing, but in David's case, it's not so bad. He relies on David, but I don't think he is asking for specific things, but looking for a fatherly figure as he is away from his parents and he doesn't know what to do. But Daniel works hard for himself. I like that.

*The poems of this book flow together like streams flowing into a river to form a beautiful story.*

I learned a lot about Cuba and the Holocaust, but I was very surprised when I learned what Cuba was like. To me, it seems like paradise on Earth: the turquoise sea, bright, cheery colors, and kind people.

Speaking of kind, Paloma is hiding two refugees in her Dovecote, and she is struggling to take care of them. "Carnival only lasts a few days and nights, and then I will need to dream up new ways of making money to help the sad people who still come on more and more ships."

Eventually, Daniel and David find out, and they help Paloma. I think that this book is a inspiring, vivid recreation of the life of a refugee during the Holocaust.

What I didn't like about this book is that it seemed as though the book just... ended. It could have continued longer, instead of stopping very abruptly. The book also conveys a sad message, which I do not enjoy in any book. Being separated from my parents at this age would be the worst thing that could happen to me. When I learned what Daniel had to go through, I felt very sympathetic and I wanted to help him somehow.

When two ships land at Cuba carrying 240 refugees Daniel is scared and excited, and he is thinking over and over again, "What if my parents are on these boats?" To him, this is the most important event in his life.

My favorite part of the book is when Daniel accepts that he is now living in another place, and he pulls away from those feelings that hold him captive. When he first came to Cuba, he was sort of shocked. Daniel had the heavy woolen coat and pants his parents had given him and a few coins. For weeks, he barely ate, slept, or did anything. He just sat there stubbornly holding on to the thought his parents might be alive.

This book is confusing at times, so I would recommend this book for people 10 years and older. This book is definitely one worth reading, and I think a wide range of people would enjoy this story.

## The Sacrifices for Family

by August

When I first started reading *Brooklyn Bridge* I noticed that Joseph was luckier than his friends and that he had everything that he wanted. The main character in the book is Joseph. His parents ran a candy shop. One day they saw a picture of the president not killing a baby bear and they got the idea to make a teddy bear shop. They became really rich from that and Joseph lost a lot of his friends as a result. His family is newly rich so they have to spend their summer working on teddy bears because they can't risk taking a break while the teddy bears are selling. No longer could Joseph and his book-loving sister get free from watching their baby brother Benjamin. Then something really bad happened; Aunt Golda died from a stroke and that devastated him because he was her favorite.



This book started out a little boring, then got really exciting. Joseph badly wanted to visit a place called Luna Park. Joseph’s parents kept putting him off so he ran away from home, went there himself and became lost, scared and freezing cold. Later, he returned with his family to Coney Island, but that trip got ruined when they saw someone they thought had died. The book had drama and sadness as well like when Aunt Golda died so early in the book. Her family found out through her death that she did so many good things. Something that I thought was really weird was that there were mini stories after each chapter that were kind of useless because they led you off the story of the book, like one called “Max and Karl” that was about unwanted children. Another thing that I didn’t like was when Joseph’s baby brother got really sick and nearly died. It was so believable and sad.

Even though Joseph had anything he could ever want and his friends called him lucky, he didn’t feel lucky because he could not play stickball with his friends. His family was so overwhelmed by work and good fortune but it didn’t seem good to him. I liked this book because it had some really interesting and important topics like how they relate to their family; but also some boring and distracting writing. I liked the character Joseph but I couldn’t really relate to him because the same things have never happened to me, and I’ve never been poor or had to help my family with their work.

## The 69.4 Kilometers That Weren’t Worth It

by Daniel

A long time ago there was a forest in Koszalin. There was a giant tree in that forest. It was 176.003 ft tall. Its roots spread for at least a mile. In those roots, seeds were caught and taken in. They found the nutrients that were needed and grew into milkweed plants. Those plants grew old and dropped their seeds. There was a terrible storm that night and the wind was at over 120 mph. One seed started a journey that it would never forget. The storm took the seed far away. The seed took a 69.4 kilometer journey to Szczecinek, but the seed didn’t want to stop there. It continued the journey south, getting closer, and closer to Bydgoszcz, then the wind calmed.

This is *Milkweed*. Meanwhile there was a commotion in Warsaw, you know probably just the regular stuff.

StopThief is a regular orphan boy who got his name from his surroundings. He goes out every day to steal food. Obviously he got StopThief from people yelling at him STOP! THIEF! One day while stealing a

*One seed started a journey that it would never forget...*

loaf of bread, he is almost caught. As he is running he hears sirens behind him. He sees a flash of red and someone dragging him. This would be his future friend Uri. Uri takes him back to where he lives and StopThief meets Uri’s friends and he is immediately welcomed to the Jewish religion. He and his friends go out stealing stuff and wrestle in their giant pile of food. Everything got worse, especially the new StopThief, he was no longer StopThief, but Misha, he was a new man. Misha met Janina through stealing, and they became besties. Soon they had to move to the ghettos; it was a big, and bad change. “The people were going. I had never seen so many people walking. We were standing on a street corner, watching. They were Jews. I knew by the arm-bands they wore.” They had to live in the dumps and piles of milkweed. They have to live through the worst of the worst and then they have to go to the worst place in the world. The ovens. Does Misha go or not?

