

# The Portland Jewish Academy Book Review

A Sixth Grade Humanities Publication Celebrating Jewish Book Month 2012

## A Descriptive Hand

by Isaac V.

By the time you read the title: *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, you know what you're in for, a diary. A diary is not an adventure. It's psychological literature. While in hiding during World War Two, Anne was more than trapped in a small annex, but in her own mind. It was almost the only place she could go besides Peter Van Daan's room to socialize. Her diary was where she poured her thoughts into so that they didn't crowd her own head.

The year is 1940. The Nazis have invaded the Netherlands and the Franks have taken refuge with an old dentist, Dussel, and the Van Daans who were incorporated in business with the Franks to a Secret Annex belonging to a business partner. Life for the group drags on and Anne looks to her diary for an escape from the dullness. Anne is trapped. For the adults she is a very normal topic for discussion regarding her upbringing, table manners, etc. On the outside it appears that these insults have bounced off her as if to say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." These words of abuse do indeed hurt her, whether they come from Mrs. Van Daan or even worse, her own mother. Anne becomes trapped in thoughts, the only place she can look to for relief.

Later in the diary, she can look to the only child of the Van Daan's, Peter, for relief. First their relationship is only friendly and a source to absorb each other's thoughts, but Anne recognizes the gravity between the two and they become a couple. Although their parents disapprove of

the relationship, they make life easier for each other.

In most popular literature these days, a story is filled with suspense, and one intriguing event leads to another. Anne Frank tells a story that was never really meant to be intriguing. These works were found on the floor after the Gestapo invaded the Secret Annex. They weren't intended to please a reader. The diary of Anne Frank is a historical document. Her diary is how much of the world understands what hiding was like.

Anne's detailed and descriptive hand truly amazes me, although I found it slow to read. Nothing distinguishing usually occurs during her day and despite that she describes each little detail. In much popular modern-day literature, writers describe large events throughout pages or even chapters. In my opinion, writers capture a reader's attention focusing on events crucial to understanding the book. Then again, Anne wrote a diary not a book.

Anne's hope tells its own beautiful story. A young girl is verbally beaten like a punching bag, yet she somehow looks on past her own tragedies and sees hope. She sees herself walking out of the Secret Annex as a free person after the war ends. I love her personality. She has an ability not all people have; in darkness that seemingly goes on

forever, Anne Frank can find light.

## Bruno and the Boy Called Shmuel

by Jesse

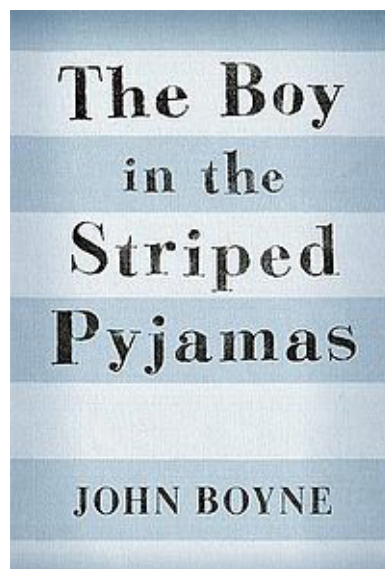
When you read a Holocaust book, you usually start out with a Jewish family having to leave their home, but when does it ever start with a non-Jewish German family having to leave their home? *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne does.

You start out with Bruno, a nine-year-old boy, who loves exploring. He lives in Berlin with his Mother, Father, their maid Maria, their butler Lars, and his sister Gretel, the "Hopeless Case." When he comes home to vigorous packing, he is confused. His mother says that they

are going to have to move because his father has a great opportunity for his job. It takes quite a lot of arguing to get Bruno to go to their new home.

There new estate is called "Out-With," and it is nothing like their old house. It is cold, rainy, and has no places to explore; except for the fence.

The fence was a huge fence that seemed to go on forever. On the other side of the fence there were people, but something was different about them. There weren't any moms, grandmothers, or big or little sisters. There were only boys. They weren't



*Anne's hope tells its own beautiful story.*

big and strong boys, but scrawny, weak boys. They were all wearing striped pajamas also. “Who are all those people?” she asked in a quiet voice, almost as if she wasn’t asking Bruno but looking for an answer from someone else. ‘And what are they all doing there?’” That was Gretel asking Bruno about the people.

Bruno’s father was in charge of many soldiers, but the most annoying one was Lieutenant Kotler who for some reason got along very well with Bruno’s mother and Gretel. He would always call Bruno “little man” when Bruno preferred “young man.” Whenever I read a page with Kotler on it I wanted to punch him straight in his smug little face.

Since all of Bruno’s friends were still living at Berlin, He decided to build a rope swing. He was walking around and looking for a spare tire when he saw Kotler. Gretel was staring at him, asking him questions, and laughing at his ridiculous jokes. Bruno asked him if he knew where any spare tires were and he yelled at Pavel, the dinner prep person, to go find the best one. After a few minutes of swinging, Bruno went too high. He fell and cut himself! As soon as that happened Pavel came outside, picked him up, and cleaned his wound.

One day Bruno decided to go see the people in the striped pajamas. When he arrived at the fence there was a little boy. He was sitting with his pajamas, dirty, wet, and skinny. He wasn’t wearing any shoes, so his feet were covered in mud. The only shelters on his side of the fence were small huts that would’ve had to have five families living in one. “Hello,” said Bruno. ‘Hello,’ said the boy. The boy was smaller than Bruno and was sitting on the ground with a forlorn expression.” Bruno soon figured out that his name was Shmuel and that they would become great friends, best friends actually. From then on Bruno would visit Shmuel and bring him food. Little did he know that Shmuel was a Jew.

One day Bruno decided to go meet

with Shmuel. When he got there Shmuel wasn’t there. He repeated this for the next few days until he saw the scrawny boy who he knew to be his friend. He looked sadder than usual. Shmuel told Bruno that his father was missing, so Bruno volunteered himself to help find him. Bruno stripped himself of his clothes and put on the muddy pajamas. The next thing you know Shmuel and Bruno disappear for a terrible ending. This book was slow and not to the point. It seemed like Boyne was trying to add a cliffhanger element to the book by slowing things down. If I knew I would’ve have chosen another book to read. The only reason I would read it would be if I loved sad and boring books. The book wasn’t terribly written but not the best I’ve ever read. Compared to most Holocaust books, this book is just a slap of rain.

## Into the Forbidden

by Abby M

When I think about the Holocaust, a non-Jewish Polish impersonator is not the first thing I think of. I think about the concentration camps and the ghettos, but never a non-Jewish Polish impersonator. Well that was until I read this book, the story of a Jewish girl’s treacherous life during the Holocaust: *In My Enemy’s House* by Carol Matas.

Let’s go back seventy years to when the war started. The main character, a strong, bold, and beautiful Jewish girl named Marissa, was living with her large Jewish family in Zloczow, Poland. Marissa’s life was fine at the time. She was not rich or poor. Her life started going downhill from the first time the Nazis came to her small town. The Nazis killed a family at the end of Marissa’s street, made Marissa and other Jewish girls clean their headquarters, and kidnapped her father and uncle. The kidnapping of her father did not come as a shock, but it was still

a very emotional time in the book, and an element that might make you forget that this is fiction.

One day, when Marissa and her sister Fanny were out looking for food, an action took place in her town and her whole family was kidnapped. The only other family member who had not been taken was her cousin Shmuel.

After days of wandering in the woods, Marissa, her sister and her cousin got back to her house to find Marissa’s brother Yehuda. The four orphans travel around

the woods for a while, staying at various farms and begging for food. At this time in the book things slowed down. The four travelers kept doing mostly the same things and there was no new plot line or key events. But they were quick to once again pick up speed.

After her two siblings escape, Marissa goes back to her house where she gets papers from a Polish neighbor. These papers will allow her to go work in Germany. The only problem is she will have to pretend to be a non-Jewish Pole. As all luck may have it, she looks Polish. She goes on her way, and Shmuel goes to meet up with a friend. This will be the last time we see the Jewish side of Marissa. For the rest of the book her identity must go into hibernation.

The process of going into Germany was long and harsh. When reading it, I could see how thankful Marissa was for not being in a concentration camp. Of course, going to Germany was not ideal but was much better than her other options. Marissa easily gets into Germany and is assigned to a family who needs a Polish worker.

Herr Kreuzs and Frau Kreuzs were very mean to Marissa and the other Polish workers. They fed Marissa almost no food and they would beat her. After working for the Kreuzses for too long, Marissa goes to the agency to get relocated. During her time with the Kreuzses, we can feel her agony and distress. The author well describes the

*For the rest of the book her identity must go into hibernation.*

hollow hearts of the Kreuzses.

Once she is relocated, her luck starts to turn around. Her new family was most definitely the nicest Nazi family in all of Germany. Their names were the Reymans. They let Marissa eat at their dinner table, play games with the kids, not work when she is sick, and let her go into town. But, they might not have been so nice if they knew that she was a Jew. Herr Reyman was a Nazi official, and the whole family was extremely Anti-Semitic.

This part of the book with the Reymans completely puzzled me. Matas created this loving family who would yell at someone if they killed a puppy, but yell at someone if they would not kill a Jew. "You see, the first one to get the most Jews out of town wins." This is Charlotte, the Reymans oldest child explaining the game Jews Out, to Marissa. "The food I'd just eaten suddenly churned in my stomach." This is how Marissa felt after hearing about the game.

Marissa has many exciting, interesting, and risky adventures with Charlotte and her brothers. One night, Herr Reyman tells Marissa that she must move to Berlin and to stop working for the Reymans. Apparently there was a need for Polish workers in Berlin. The Reymans had grown to love Marissa, even though she was a Pole, and Poles were thought to be stupid. But, she had to go, so she left. Her time in Berlin went by quickly working at a slaughterhouse.

In Berlin she made one friend named Renatta. One night when she is out, a bomb hits Berlin and starts a fire. Marissa and Reantta camp out in a bunker, save children from a building that was lit on fire, and save Reantta's boyfriend from the fire. To make a long story short, Marissa goes back to the Reymans. When the war ends, she goes to find Shmuel, and gets on a bus leading to Shmuel's camp.

Marissa also reads the list of Jews who were killed: "And there they were: Yitzhak Ginsburg-killed by Ukrainian death squads. Sarah Ginsburg, Moishe

Ginsburg, Rachel Ginsburg- killed in round up." All her family members were killed except for Fanny and Yehuda. This is where we see how bad the Holocaust was. Marissa's life during the Holocaust may not have been easy, but she survived and never even went to a camp. She had a relaxed life compared to most of the Jews. This part of the book makes us remember that she had impeccable luck, and that most Jews could not pass as Poles. This is because most Polish people have blond hair and blue eyes and most Jews don't.

This novel had a good plot that kept unfolding as it went on. It had key characters that kept with us throughout the whole book. The characters were very believable and they seemed like people we know. It felt like non-fiction, even though it is fiction. It will make you cry and laugh, and it might make you bored. Although this book was not the best book, I would recommend this to anyone who wants to read a believable story about the Holocaust.

This book may not be an amazing true story like Anne Frank's Diary, but it taught me something. Marissa spent months pretending that she was not a Jew, not going to synagogue, and not talking to G-d. Most people put in this situation would just decide to stop being Jewish, but not Marissa. She kept her faith the whole time, and never let it go no matter how hard it could be. She kept love in her heart and Jewish faith in her mind. She was not changed by the Holocaust.

## **Escape! From the Horror that is This Book**

*by Mitchell*

**H**arry Houdini. I bet you've heard of him. If you don't want to spoil your image of him being exciting, don't read this book. *Escape! The Tale of the Great Houdini* by Sid Fleischman takes a magician known across the entire

world and makes him boring.

This third person narrative of Houdini's life takes two chapters to get to Houdini's life. It starts by saying that a clip of pajamas that said H.H on them sold for a lot of money in auction, it must have been Houdini's!

But what if it wasn't? According to the book it was never a possibility. Once it actually starts, it is revealed his real name is Ehrich Weiss who had a role model named Robert Houdin, another

magician; but when did Ehrich learn about him? The book doesn't say.

He then runs away. And crafts a new name. He turns Ehrich into Harry because he is sometimes called Ehrrie, which sounds like Harry. And learns that by adding an i to the end of Houdin it means "like Houdin"; that's where Houdini came from.

From there Houdini started small, well small in comparison to his future stunts. He would climb inside a big can filled with water. It would be locked, and he broke out. He got famous, and that led to much more.

My biggest problem is mostly my fault for not realizing that this book is recommended for 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> graders. So don't read this book unless you fall into that category.

## **Milkweed: Not Just Another Holocaust Book**

*by Lev*

**M**ilkweed, by Jerry Spinelli, is not your usual Holocaust book. It's not about a Jew who was attacked by Hitler's troops and then sent to live with his/her uncle and on, and on, and on. Other books are just sad, depressing... and don't forget... *lifeless*.

But, no Milkweed isn't that. It's about a boy who wants to be a Nazi. He wants to be respected. He doesn't want to always be the skinny homeless kid who steals bread from rich ladies.



When he sees “jackboots,” he can imagine himself clomping around with those big shiny, black boots, his head held high listening to the cheers of the people behind him. One day he bumps into a boy called Uri. Uri is a few years older than him and teaches him a lot about the world. Uri names him Misha. But the days in Warsaw have no color, and no light. The only reason that Misha isn’t sad is because he doesn’t understand the world and what is going on around him. And of course strawberry babka and a girl named Janina. Those make him happy.