There were a few things wrong about this book. Janina needs to be a character because there is no “milkweed” without Janina. Janina being another main character messes with the story making it more complicated. Also it makes the writing of Jerry Spinelli not sound as good as it really sounds because it gets too complicated. Jerry Spinelli had some problems with writing this book because he made everybody sound extremely stupid, and it’s just not realistic. As far as I know, a very well known and highly positioned Nazi would never ever in his life want to, or just

straight out come to a ghetto.

Luckily there were some good things about this book. It was very descriptive, and in most cases true. So I might not ever call this close to my favorite book, but I think it was fine. I just think that if that seed got all the way to Warsaw and actually grew into a milkweed plant in a ghetto then this book would be much better.

## Tropical Secrets: The Book of Poetry

by Elan

Usually, in a book about the Holocaust you get information about numbers of deaths and how terrible it was, or else you get a story of some poor young boy or girl who is trapped in Germany or another country occupied by the Nazis. What you wouldn’t expect is a beautiful story written in poems about a young boy named Daniel who escaped from the Holocaust on a ship seeking refuge in America. Daniel is turned away from America and is forced to become a refugee in not America, as he and his parents wished, but in Cuba where he befriends a local girl whose father is in charge of who is allowed to land in Cuba.

The book is called *Tropical Secrets: Holocaust Refugees in Cuba* by Margarita Engle.

Paloma, whose real name is Maria Dolores, is the lonely girl Daniel meets. She tries to help the refugees while avoiding her father “El Gordo” who is a very greedy man: “Business is business.

Why should I care about Nazis or Jews? I find money for my fat wallet any way I can.” Yet she has no close friends other than her birds that she spends so much time with in her dovecote. This book is narrated in the first person by Daniel and Paloma with “El Gordo” and David occasionally narrating a chapter.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in America, the Cuban officials tighten up on not only the Japanese people there but also the Germans who found refuge in Cuba. It took a while for Daniel to figure out that only non-Jewish Germans were being

rounded up. A couple that live in the same shelter as Daniel are a target for those new laws. The woman Miriam is Jewish but her husband Mark is Christian. Daniel and Paloma hide Miriam and Mark in Paloma’s dovecote as they feel like they need to save at least one of the innocent wives or husbands who fled Europe (with their Jewish husband or wife) to escape the Nazis. The dovecote is not a suitable home for an old couple so Daniel and Paloma devise a plan. They take Mark and Miriam on a train and Paloma’s cousin agrees to take care of the old couple.

Fewer and fewer refugee ships are allowed to land for fear of Nazi spies. There are two final ships in the Cuban harbor Daniel and Paloma must save. To allow them to land “El Gordo” demands a lot of money.

I will not spoil the ending because I recommend this book. However, I recommend it for the way Margarita Engle tells the story with beautiful poems- “How can hatred have such a beautiful name? Crystal should be clear, but on that dark night the glass of broken windows did not

glitter”- but not much for her plot and the way she explains things. For instance, I think the ending was finished but not done because Daniel’s journey seemed unfinished. I recommend this book for people nine and up who like poetry and great word choice, but who don’t care that the plot has holes or is unfinished. I rate this book three and a half out of five stars.

## The Boy in the Closet

by Henry

When I first saw the book, *The Entertainer and Dybbuk*, I thought lots of things by just judging the cover.

There is a boy with glowing eyes sitting in a closet. I expected it to be mysterious. The author, Sid Fleischman, did an excellent job making you go back into the world of the Nazis without making you cry. The first couple of pages where strange with words I never heard of like ventriloquist. I asked my parents about a few of these words and discovered that you really cannot judge a book by its cover because the book was about a Dybbuk and a ventriloquist which sounds mysterious but wasn’t.

When I laid my eyes on the first page

it was when the great Freddie came home from a hard day’s work as a ventriloquist. He opened up his closet to put his suit away and sitting in his closet was a boy who was almost glowing. This part struck me that this book would be a fantasy book. I have a fondness of Freddie’s personality because it is so unnatural, and this made me want to find out why and what happened. Then the Dybbuk boy asked if he could possess Freddie and Freddie said no. But then the boy said that Freddie owed him a favor. The Dybbuk reminded Freddie of a time when they were on a train and the Dybbuk helped Freddie escape from the Nazis. The Dybbuk said: “The German Train moving you to another camp-it was wrecked, remember? You were able to escape in the woods. Yes or no, eh? Was the train struck by lightning on a clear night?”

I think my favorite part of the book was when the Dybbuk explains his story to Freddie. I liked this excerpt because it was exceptionally interesting to hear the Dybbuk’s story. However, overall I did not enjoy this book as much as I have enjoyed my recent reads. This book was short and slow and sometimes silly: “The reporter shot back sarcastically. ‘But of course! You’re saying someone actually murdered zis carved hunk of wood?’” Sometimes the book had a pop of action, but it just wasn’t enough to keep my interest. I would think that this book would be good for seven or eight year olds. If I could change this book I would make it a bit more mature and put some more action into it.

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## Milkweed: Not An Ordinary Holocaust Book

by Ivan

Have you ever not been able to put a book down? Well, *Milkweed* would be one of those books. *Milkweed* is about a character named Stopthief, an ordinary thief. The book takes place before the Holocaust stealing bread and everything. After he is found by Uri, Uri thinks that Stopthief can be a smuggler because he is slim and fast.



Misha (Uri names Stopthief Misha) meets more thieves because of Uri. Uri takes the lead and tells Misha to follow what he does and stay close to him.

Until everyone gets taken away into the Ghetto, Misha is very curious and stupid at the same time; he goes up to strangers and ask, “Where are you going?” When he meets the Milgroms he decides that he wants to stay with them and not with the boys. When Misha meets Janina they create a strong bond throughout the whole book like brother and sister. After he is in the Ghetto, Misha is still

smuggling and won’t stop finding food for the Milgroms. After a while Janina thinks it would be a good idea to follow Misha through the two brick hole that Misha goes through to get the food. Mr. Milgrom first tells Janina to stop, but she yells “No, I won’t stop.” Misha then tells Janina to stop following him. After a couple of months of smuggling, Misha finds Uri working at the Blue Camel where he steals all of the food from Misha and Uri tosses him into a room and talks to him. After that he kicks Misha out and tells him not to come back.

One day Misha is being chased by Buffo (who is a Nazi also known as a jackboot) and he is chased into an alleyway. Janina notices and then throws a rock at Buffo’s head and knocks him out. Misha then tells Janina to follow him into another alleyway, sprinting so they don’t get caught by the Jackboots. What Janina finds, she thinks is amazing. She is actually seeing some color in the Ghetto because of a plant that is for once alive.

The side-characters are very unknown, such as the boys, until far into the book. The main person you know is Misha. After a while, the side characters start to die out, literally. Once Misha goes smuggling one last time before the trains come to go to “Candyland.” The Jackboots cover the walls and Misha can’t get back in. In my opinion this book was amazing because it had everything a 6th-8th grade male would want because of all of the action and what happens in the end.



A Life Of Crime/Justice

by Jared

Have you ever wondered about the true identity of a character? Who they are or who their family is? Well, if you have then this is the book for you. This book tells the story of Amnon “Nonny” Feuerberg who is no ordinary kid. He is from a family of crime and a family of justice. His dad is one of the best detectives in Israel. His mom lived a life of half crime and half normal.

*The Zig Zag Kid* is about a thirteen year old boy named Amnon “Nonny” Feuerberg nearing his bar mitzvah. Nonny and his family live in Israel. His dad (a workaholic policeman) and his girlfriend (his dad’s secretary) are trying to send him on a special trip, but Nonny encounters his dad’s old friend Felix Glick...master criminal. Felix takes Nonny on a trip, to show him his past. Nonny figures out the secrets of his mom who died when he was young and his true identity. He also finds out the truth about his mom’s side of the family.

One thing I like about this book is how the translator translated it. You could barely tell it was translated. Another thing I like about it was the author’s writing style. It was a fiction book, but at some parts, it made you really want to believe it was non-fiction. The author makes you believe that this boy is a real kid looking back at his life from when he is 30 or 40; “The boy at the window of the moving train, gazing back as though he might never see this picture again, was me.”

I think that Felix Glick and Lola Cipe-rola are my favorite characters because they are the most secretive characters in the book. Both of them hold a secret that changed Nonny’s life forever. Felix and Lola tell Nonny the truth about his mother who was a very, very interesting person. They really stand out as secondary characters in the book. The book would be horrible without them.

The book got its title *The Zig Zag Kid*

because of Nonny’s life. Sometimes he can be an angel, like when he was around his friend’s family. But he could also be like a devil, like when he killed his neighbor’s cow or when he runs from the cops after a hijacking.

I would rate this book a 4.5 out of 5 because it was a really good book, but it got annoying with so many back stories that had no logic. I think the author had a book but wanted more so added useless back stories. For example, there is a time when Nonny and Felix are driving and Nonny starts telling this story about his rich friend who was an amazing piano player and his mom only let him do things that didn’t hurt his fingers.

I would recommend this book for fifth grade and up because there are a couple places with inappropriate content, but overall it’s pretty clean.

Despite the occasional useless content, I really liked the book because the translation made sense and I liked how the secondary characters like Felix and Lola came into play as big characters from the middle to the end.

Not a Typical Holocaust Book

by Jordan

A typical Holocaust book would be about a Jewish boy or girl who is trying to escape the Nazis, but this is not a typical Holocaust book. In John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, you first find yourself with 9-year-old Bruno returning to his house in Berlin after school. Bruno went up to his but room and “he was surprised to find Maria, the family’s maid—who always kept her head bowed and never looked up from the carpet—standing in his bedroom, pulling all his belongings out of the wardrobe and packing them in four large wooden crates, even the things he’d hidden at the back that belonged to him and were nobody else’s business.” When Bruno asked what was going on, he was told by his mother that they were

moving from their house in Berlin because Father had been given a promotion, but Bruno was not happy about this. His family already lived in a beautiful five-story house that had the best banister for sliding down and even though he had lived there so long, there were still so many nooks and crannies to explore. To Bruno’s dismay, their new house had only three floors and hardly anywhere to explore. While unpacking his things, Gretel (the hopeless case) came into Bruno’s room. When Bruno asked Gretel (the hopeless case) who all the people in the striped pajamas were, she didn’t know what Bruno was talking about. So he told Gretel about the people in the striped pajamas that he could see through his window. Gretel (the hopeless case) took a look through Bruno’s window and Bruno asked again who the people were, she replied with a simple “I don’t know.”

But one day, Bruno decided to go on an adventure to the fence that divided them from the people in the striped pajamas. When he arrived at the fence, he walked along the fence for a while in hopes of seeing something, which he didn’t.