Throughout this story you follow Misha to burnt out buildings, the horse stables with the orphans, and to the ghetto.

One of the many reasons that this book appeals to me is because it’s different. Almost every other Holocaust novel is about a Jew. But Misha doesn’t remember his religion his real name, or anything about his family. But don’t think that might get complicated, I think that it gives the book an interesting and engaging twist, which leaves us unanswered questions as Misha has unanswered questions. Also, the writing style is very simple and to the point. For example, the very first sentence is, “I am running.” (But of course that’s not how the whole book reads.) The reason why such a simple writing style works is that even though the book isn’t a diary, it’s still in first person, which reminds the reader that it really *is* an 8 year old talking. The writing style also creates a strong bond between Misha and the reader almost as if Misha were his close friend or little brother.

## Wait, What?

by Zevi

**H**ow, exactly, did this book, *The Devil’s Arithmetic*, win the Jewish Book Month Award? The answer to me is beyond belief. I’m not

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quite sure what Jane Yolen was thinking when she wrote this book. The book includes non-stop talk about this selfish girl, Hannah, who has many negative feelings about wanting to go to the Seder at her grandparent’s house. She lives in New Rochelle, New York. When Hannah tells some people where she lives, they ask, “What about Old Rochelle?” Ha ha

ha, was that supposed to be funny? It was not. Throughout the book, Hannah always complains and it gets on my nerves a lot. *The Devil’s Arithmetic* is the cheesiest book that I have ever read. I almost fell asleep every single time I opened it up, and the pages droned on and on and just seemed like the book was written by an inexperienced ten year old girl. Yolen suggested the book for ages 12 and up which I could understand, for some mature content, but I would suggest the book for ages 11 and under because there is almost nothing that is too mature for younger kids. There were a couple slightly inappropriate parts about women that were not needed. The book didn’t draw my attention like the misbehaving souls in the concentration camps did.

On the way to the Seder, Hannah and her brother Aaron go into an elevator leading to their grandparents complex... “Because he was the youngest, Aaron got to press the elevator button. ‘That’s not fair...,’ Hannah began. But then she remembered how scared she’d been the first time she’d had to ask the four questions at the Seder and she stopped.”

When they got to the Seder, Hannah is volunteered to open the door for

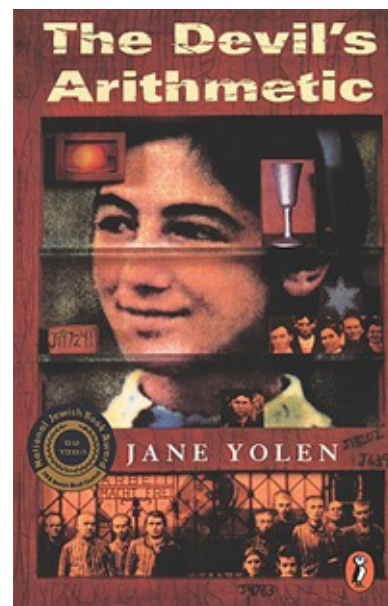
Elijah the Prophet. She expects to see the hallway with green numbered doors at her grandparents’ house. Instead, she finds a greening field with a man singing a song about death. When Hannah turns around, she finds herself looking at a woman with a black skirt and cleaning the house. The room had a small wooden bowl, a stove, and some cabinets. She soon realizes that she had been teleported to a Polish village in the 1940s. Really? Now that is some serious cheesiness. I wish I was teleported away from this book and never returned to it. Hannah has to adjust to the past in the 1940’s during the Holocaust. Hannah gets thrown in a train car that takes her to a concentration camp and must survive. She meets some girls her age and becomes friends with them (classic). She is helped along by her aunt, rather her imagined aunt, and barely makes it through. The way it really happened, Hannah most definitely would not survive the camp. Spoiler alert! Hannah goes into a giant

brick oven to burn up and would die, but instead she is transported into the present day at the Seder. It is not really a spoiler because I highly recommend that you do not read *The Devil’s Arithmetic*, and there is nothing to ruin.

There were no surprises as I completely expected this ending and it was quite obvious that she would be teleported back to

the Seder. The book is one of those types where you know what is going to happen in the end. I predicted it exactly. I knew Hannah would make it out alive, and I knew that she would somehow die and return back from the dream.

Yolen, let me tell you something, this book is probably the worst book



that I have ever read in my life and most likely for others. You didn't sound interested when you were writing it, and just wanted to make some cash. I hope that you made \$0, because you don't deserve it. If you have written any other books, they better be good, otherwise, find something that you are actually good at. The magic in this book just didn't do it for me. I would much rather have read a book that deserved to win the Jewish Book Month Award.

Yolen criticizes the Harry Potter series because eight years before, she had written a book called *Wizard's Hall*. She thinks that J.K. Rowling copied her book. Even if Rowling did copy her book, she probably did it way better. If she criticizes the Harry Potter series, then she definitely needs to learn how to criticize books more like her own. Yolen, I know you're old, but you have got to do better. There are authors fifteen-twenty years older than you and they can think straight, why can't you?

Alright alright, enough criticizing, for now. I understand that you didn't get enough sleep every single night you wrote the book. I would like to see you redo this book and make it a heck of a lot more interesting. Your characters were not believable at all. They each had some pretty corny lines. If I were one of the people in the book, I would feel terrible having to say quite stupid things.

## The Struggles of an Adult, The Diary of a Young Girl

by Abby G.

Imagine getting a diary for your thirteenth birthday. You'd start out writing about everyone in your class, who your friends are, who you like, and who completely bothers you. You'd write about things that happened at school, things about your friends and little things that even you don't think of as very important, but you wouldn't know that about a month later you would be leaving to go into hiding so your sister wouldn't get

sent to a concentration camp.

This was the story of Anne Frank that you'll read in *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Anne and her family (The Franks) went to live in a warehouse where Anne's dad, Otto Frank, worked. Anne calls this the Annex. Another family joins them, they don't take up much room because they're only a family of three and they needed a place to stay (and they were family friends). Imagine all those people living in one house. Anne Frank, Otto Frank (her dad), Edith Frank (her mom), Margot Frank (her sister), Mr. Van Daan (a man who worked with Otto), Mrs. Van Daan, Peter Van Daan, and a later addition of Albert Dussle.

Although this book was full of entries about daily fights with her mom, and her going on and on about not being appreciated, there is also a lot in there about feeling bad for other people and being thankful for all that she has; she also apologizes for complaining. I think when she talks about all of those types of things, those are the best parts because they are the parts that show her level of understanding things about the world and how she can give back to it and how she wants to help it. She shows that she knows what's going on. She still makes it easy to follow and that was probably because she makes you feel like you are there with her. You are the shoulder that is there for her to cry on, the person that she can talk to and you will listen back. "I wanted to scream at Mother, Margot, the Van Daans, Dussle, and Father too: 'Leave me alone, let me have at least one night when I don't cry myself to sleep with my eyes burning and my head pound. Let me get away, away from everything, away from this world.' But I can't do that. I can't let them see my doubts or the inflicted on me. I couldn't bear their sympathy or their good-humored derision. It would only make me want to scream even more."