“After walking for the best part of an hour and starting to feel a little hungry, he thought that maybe that was enough exploration for one day and it would be a good idea to turn back. However, just at that moment a small dot appeared in the distance and he narrowed his eyes to try to see what it was. Bruno remembered a book he had read in which a man was lost in the desert and because he hadn’t had any food or water for several days had started to imagine that he saw wonderful restaurants and enormous fountains, but when he tried to eat or drink from them they disappeared into nothingness, just handfuls of sand. He wondered whether that was what was

happening to him now.” This is a good example of when John Boyne starts to ramble on and on with details instead of getting to the point. I, being a young person, like fast paced books with a lot of action in them. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* was not one of those books. I liked this book, but I didn’t love it, and I would’ve tried harder to make it more engaging if I were John. Besides that John should keep doing what he’s doing.

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The Other Side of the Fence

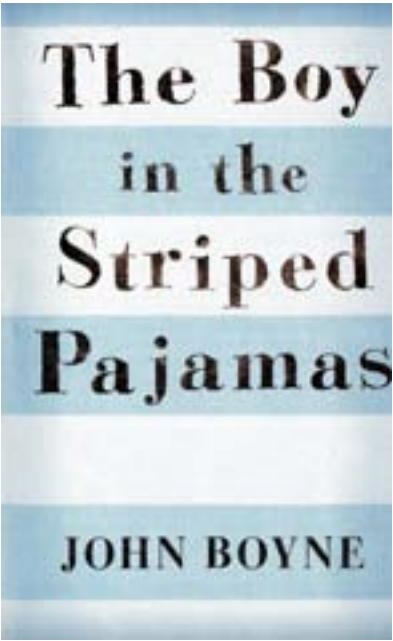
by Lyle

Normally when I think of a Holocaust book, I think of a poor Jewish girl or boy either getting sent to a concentration camp or trying to prevent it. So when I picked up *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, knowing that it was a Holocaust book and started reading, I was very surprised. I started to doubt it was even about the Holocaust. *The Boy in Striped Pajamas* starts with a German, nine year old boy living in a huge house with his sister, mother

and father. This boy’s name is Bruno and his life is the focus of this book. The writing style of this book is like no other book that I have read. It is always following Bruno and because he is so young, and he doesn’t know much about anything, the author doesn’t tell you any details that Bruno himself doesn’t know.

Bruno loves to explore his giant house. Every time he looks around, he finds a new closet or even an entire hidden room that he never knew about. One day he comes home from school to the maid packing his clothes vigorously. He asks what she is doing and she says they are moving. He is very surprised and doesn’t want to move, but he can’t do anything about it. So just a few days later they are at a new house named Outwith. Once they move into the new house, one of the first things he notices is the giant fence extending seemingly forever in both directions. On the other side of the fence, he sees many people in what he thinks are striped pajamas. I’m sure you can all guess what those clothes really are. When he and his sister, Gretel, who he calls “the hopeless case,” first see the fence and the people, Gretel, after a long silence, speaks up: “Who are all those people? And what are they all doing there?” This is what gets Bruno curious and really starts the adventure.

Over time Bruno gets used to the house and seeing people come and go, in and out of his father’s office. He often sees soldiers, most of whom pay no attention to him except for one. That man is named Lieutenant Kotler. Bruno doesn’t like him at all but Gretel does, A LOT. His character just floats in and out of the story at different times and he is very believable. That is what I like about him and all the characters, the most. They are all very realistic with their own personalities.



The entire reason for the family moving is because Bruno’s father is a highly regarded and important Nazi. His family was moved to the house next to a concentration camp for who knows why. Bruno doesn’t know so it doesn’t tell the readers. Bruno becomes used to the house

and decides to go explore the fence line. He finds a boy on the other side of the fence who is his age and a bit smarter than he is. This is one of my favorite parts in the book because it introduces a new character with a new personality which is something that doesn’t happen a lot in the book. This boy that he finds is named Shmuel and he quickly becomes Bruno’s best friend even though there is giant fence between them. Shmuel proves to know much more than Bruno about where they are and what is going on. They have a conversation which includes Bruno learning that they are in Poland and that both Denmark and Germany are very far away from where they are now. Another thing that makes Bruno believable is that he doesn’t like to be wrong just like most kids. “‘Well yes,’ he said. ‘but it’s all relative isn’t it? Distance I mean.’ He wished they could get off the subject as he was starting to think he was entirely wrong and made a private resolution to pay more attention in future in geography class.”

Now as this book is coming to an end, things are getting more interesting and at this point it became one of the best books I have ever read. I am not going to spoil the ending, but I will just say that it is amazing because Bruno doesn’t know what is happening so it doesn’t say it plainly and you

As soon as I started reading *Anne Frank and Me*, I got captivated by the detail and the beautiful sadness of it.

When I first saw this book, *Anne Frank and Me*, on the Jewish Month Book reading list, it caught my attention immediately. I almost always like books like these where a character is transported into the past, usually the Holocaust like *The Devil’s Arithmetic* by Jane Yolen. As soon as I started reading *Anne Frank and Me*, I got captivated by the detail and the beautiful sadness of it. Most Holocaust books have some of this, but this book expands even more on that idea. You could almost hear Nicole’s joys and unhappiness. The book also gives an accurate description of sibling rivalry and annoying little siblings (I have a couple of siblings as well).

Nicole was very confused. She just woke up in Paris, France, with the year 1942. The principal of her school at home, Urkin, says he is her father, and BaZooms, her teacher, has become her mother. Her sister, Little Bit, has become Liz-Bette. All the other people in her life have shown up too, as friends. The guy she had a crush on at home has become her boyfriend. At first, she thinks they are acting and looks everywhere for hidden cameras. However, as time passes, her memory of home becomes a dream and she and her friends laugh about it. “Mimi rolled her eyes. ‘Oh, that’s right. You still think you were an American and that you-’ Lived in the future,’ they said

have to figure out for yourself what happens to Bruno. Even though the main character is a nine year old, the writing style is definitely not for that age. I would recommend this book to anyone who likes to read realistic books that have elements of sadness, mystery and a small touch of humor.

The Memories That Never End

by Maia R.

Sound of a gunshot... Screams... Running... Red-hot pain...

When the sound of a gunshot echoes through the museum in an Anne Frank exhibit, Nicole Burns gets transported into the past. Her name is Nicole Bernhardt and she is Jewish. “‘You have to tell me.’ Her own voice sounded distant to her ears, like she was at the bottom of a well. ‘What year is it?’ The moan of the sirens began again. ‘Nineteen forty-two, my darling child,’ Urkin said. ‘Nineteen forty-two.’”

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at the same time.” The author found an entertaining story to go along with a wealth of information. This book may not seem like it is entertaining, but it is a little bit funny when she goes searching for video bugs, because she thinks that she is in a watched environment or an experiment of some kind.

This book paints a beautiful, but terrifying picture of life for Jews in 1942. You learn about the horrors of the Holocaust, and I believe that this book teaches lessons with how to appreciate what we have. Nazis everywhere, chaos, and the rumors about the “relocation” areas. It is very informative with the details, so much so that younger kids would not understand or might be frightened, so I do not recommend this book for 10 and under.

Nicole faces tragedy and wonder as she moves through her life as a French girl. Tragedy shows when she gets stuck with neighbors in a Jewish holding camp. People die, but she helps her neighbor’s daughter escape. Her feelings seem to echo through you when you read this book. I highly recommend this book.

### The Devil’s Arithmetic-Impossible to Put Down

by Mari

Most of her life, Hannah has been complaining about hearing the same stories over and over again on Pesach. But what she doesn’t know, and what turns out to be her big mistake, is that there is more behind these stories.

Twelve-year old Hannah (Hebrew name Chaya, which means life) goes with her family to Grandpa Will’s house for Pesach. Grandpa Will tells Hannah to open the door for Elijah. “Outside, where there should have been a long hall with green numbered doors, there was a greening field and a lowering sky. The moon hung between two heavy gray clouds. Across the field, marched a shadowy figure. He had a cap on his head, and he was singing: ‘Who asked you to be buried alive? You know that no one forced you. You took this madness on

yourself.’” It doesn’t take Hannah long to realize two things: that she should have never complained about hearing the same stories over and over again without actually thinking about what the Jews had to suffer from the torture of the Nazis, and that she had been automatically transported into the past! Before long, she has an Aunt Gitl who is strict the first time they meet, an Uncle Shmuel who looks like a lumberjack, and a mom and dad who are up in the heavens because of a terrible flu. She soon finds out that not long after her parents died, she had also caught the flu, but luckily, she survived. Soon after the wedding of Uncle Shmuel and Fayge, everybody gets

captured by the Nazis. Many tragic deaths happen in the trucks that they are taken in. I will not tell you where they were taken, but I will tell you this: It is the time of the Holocaust. It is a tragic place and time, and tragic endings are to be expected, when Hannah sacrificed herself for the safety of her friend, and when Hannah goes back to the present day, where she meets her friend that she met back in the time of the Holocaust. Except, the thing is that the friend in the present time is older than she is!

I think that Jane Yolen really understands the Holocaust and that she has a pretty good idea of what happened back then. Yolen didn’t really want to write the book. But then one of her editors, who was a rabbi’s wife at the time, convinced her. She also connected the main character of *The Devil’s Arithmetic*, Chaya, to her own life, because, for one thing, both she and Hannah hated having to remember so much history and ritual.

Although it was a good book in all, I believe that the author could have made the chapters a little longer. At some places, she added in a little too much history, losing my attention a bit. Overall, I can’t wait for Jane’s next book about the Holocaust! At first, she swore that she wouldn’t write another book about the time period because

it required many years of researching. “She called it after her young niece, who died a hero in the camps: CHAYA. Life.”

### A Boy and a Fence

by Maya G.

When I think of Holocaust literature, I think of a Jewish family that is captured by the Nazis and taken to a concentration camp. I definitely don’t think of a story told from the perspective of a naive young boy who thinks “Heil Hitler” means “Well, goodbye for now, have a pleasant afternoon.” That is what surprised me about *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne.

The book starts out with nine-year-old Bruno coming home to the family’s maid packing all of his things. He asks his mom what she is doing. His mom says that they are leaving. They are going to a place called Out-With that readers will later find is the concentration camp Auschwitz. When Bruno arrives at Out-With, he is very unhappy. His life before had been perfect. He had “three best friends for life, a big house, and no worries in the world.” When he gets to Out-With, everything changes. I remember when I moved into a new house, I didn’t really like the situation at first and I missed all of my old friends but, like Bruno, after a while it felt like home.