Before you go ahead and read this book I'm just going to state the few things that weren't so good about

this book. Even though I feel terrible about offending the author along with the book, I think you should know the minor things that made this book a little slow. First is the repetition, whether it was fighting or talking about boys or talking about the awkward things about being a teenage girl, these parts became very tiring and dry. Second is how sometimes it got a little bit too conversational and a bit too in depth to the point where you feel like nobody really remembers how this subject got started in the first place. This also makes the book much longer and lengthy. Also some parts of this book make it so there are certain groups I wouldn't generally recommend it to, for example boys, younger kids due to language and references that wouldn't be for the particular age groups that are under Tweens/Teens, also people who get a little over emotional for very obvious reasons.

Back to the point... there are a lot of things that weren't so good about this book. Like I had said before, there were constant fights with her mom along with other people in Annex, "I simply can't stand Mother, and have to force myself not to snap at her all the time, and to stay calm, when I'd rather slap her across the face." Also you have to look at that she had no idea anyone would be reading this which is a good enough reason to have parts that are little things that nobody really cares about. All these little things were probably really big to her.

All in all I thought this was a great book and I would recommend this book to most girls in grades sixth (maybe fifth) and up.

## Escape! The Story of the Great Houdini

by Joshua

This book is called *Escape!* by Sid Fleischman who won a Newberry Award for another of his books, "The Whipping

Boy” in 1987. He is a wonderful author but I didn’t think this was one of his better books.

Mr. Fleischman was fascinated by magic and because of this also very interested in Harry Houdini. He thoroughly researched this biography, and even became friends with his widow, Bess.

Harry Houdini was born in Budapest, Hungary, on March 24, 1874. His birth name was Ehrich Weiss and his father was a rabbi and former soap maker who became educated at University and mastered several languages. His father decided to move the family to the United States in the late 1870’s so they would have better opportunities. The family sailed for 15 days to make it to the US and then settled in the Midwest. The better opportunities they expected never quite materialized for Rabbi Weiss and left his son Ehrich with a drive to find a way to succeed.

When he was young he changed his surname to Houdini to honor his hero, Robert-Houdin, a famous French magician of his time. In the beginning, Harry’s career as a magician was going not-too-well. The first person he partnered with was his own brother, Dash, and later with his new young wife, Bess. He worked hard but could never get the one great break that he needed to be really successful. Even when he started to perform his intricate escape tricks his reception was, at best, lukewarm. Eventually Harry got to know a manager called Martin Beck. Mr. Beck suggested that Harry should perform his escape tricks instead of the more routine tricks (like card tricks). He got Harry jobs in the US, but then decided Harry should try performing in Europe. This turned out to be a great idea. As soon as he began performing in Europe his career really took off.

Harry became famous across the entire Atlantic. The Germans loved him. Harry started to try feats that were

more and more outrageous, more and more dangerous. He even decided to jump off a German bridge after being manacled where he fell into the water and yet managed to free himself. The Germans just couldn’t get enough of him. He would even try to get local police forces to chain him and lock him up just so he could prove he could escape and get free. Somehow he always got himself free no matter what people did to try to confine him. Even the prejudiced people at Scotland Yard could not keep him restrained for long. He was able to escape from their handcuffs in just minutes. Even after he became famous, Harry could not resist making up stories about his great achievements. He was so determined to be considered the best magician in

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the world he would do anything to achieve that fame, including lying, attacking his competition both verbally and in the courts, publicizing himself in the most outrageous and strangest ways possible. He was generally aggressive, pushy, and even “cocky” too. His attitudes won the adoration of thousands but also the dislike of many. As long as Harry’s audience was happy, Harry was happy. Harry died of complications following a ruptured appendix on Halloween, 1926. To this day, when someone hears the name “Houdini,” they think of magic and especially daring escapes.

This book was okay, but I would have enjoyed it more if they talked more about his actual life instead of talking so much about all the acts that he did. The pictures in the book were a little interesting, but didn’t add that much at all. Interestingly, when I asked other friends what they thought of the book, most said they didn’t like it so much either. I did enjoy learning about Houdini’s acts, but it was really too much detail for a general reader—maybe a magician would find those details more interesting. For these

reasons, I would not recommend this book, except perhaps to someone who really wanted to learn all about escape tricks.

## ***Anne Frank and Me, the Holocaust Through the Eyes of a Teenager***

by Roni

Whenever you hear or see a famous title with “me” at the end, you know it’s going to get very interesting. This is a remix of the *Diary of Anne Frank*, written by Cherie Bennett, author of four different series including *Dawson’s Creek*.

This time travel novel starts with Nicole Burns. She’s an average, twenty first century, fifteen-year-old girl. The other main characters include best friend, Mimi, and her super crush, Jack Polin. One day, their class takes a field trip to the Anne Frank museum. Confusion erupts! People are screaming, “Dooms shooting! Dooms got a gun!” Nicole blacks out. When she wakes up, she’s not in the twenty first century anymore. She’s in Paris, France, 1942. And, in the time of the Holocaust. There’s a change of characters. The man who was her principal claims to be her father, and her English teacher claims to be her mother. Her little sister is still there, annoying as ever, but most importantly, her friends are there too. Mimi is there, thank goodness, and Jack Polin. Only here he claims to be her true love, and back in the other time he does not know she exists. Because she cannot get back to her time, she slowly accepts her American life was all a dream. But when the Nazis take Nicole and her sister to Auschwitz, where she meets Anne Frank, will she be able to survive and get back to her time?

The thing that struck me the most about this novel was the fact Nicole changes. She goes from a snotty, self-centered girl to a mature, understanding, caring person. Not that she was mean,



but she was just shallow. Of course anyone who goes through the Holocaust would change, but she really deepens and understands the meaning of family. This is important to the reader because we

try to relate to the character, and it really matters that she changes because we relate to her in a different way in the end than we did in the beginning. Another thing that struck me is the book is really, really realistic. All the experiences Nicole goes through really adds up to who she is today. For example: "I put my arm around her, Burb girl in training, currently on her way to Heatherville or Chrissyland or someplace I did not want her to end up. But maybe she could go a different way, end up someplace else entirely, if I only cared enough to try to show her how." That was Nicole, talking about her sister. It shows how Nicole learned how to not be self-centered and care about what happens to her sister. Another way to show how realistic it is to see that they showed both sides of every act. For example, when the father said he was in The Resistance, while a brave thing to do, the family looked at it as if terribly frightening, like he was going to die.