Bruno looks out his window and sees people behind a fence wearing striped pajamas. No women, just men. Soon his curiosity gets the best of him and, despite his parents warnings, he walks down the road to explore the fence. After walking for about an hour Bruno comes to a place where there are no more little shacks on the other side of the fence. Not long after that Bruno saw, “The dot that became a speck that became a blob that be-

came a figure that became a boy.” The boy was just sitting there on the ground. Bruno walked over and they started talking. Everyday following the first, Bruno walked to the fence to talk to his friend Shmuel. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is the story of two friends, a German boy and a Jewish boy, right in the middle of the Holocaust.

I loved the writing of this book. It was very descriptive and full of fifty-dollar words that I had to look up in a dictionary such as “escapade.” The way John Boyne

wrote the story, it makes readers feel as if they were Bruno and had actually experienced everything that the author writes about. The author writes the book from the perspective of Bruno and he gets into Bruno’s head and shares everything that happens in it. There was one thing that I didn’t really appreciate. The author sometimes leaves off at tense parts in the story when it seems essential to know what happened. He only gives the reader little clues to what took place. That was pretty frustrating for me because I didn’t know if my guess was right, but the way he configured the story later on confirmed my guesses.

This book really touched me. It made me feel closer to the Jewish half of myself, and I felt like I was in the middle of the Holocaust and at the end I just couldn’t bear to turn the last page. I didn’t want my adventures with Bruno and Shmuel to end so soon: “...Despite the mayhem that followed, Bruno found that he was still holding Shmuel’s hand in his own and nothing in the world would have persuaded him to let go.”

### A Book Worth Reading

by Maya P.

When I first picked up *Bread Givers*, I looked at the back and saw the line, “Sara Smolinsky, the youngest daughter of an Orthodox rabbi, watches as her father marries off her sisters to men they don’t love.” That line chased me away from the book at first because it sounded like some silly romance novel. My mom told me that it was a good book and worth trying. I’m glad I read it and I think a lot of people would like it too.

At the beginning of the book, Sara is ashamed to collect coal because it makes her feel like a beggar. Since her dad won’t provide for his family, Sara becomes a sardine fish peddler. Then, because of her dad’s preaching, Sara runs away from home. She goes to college, becomes a teacher, and gets work at a school. One of Sara’s loved ones dies. Sara finds someone who finally loves her, and makes up with her dad.

My favorite part of *Bread Givers* is how Sara, the main character, stood up for herself and her sisters. She followed her dream

to become a teacher, she made up with her dad, and she finally found the right person to spend her life with. What I didn’t like was Reb Smolinsky, Sara’s dad. He didn’t provide for his family, he got the best of the food, and he regarded himself highly. He said that he was the “light of G-d” and that no one could do anything without his light. I read this book with my grandma and we laughed at Reb Smolinsky for calling himself, “The light of G-d.” I like how everything was believable. The author didn’t give much detail on the main character but gives a bit of detail on the characters Sara doesn’t like. For example, Sara said a lot of detail about how much Zalmon the Fisherman smells.

One of the things I didn’t like was how the story ends: “It wasn’t just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me.”

### We Will Stay Strong

by Sam

I sat at my desk one cold rainy night looking for a an exciting fantasy book. I had started by looking for a what the reading community calls a “feel good” read. While I was looking for that, I stumbled upon “Memories of Anne Frank.” at the time I had not known what I had gotten myself into. This Holocaust novel is anything but a feel good book. It is full of disappointment, despair and long nights full of hoping and believing that tomorrow there would not be a harsh knock at your door with a Nazi there, sending you off to torture or, in most cases, imminent death.

When I first saw this book on the internet, I did not immediately order it from Amazon. I usually do not enjoy Holocaust books. But when I heard from my teacher that we were doing a project about Jewish Book Month, and saw the list I was ready for my golden opportunity to read a more serious, solemn novel. I grasped this chance, and within a few days, I had

sped through this unique and touching novel.

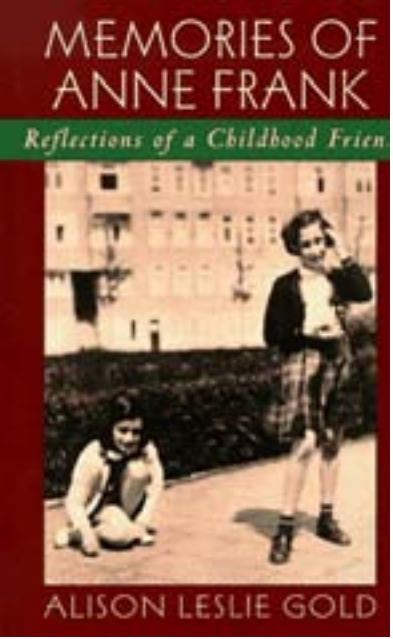
“Memories of Anne Frank” is told through the eyes of one of Anne Frank’s best childhood friends. They would laugh, talk, scream, daydream and enjoy their humble life as young adults. Then, a horrific event started. From the beginning of the Holocaust, there was no laughing. There wasn’t even any talking. If you went skipping around, the odds of you being scooped

up by a stray Nazi and being taken to a concentration camp were almost guaranteed. But this was the fear that everyone was forced to live within this terrible time in history. Every day the Golsars and the Franks and everyone in Amsterdam lived in the fear that maybe this was the day that the dreaded rhythmic “Nazi knock” would occur at your doorstep. This knock was known all over Europe and around the world as a call of death or torture. This is what the camps would bring.

If you behaved like Hannah did, listened to the Nazis, did your daily job well, didn’t complain and didn’t retaliate, then you would get that extra piece or even a crumb of bread that could prolong your life for a few extra days.

Hannah was left in the dark. Her family was taken to Alballalager, a “privileged” concentration camp, while Anne had not been taken to a camp. For all that Hannah knew, Anne had left Europe and was now in America. She just had no idea.

Inside Albaallager, Hannah was separated from her father. She had no idea where inside the concentration camp he was. She took the job of literally scrubbing the toilets with a harsh disinfectant. Inside that bathroom there was a small window that overlooked an area that held hundreds of people. Hannah took a risk and she saw her father. He was thin as a bone and incredibly weak. But seeing her father gave her hope, hope to hold onto life. At the time when she saw him she had been suffering greatly from the Nazis giving them next to nothing to eat and forcing them to sleep on hard wood mattresses. “Because of the cold, everything froze in the toilets and





washrooms, making Hannah’s work very hard. Her hands were chafed and raw from scrubbing. The wind irritated her eyes. Icy rain and sleet fell all the time.”

Yet, she was a strong girl. Here is an excerpt from a time in the book when Hannah’s life is just about to get to the worst times in the camps.

This was a message that I took from this book and applied it to my personal life. I understand that things will not always be perfect from the start. You have to put in the work to be wherever you want to be, not only in school, but also in my sports life. Hannah and everyone in the Holocaust could have given up when they were starving. However they all chose to have hope and faith that G-d would

lead them the right way, that he could lead them to freedom and peace. This is the attitude that everyone should live by in their everyday lives. That success can not be bought but it has to be worked for. You have to believe in yourself. That you are strong and that you can stay strong. “For two days, a small amount of bread a little bit of water was distributed. We kept hope that this would sustain us.”

Although I did take many life lessons from this book there were most definitely flaws in the way that it was written. Although I know that the Holocaust was one of the worst ever times to be a Jew in Europe, and I knew what kind of book I was getting myself into, this book made me sad. Simple as that--it was a sad, serious, real life book. It describes the gas chambers in which hundred of thousands, even millions were gassed to death. They described everything. At this point in the book, I considered starting a new Jewish Book Month book. I am very glad that I continued to read this book. If you are thinking about reading this book after my book review here are a few things that you should keep in mind when starting this book. It has hard language, language that I had to look up. This should not stop you from reading this book though. In only 130 pages it gives you an idea of what the Jews really experienced in the Holocaust, how they felt being taken to imminent death and watching their family die in the chambers. How they lived in fear.

## The Suitcase that Started a Story

by Sese

Hana’s suitcase arrived in Tokyo, Japan, at Little Wings Holocaust Education Center in March of 2000. Her name was written with white paint saying “Hana Brady May 16, 1931.”Below that it said “Waisenkind”-The German word for orphan.

*Hannah and everyone in the Holocaust could have given up when they were starving. However they all chose to have hope and faith...*

The book starts with telling Hanna’s story before. Before her parents were taken away. Before the Holocaust struck Hanna. Hanna was Jewish, like many people in Germany. She had a normal life with her family: A mom, dad, and an older brother. She went to school and had friends. She was a normal

girl. She had a lot of fun being the way she was too. She loved to ice skate and ski. She didn’t realize her future. How could she?

On March 15, 1939, she realized that her life had changed. That was the day Hitler’s Nazi Troops marched into Czechoslovakia and with straight faces, declared that Jews were evil and dangerous. The said Jews had no more rights. No traveling, so no one could visit their family or escape. They all had to tell the Nazis what they owned, no matter what it was: art, jewelry, cutlery, and bank books. The Brady’s took their most precious possessions and put them in the attic or gave them to non Jewish friends.

One day, Hanna was planning on seeing “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” but the Nazis had put up a sign that made Hana Brady lose hope. “NO JEWS ALLOWED!” Hana quietly walked home. Hana started seeing those signs everywhere, but she just kept walking.

Hana still went to school. She sat with her friends at lunch and always played with them, especially Maria: “We’ll be together

forever, no matter what.” This piece just really spoke to me. The quote Hana said to try and boost herself up, but she knew she couldn’t keep her promise.

Fumiko, a woman from Japan trying to find out about Hana Brady. Her first clue. She had stayed up late at night, searching Hanna Brady, looking and hoping to find one little clue. Anything. One night she discovered that the children in Theresienstadt (where Hannah was) a collection of some drawings they drew. Could she find Hanna Brady amongst all of the drawings?

Third grade was the year Hanna lost everything. At first it was sad. No school for Jews. Hanna was really sad. She could no longer see her friends. Hanna was alone. Forever. But then...The Nazis. March 1941. Her mother. They ordered her to go to the Gestapo at nine o’clock in the morning. She had to leave. Now let me cut in. Really if I was Hanna I would be devastated. There would be a black hole in my heart that could never be filled. I would just...

well, I would just never see any point in doing anything. Nothing, no one, could ever replace what we had.

Eventually, a package had arrived for Fumiko. A package that contained a clue to Hana Brady. In the package there were five pictures of drawings that Hanna had drawn.

She tried her best to behave. But it got worse. Hannah’s father was taken away. She had no one except

her brother. There uncle took them in, but it was never going to be the same. The goodnight tuck in, no longer meant something. Hanna wondered if it ever would.