However, while the author used time travel very effectively, there was one exception. Jack in one period loves Nicole very, very much, and wants to marry her, and in the other pretty much ignores her. I think this confuses the impression he's supposed to make on the reader. Are we supposed to be angry, sad, or jealous? Another thing that is a bit of a downside is that some points can be repeated. Occasionally Nicole will say or think something more

than a few times. "Nothing to do," "trapped" all these are quotes from the book in one chapter. While a good point, it is repeated. It does not do much to harm the book, but it can make some chapters a

bit slower than they could have been. Other than that however, *Anne Frank and Me* is a marvelous novel. It helped me, an innocent girl, understand what the Jews went through. Before I read this book I thought they treated them as lower class but I didn't understand they didn't even treat them as people. I would recommend this book to people who would like to see a terrible historic event through the eyes of a young teenager, and how it affects her.

## A Book About Houdini That Made Me Want to Escape like Houdini

by Taliana

Sid Fleischman, a Newbery award winner, didn't show his best work this time. Sid uses plenty of raw fact and lots of bad drama in his book *Escape*. Even though it is a fast read with plenty of pictures, the majority of it is a train wreck.

"Houdini was no where to be found in the environs of Appleton on March 24, 1874, the day he was born." The

book starts with the mystery of his birth time and place, but in less than six pages, you find the answer. After that, there is nothing else to pull you in. It continues on and on with straight facts like, "As Professor Houdini, he opened a school of conjuring, at 221 East 69th Street." Sid's writer's voice is absent causing the

book to be boring.

The book follows a predictable format. The author writes in the same way, he starts each chapter in the same way, and he ends each chapter in the same way. He tries to end the chapters with a dramatic cliffhangers, but fails. Example: He uses a cliché line at the end of chapter where Houdini made an elephant disappear. "One thing was certain, the elephant didn't go up Houdini's sleeve" Well, isn't that obvious? Even a three year old is educated enough to know that.

Even though each chapter has a format, the actual writing is very disorganized. It skips around making me very confused and unable to understand. "Even his professional enemies, and he had flock of them, conceded that as a showman the world had not seen his like before," Sid writes.

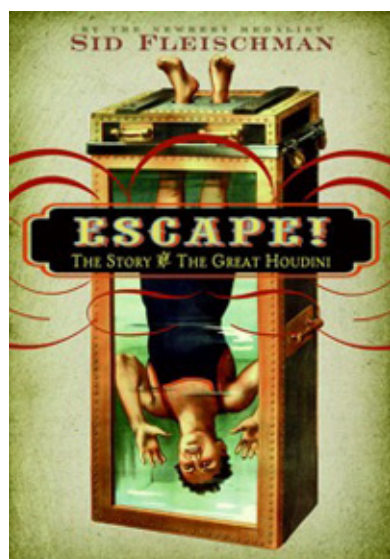
Sid included pictures, about the only thing that brought the book to life. The pictures helped me understand the tricks Houdini performed and what life looked like for him. They also helped the book go by fast.

Sid Fleischman is a fiction writer. He has amazing fiction books where he can make up dialogues and invent characters. When he writes non-fiction books, he can't use imagination, and he doesn't have the right writing style for the job. I don't recommended this book; it's a waste of time and a bad read.

## The Tale of Bruno The Ignorant

by William

The *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. The title immediately caught my eye. It's nothing like any other title I've ever seen. Don't be mistaken, though; it is, to quote a previous student: "A book worth reading, sort of." It starts with Bruno, the main character, going up to his room in Berlin, to find that the maid is packing his things. It turns out they are going to a new house, which is apparently called Out-With. Later, you



realize it's actually Auschwitz. Bruno does not like it there. He thinks it was a mistake for his father to make them go there. He soon finds out, with a bit of exploration, that things aren't as boring as they seem at Out-With. Bruno meets a boy named Shmuel on the other side of a huge fence. They become friends in a few seconds. By the way, Shmuel is the boy referred to in the title. Nothing much happens there, other than the conversations between Bruno and Shmuel, and this is one of the things I did not like very much. I like books that are at least a little bit faster. I sometimes thought there was a bit too much conversation.

One thing I did sometimes appreciate was the fact that John Boyne was not overly poetic or extravagant with his writing. Here is a quote to prove my point: "Since arriving at Out-With and their new house, Bruno hadn't seen much of his father." This could have been something like: "Since arriving at their boring new house at that horrible place called Out-With, Bruno really had definitely no seen much of his overbearing father." This can go both ways, though, because sometimes his writing can seem too bare and empty. It depends on the situation. Sometimes it's the right time for a bit of extravagancy, and sometimes it's just too much.

Another thing was that Bruno was so ignorant and clueless at some times that it was ridiculous to the point of annoyance. He has no idea what so ever where he is, what's happening around him. He doesn't even think that the people in Auschwitz might be there against their will. This became annoying after a while, mostly because the main characters in all the books I've read are relatively smart. It was also an interesting twist to the story, so it's both good and bad. It is also good to be a little angry when you're reading because this can sometimes really bring you in. It certainly did with me.

I enjoyed this book, and although it wasn't the absolute best book I had ever read, it was still a pretty good book.

## Would you Leave Your Friends to Save Yourself?

By Ryan

**B**lack Radishes, written by Susan Lynn Meyer, is a very interesting book. The book started out with Gustave running into a familiar looking old man while trying to complete a scavenger hunt. It then pulled me into the book, diving through Europe into Paris, where Gustave lives. I watched from a distance as Gustave stumbled into the old man near the Eifel Tower, which is covered in camouflage paint to protect it from the Nazis because this

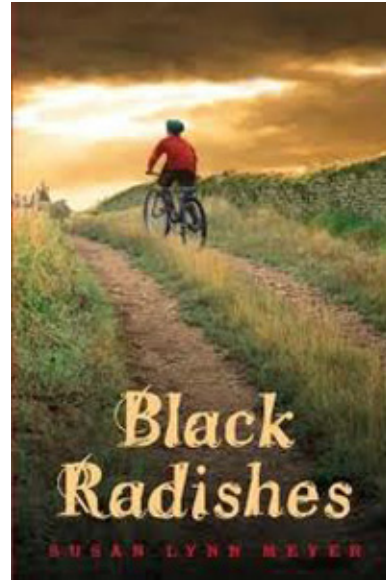
*It is also good to be a little angry when you're reading because this can sometimes really bring you in.*

is in the time of the Holocaust. He and his teammates, Marcel and Jean-Paul, Gustave's cousin, also known as the Eagles, split up to find a yellow feather to win. The old man was trying to get to the post office and sucked up Gustave's important time to look for the feather. Gustave was going to a hat shop owned by Monsieur Jouvett, a friend of his father's, when one of the other teams, Pierre, who was a part of the Bears, burst out of the shop, happily holding a yellow feather. The scavenger hunt stops and everyone is supposed to go back to the synagogue. The Eagles walk back to it while the Bears exclaimed that they won. The Boy Scout leader, Monsieur Levi, reveals that a secret test was in order. The Scout Leader explains that

while everyone was looking for things, the scouts' relatives went around and asked for directions. Any Boy Scout who didn't help would be disqualified. Because of that, The Eagles win ten points for the End-of-the-Year Awards, although not the chocolate bars that they were promised. Gustave is happy and walks home with his team back to the neighborhood in which they all lived. Gustave's mother is talking to his Aunt Geraldine. His mom says that it isn't safe anymore to live in Paris and tries to convince Geraldine that she, Jean-Paul, and Jean-Paul's sister should leave Paris. After the Nazis start invading countries, Gustave's family heads to a small village named St. George. He meets many friends, such as Nicole, and enemies, such as Phillippe. When Gustave and his family try to escape to America, Marcel and Jean-