The siblings received a notice announcing their moving to Nove Mesto on May 14th, 1942, TOGETHER. Hanna was scared. A place with many Jews sounded nice... but what would it be like? Her boshka (Grandmother) came in and prepped them all she could. How could you prepare someone for uncertainty? A few hours later, the driver dropped the children off in front of a warehouse. They joined the lineup. They finally got to the frowning soldier waving people into a dark, airless building. Mats covered

the floor, so Hanna and George agreed to find two mats together. They looked around. Scarcely any children. They were waiting. They were being deported.

They had an hour. One suitcase. 25 kilos. Not a gram more. Everyone had fear in their eyes. Fear was everywhere. Once Hanna and George got on the train, it filled up quickly.

Theresienstadt. A name the Nazis gave to a previous town. Fumiko had arrived. Fumiko was hoping to have luck on her side. She had no meeting scheduled but just hoped they would see her. She opened the heavy door to the museum. Quiet. Where was everyone? She asked a guard. He said it’s a holiday. Everyone is at home celebrating. Her luck had run out.

Quiet. Boring, uneventful. They arrived. The boys to the left girls to the right. Hanna shouldn’t have spoke. She wanted to be with George. He ordered her to the right.

“Help me find Hanna Brady”

Found. After so long, Hanna Brady had been found. The assistant of the museum took out a big book. Names of thousands of people. Hannah Brady. That was it. But George. Fumiko didn’t know what she was looking for anymore.

George was excited to tell Hanna. Grandmother had arrived. But also worried. Grandmother might not be able to hold up. She had lived in the city. Then they saw her. Her clothes were torn and soiled. Three months past, Grandmother was dead. Sadness struck again. The Nazis made an announcement. The list. Every day they put up a list. Peoples names were on that list. Hanna was crying at the thought of being separated from Gorge. No longer could she contain her sadness.

The day came. George Brady, it read. Hanna sobbed. It was one of the worst days of her life. But

just days later it read Hana Brady. So the next day, she lined up, took the train, and got off, like everyone else. This is Auschwitz. I heard depression at this part of the book. Sadness everywhere. An angry soldier told everyone to leave their stuff on a platform and they walked through a gate.

Hana had died at the camp. George had survived. He could have died somewhere else. Fumiko was determined. For the next hour, they searched through the books. Then Fumiko found something. George’s

bunk mate. They found him in Prague.

The clock ticking. Only a few hours of day time remaining. The bunk mate was unavailable. But this time she had luck. Kurt had only a few minutes. Kurt knew where George lived. Toronto, Canada. So she flew.

A warm, sunny, Canadian day. 72 year old George Brady didn’t know that Fumiko was coming. Hana was his deepest sorrow. He had lost her, but did not know about her death. When Fumiko told him, his whole world went black.

He’s okay though. And he visited Little Wings in Tokyo, and told his story.

This book inspired me. It made me believe in the power of love, and what it does to people. I can’t imagine the pain these people went through. I’m just amazed.

## Anna Frank’s Life

by Tamar

I read the book *Anna Frank from Words to Pictures* and I don’t know how to describe it: exciting or sad, or maybe even happy? But I know that this book is good, very good. I liked this book because Anna was writing in her diary about things that she didn’t say to anyone else. Anna and her family go into hiding with other people to protect themselves from the Nazis, and she is eventually taken to a concentration camp. Anna wrote about how much she missed her friends and how much she missed the boy she loved.

There is a sentence in the book that says:

*This line has a lot of meaning to me because how can a child so young understand the meaning of war and death and how cruel the world is.*

“In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can’t build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery and death.” I think this sentence is amazing because she said that people are good in their hearts. But how could she have hope when people were

thinking about death. This line has a lot of meaning to me because how can a child so young understand the meaning of war and death and how cruel the world is.

I learned a lot from this book and it added to my general knowledge of the Second World War. I learned that the world is not perfect. There are bad people in the world and we can’t change that. But we can change how they show it. Also, everything in the book is described well. There are pictures from Anna’s diary that are in

Dutch and English but are translated into Hebrew so that it’s easy to understand.

I think people who like to read books about difficult topics will love this book. It is also an exciting book because so many things happen to Anna both when she is in hiding and in the concentration camp. It’s also a sad book because she lost her parents, but she didn’t know it. She is alone with only her sister in the concentration camp. The saddest part for me was that Anna got sick and died in the concentration camp when she was 15. But the book was also happy. She met Peter while she lived in the secret attic and they were more than friends. This makes me think that something good came out of something bad.

*The Portland Jewish Academy Book Review is a Sixth Grade Humanities publication celebrating Jewish Book Month.*

*During November 2014, all sixth grade students read at least one book with Jewish content. This year’s class chose both fiction and non-fiction, with most works relating in some way to the Holocaust.*

*After reading their chosen books, students closely examined several reviews of children’s and young adult literature from “The New York Times Book Review.” In addition to recognizing the informal and often personal tone of these reviews, students noted the unique stylistic choices including the use of very short paragraphs and titles of books set off in quotation marks (although for our purposes we generally stayed true to the more familiar italicized format).*

*The sixth graders then wrote their own New York Times-inspired book reviews incorporating their opinions about elements such as plot, characters, and the author’s writing style. Short excerpts from the texts to help support particular points were also included.*

*As these reviews were written by developing writers experimenting with a new form of writing, occasional grammatical errors as well as opportunities for idea clarification or elaboration are to be expected.*

*It is hoped that the opinions of these thoughtful and insightful reviewers will lead to many conversations about what makes a book great and will inspire others to read some of the most appreciated titles.*