Paul's family are stuck behind the demarcation line, which divides France into the Nazi-Occupied area, which includes Paris, where Jean-Paul and Marcel are trapped. This part is very intense because the demarcation line is filled with Nazis that will shoot them if they find out that Gustave's family is smuggling people over the line.

I liked this book very much. The description was great sometimes, but in other parts it was terrible to read on about all the horror, blood, and shooting that was going on in Europe, like this excerpt because it was scary to imagine it. "It was Jacques, the pony. He had been shot. His beautiful brown head was thrown back, and a pool of dark blood spread out around him. His pale mane was stained where it lay in the blood." They were frightening sentences, but the description was great in this phrase. Gustave was keeping





track of the war by painting a map red where the Nazis had taken over, and painting it blue where people were still free. "It was a stupid map anyway, almost all the same color. Smeared with red paint everywhere, it didn't separate everything from anything. Gustave grabbed it and tore it down from the wall, then ripped it into smaller and smaller pieces until the floor was covered with the torn up pieces of Europe." In my opinion, there wasn't enough foreshadowing for me, but when there was, it was amazing to reread and find what it was foreshadowing. "The framed photograph of Gustave and Marcel and Jean-Paul that had stood on the dresser was gone. Gustave found it under the bed. The glass was cracked. Gustave picked it up... the photo inside was ripped, right across Marcel's face." This is foreshadowing of something big at the end of the book. I enjoyed this because it shows how elaborate the plot is. I also liked this part quite much because the description of the cracked frame painted a picture in my head.

In response to my title, I would leave my friends to save my family because, yes, it would hurt to leave my friends, but I could make new ones. Family is eternal.

## The Whirlwind

by Karly

**T**he *Whirlwind* is about overcoming. Overcoming Hitler, fear and feelings of disrespect. Hitler shouldn't stop you.

*The Whirlwind* features a boy named Ben. Born in Germany, Ben's family moved to Seattle for their safety in the summer of 1941.

Ben met a boy at school, his name is Jon. He is the only kid in the class from Japanese heritage. Like Ben, coming from Germany, they both stick out. At this point in time, during World War II, sticking out could mean your life. Jon's family gets sent to an internment camp and Ben is severely worried for Jon and his family. He feels like America is no longer a safe place to live.

One day in class Jon, Ben and a few other students are told to leave the classroom. No one knows what this is about but Ben. The kids were kicked out of school for being Jewish, Japanese and black. Ben went home and saw in the newspaper that many Jews were murdered in Europe. Ben is getting very paranoid. He thinks Canada and Isaac is all that can keep him safe.

Ben planned an escape to cross the border to Canada alone to go to his Uncle Isaac's house. Isaac told Ben that he would always be able to take care of him if he were in trouble. Ben packed a bag and crossed the border safely.

After he crossed the border into Canada, a man pulled over his car and asked Ben where he was going. Ben told the man he was going to Vancouver to his Uncle Isaac's house. The man said he was also going to Vancouver and asked Ben if he would like a ride. Ben being fully aware of the Nazi's was hesitant at first to take the offer of a ride. He is not sure he is who he says he is. Eventually, alone in Canada, he takes the risk and gets dropped off a few blocks down from Isaac's house. The man gave Ben money for food to last him until he arrived at Uncle Isaac's house or if he got into any trouble.

Ben arrived at Uncle Isaac's house and Isaac said, "Life is short, there is joy in the world, you just have to find it." At that moment Ben has no idea what he is talking about, but really tries to think about it for some time. Isaac bathes and feeds Ben, then puts him to bed, calls Ben's dad and tells him Ben is safe. Ben woke up to his father in the room next door. Ben's dad took him to the train station to head back home. They arrive at the border safely but they may or may not be able to cross it; you will have to read the book to find out.

This book was one and one-half stars out of five for me. It was very slow at the beginning and lacks description and did not tell me much

about any characters except Ben and barely even him. It had bits and pieces of unconnected background, but once I did get to his adventure, it was very interesting, but that was not a big part of this book. Toward the end of the book,

*They arrive at the border safely but they may or may not be able to cross it.*

Ben says, "Sometimes we Jews get treated badly because people don't realize we hate Hitler more than they do, they just hear our accent or hear us speak German

and hold it against us." This quote has everything to do with this book; it shows Ben fighting for his rights and the rights of his religion. Overall this was not my favorite book.

## A Life Chosen By War

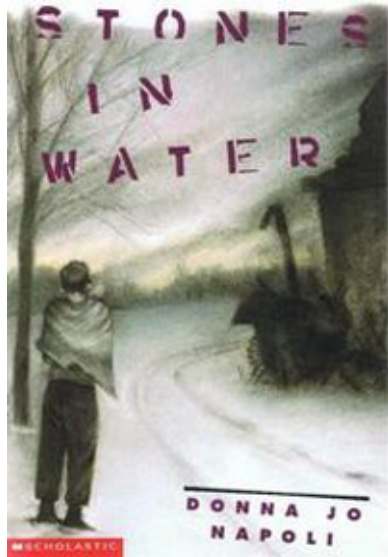
By Seth

**M**y name is Seth. Now I am writing this book review. Later on I will read a book, then watch some TV, then go on my computer. Pretty much, I will do what I want to do. This "I will do what I want to do" was lost for the two friends Roberto and Samuele in Venice, Italy, 1942. These two boys, one Christian, one Jewish, are the protagonists of the novel *Stones in Water* by Donna Jo Napoli. It was of no fault of these two boys that Germany lost World War I and was humiliated. It was also of no fault of these two friends that the hungry and angry Germans during the Depression elected the fascist maniac Hitler to power in 1933. It was particularly tragic for Jewish people that Hitler was an anti-Semitic fanatic. Nor did these boys elect the fascist dictator of Italy, Benito Mussolini, who was an ally of Hitler's during World War II, which these fascists threw the world into in 1939. In war, you never know what's coming at you. One moment you are safe, the next you are not. The author takes the characters through cruel random twists and turns of war, where their lives are always at risk. Every moment there is a new cruelty to face, and new means for survival.

The book starts in Venice, Italy, during the summer of 1942. Three friends are watching a movie: Roberto, Samuele, and Memo. Samuele is a Jew from the Ghetto who had been snuck into the theatre. The next moment, Italian and German soldiers showed up. All the boys from the theatre were basically kidnapped and loaded onto trains, grouped by age. At that moment, Roberto and Samuele's lives were changed forever. Once the train arrived in Munich, they were taken to a work camp in Germany, where they lived and labored under awful conditions. Because of stealing a couple of eggs from the chicken coop, the boys were shipped off to Ukraine to build an airstrip, another tragic turn in their story. It was worse there than in

the work camp in Germany: relentlessly scorching summers, coupled with paralyzingly frigid winters. Yet the boys lived on treasuring their most important and only asset - their friendship. From the very beginning they had clung on to each other. Roberto tried very hard to keep Samuele's secret of being Jewish, even changing Samuele's name to Enzo. Roberto also gave his Saint Christopher medallion to Enzo. This medallion was worn by Christians to be protected by their Saint. With Enzo wearing the medal, nobody would suspect him of being Jewish. If Enzo was found out, then both he and Roberto would have paid with their lives. Unluckily, Enzo's secret was discovered when one of the boys had seen that Enzo was circumcised. War reveals people's true characters; it brings them to their extremes. Kind and ugly coexist in war, and only fate tells whom you will meet. The boy started taking Enzo's food as a payment for

his silence. Roberto would then give Enzo part of his food, and even if Roberto had a piece of a most precious cheese, he would split it with Enzo. Enzo returned the kindness by telling Roberto bedtime stories when neither of them could sleep, magnificent tales extracted from the Bible. It was their friendship that saved them, but in the end it was one of the cruel misfortunes



of war that made Enzo sacrifice his life for his friend. One day Roberto and Enzo were given the boots of German soldiers, whose corpses they had found. That same night a pack of boys attacked them while in slumber. They stole Roberto's boots first, and then went on to Enzo. But Enzo had woken up when they were stealing from Roberto, and started fighting them. Roberto woke up and

joined Enzo, but unfortunately it was too late. The group of boys retreated because some soldier woke up, and Enzo ended up keeping his boots, but it was over for him: the boys had crushed his chest. While dying, Enzo was begging his friend to save himself: "... But you have to fight. I don't mean with your fists I mean inside. Don't ever let them win over the inside of you."

That was the first half of the book. The second part of the book was about Roberto struggling and succeeding at what his friend wanted him to do: to fight, not to lose himself, to survive, and to get his life back. Roberto ran away, desperately trying to reach home in Venice. He ran through the forest during a Ukrainian winter, trying to stay warm enough to not freeze to death, and looking for food and water to not starve. One thought stayed in his head, 'I must survive.' With every step, death seemed to move closer upon him. He wandered for days. One day he reached

a village where all the inhabitants had been massacred by the Nazis, except for one little boy. Together they went to the nearest city, which had been recaptured by the Soviets. For them Roberto was a German Nazi because of Enzo's German boots that he was wearing. Roberto was shot and interrogated, but the Ukrainian boy helped him change the boots and escape. Another time he was taken as a Ukrainian peasant by an Italian deserter he met in the bushes who almost killed him. The reader finds more twists and turns in this turbulent, tragic story of survival. The first half of the book is about what fate throws at you, while the second half is about how you can fight it.

This book has several important lessons for its readers: friendship must be held on to, it takes will and perseverance to be able to survive the hardest times, and that war is cruel and random. In the first half of the book Roberto and Samuele would have never survived without their friendship, and in the second half Roberto would have never made through more than one day if he hadn't had a stone heart and determination. The cruelty of war is what brought Roberto to such miserable circumstances, and the number of different people he met and places he went attest to its randomness.

I really enjoyed reading *Stones in Water*. In fact I enjoyed it so much that all parts were my favorites. This book was an easy read that captivated me with all its sudden, sharp twists and turns. It was a good mix of seriousness, tragedy, and hope. Donna Jo Napoli perfectly brought all those elements together to create a truly brilliant novel.

Her writing style was simple, clear, and eloquent with mostly short sentences, few adjectives, and in the past tense. However, her descriptions of settings and characters were inadequate. It is true that when it came to describing things like characters' emotions, Donna Jo Napoli proved herself genius. When Roberto is alone in the woods, he suddenly feels overwhelmed and afraid, and thinks

that he can become the “perfect wolf meat.” The way she describes the feeling makes the reader feel it himself; she makes the reader become Roberto, so when Roberto is dying, the reader is dying with him. But when it came to describing things like a work camp, a village, or just someone’s attire, her explanations didn’t suffice. Donna Jo Napoli always seems so caught up in describing thoughts and emotions, that she just skips the descriptions of the physical characteristics. For example, when Roberto is very tired and comes into the Ukrainian village all she says about it is that there are a few houses, a cat, and a sign. I was left imagining more than I wanted to, and sometimes I did not get the full gist of the scene.

What greatly surprised me was even that the author herself, born in Miami, Florida in 1948, had not experienced the war, she described the time period in the book vividly with great knowledge and detail.

I would recommend this book only to people who are able to handle great grief and tragedy, but also love action and adventure. Readers should also have some background knowledge on the World War II history and the Holocaust before embarking on this novel. If you satisfy all these conditions, then I wish you a good book, and hope you enjoy *Stones in Water* as much as I did!

## Lonelier Than the Old

by Lily

**T**he Holocaust was a time full of war, pain, and hurt. Some went to concentration camps, some immigrated to other countries, and some went into hiding. Anne Frank and her family were some of those who went into hiding during the war. On her thirteenth birthday, the last one before she went into hiding, she received a diary. That diary soon became much more valuable than she realized at the time.

Throughout the next two and a half years, Anne, in her *Diary of a Young Girl*, wrote about her struggles: mentally, physically, and emotionally.

She deals with boys, parents, and all the struggles of being young and “lonelier than the old.”

The people in the Annex were: Anne Frank, her sister Margot Frank, her father Otto Frank, and her mother Edith Frank. The Van Daan family included: Mr. Van Daan and Mrs. Van Daan, Peter Van Daan, and the Van Daan’s cat Mouschi.

When an eighth addition, Albert Dussle, joins them in hiding, Anne writes “Prospectus and Guide to The Secret Annex, a Unique Facility for the Temporary Accommodation of Jews and Other Dispossessed Persons.” She goes on to explain the diet, rules, and other aspects of the Annex. Anne’s story grows more complex with each passing entry, with topics turning from the Annex, to her mother, to herself, to boys and back again. She describes herself to Kitty, her friend whom she writes her diary toward, “As I’ve told you, what I say is not what I feel, which is why I have a reputation for being boy-crazy as well as a flirt, a smart aleck and a reader of romances. The happy-go-lucky Anne laughs, gives a flippant reply, shrugs her shoulders and pretends she doesn’t give a darn. The quiet Anne reacts in just the opposite way. If I’m being completely honest, I’ll have to admit that it does matter to me, that I’m trying to change myself, but that I’m always up against a more powerful enemy.”

Anne felt very deeply about a boy named Peter, whom she later explains was her boyfriend before the war, then just stopped hanging out with her. She dreamed about him and thought about him for a long time. Peter Van Daan, however, was more of a pest to her; in the beginning at least. But as time progressed, they become something more than friends. He became her rock, and she just wanted love, whether they were friends or more than that.

Sometimes you can see Anne’s fragile outside eggshell self crack, revealing that inner-Anne she talks so

much about. Sometimes she lets her anger, love, or memory overwhelm her. Underneath that layer, that adult mask she put on, is that 13 year old who just got a diary, that 13 year old who just wanted to talk about girls, boys, and all the lighthearted things in her life. As the bombs go off, as the war rages outside their window, she climbs into her father’s bed, and tries to be a kid, forget her worries, and just go to sleep.

I feel that this book wouldn’t be nearly as good if it were written by anyone except for Anne. Her voice is stronger than any author who feels her pain. I don’t mean to say that all people

*Sometimes you can see Anne’s fragile outside eggshell self crack.*

who have written books about her story haven’t done justice to her, but her personal reflections are what make this

book shine. She isn’t afraid to say what she thinks. Her soul is on each piece of paper in the book and the book as a whole is her essence.

There were times, however, that I felt Anne’s entries revolved about the war too much, making me feel like I’m reading a portion of a history book, rather than a diary. But I think overall this information was helpful in creating the picture of the Annex and of the 1940’s in our heads. It was helpful because it gives you a sense of what was going on outside of her little world at that time, in that place.

I would recommend this book for girls rather than boys, and for people ages 10 and up. I say this because she describes herself in such an explicit way that the boys may be a little shocked, and that younger people may not understand. But throughout this entire book, I just have to keep thinking that she didn’t know I would be reading it. She didn’t know anybody would be reading it. And once you realize that, and what a journey her story has taken, this book has a whole new meaning.

Her entries tell tales that should feel long forgotten; but as her words carry on, so does her memory. Not just the memory of a girl who didn’t survive



the Holocaust, but the memory of a teenage girl who still liked boys, had fights with her parents, and discovered herself through small triumphs and bigger tragedies.

## A Different One

by Eli

**M**ilkweed is about the Holocaust, but it's not like the others. Jerry Spinelli has given this novel an interesting twist. The main character, a young gypsy boy with no family, wants to be a Nazi. He imagines himself in those big shiny boots marching around acting all important.

I loved this book, I just couldn't put it down; it engaged me from the first sentence. From the very beginning you're drawn in, you want to find out what happens to the boy, Misha. Every time he was in trouble I wanted to warn him, to help him. To me he felt like a younger brother I never had. The way that Spinelli writes makes it feel like Misha is talking to you. "I thought: *This is what the enemy does. He flies overhead in his airplane. If he sees you in the street below, he reaches out and drops a bomb on your head.*" I pictured bombs as black iron balls about the size of a sauerkraut kettle." He sounds like a kid, unlike some Holocaust books, that have children that sound like adults. They seem like they understand everything, they're always so serious and don't have one stroke of imagination.

Misha isn't completely alone. At the beginning Uri, an older boy, takes care of him. They have many experiences together including driving a cable car. Then, when Misha gets taken to a ghetto, he finds a family. He has a sister, a father, and an uncle. Every night he sneaks out and steals food for them. One day in the ghetto they all have to stand out in the cold: "I thought of the stone angel. I pictured the snow falling over it, two crest of snow rising on top of its wings. So silent, the both of them,

the angel and the snow. I pretended I was the stone angel. I closed my eyes and pretended as hard as I could, after a while I was convinced I could feel wings sprouting from my shoulders. I wanted to look, to see my wings, but I was an angel of stone, so I could not move." This excerpt shows the reader that even in the Holocaust a boy still has an imagination, enough to imagine he is a stone angel. It reminds the reader that this book is about a young boy.

After time, the trains come. They take one street away at a time, Misha runs away with his sister. Every day they come back and make sure that their father is still there.

*Milkweed* was an amazing read; maybe a little on the sad side, but a well written book that showed me what the Holocaust might have been like for a young child.

## The Clueless Life of Bruno

By Isaac R.

**T**he *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. It caught my attention the moment I heard the title partially because my sister read it and saw the movie and because my sister always would throw out information about the book. All those little parts of the book were quite interesting to me and even sometimes horribly sad. Also because I always heard of this book as a one of the best Holocaust stories.

In *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Bruno, a nine year old, has to move to a new place far away from Berlin, his home. He is reluctant. He doesn't want to leave his friends and family, but his mother makes him go because his father's job is forcing him to go. His mother is always saying that the "Fury" has good things in mind for him.

They leave by train and when Bruno gets there, he is shocked to find that there are only two floors. At his old home, he had five floors. He

was accompanied by his sister Gretel, his mother, his father, and Maria their maid. Gretel had many strange habits. She has hundreds of dolls on the shelves in her room and whenever Bruno walked in he would feel like they were watching him. Bruno hated this place that his father called "Out With." He kept on asking his father when he could leave.

After a while, Bruno knew they were not going to move back, so he decided to make a tire swing. He thought the tire swing would not make him lose his mind. He went all around "Out With" asking soldiers if they had a spare tire. Bruno asked Lieutenant Kotler for one tire. "On most days the young lieutenant looked very smart, striding around in a uniform that appeared to have been ironed while he was wearing it. His black boots always sparkled with polish and his yellow blond hair was parted at the side and held perfectly in place with something that made all the comb marks stand out in it, like a field that had just been tiled. Also he wore so much cologne that you could smell him from quiet a distance." Kotler told Pavel the person who was helping out at the house to get a tire for Bruno. He yelled at him and called him a filthy \_\_\_\_\_. It was a word that Bruno hadn't heard before. After Pavel got the tire, he then made his swing. He was swinging so high he hit the tree and fell to the ground. When he got up, he got hit in the head by the tire and nearly got knocked out. Pavel ran outside to help him. Bruno had a scratch on his knee and he was worried. Pavel said that he was fine and he wouldn't even need stitches. Bruno doubted him and asked if he was a doctor. To his surprise he said yes, and he was taken away from his job. Later we finds out the significance of this as it helps Bruno learn about the poor treatment of Jews during the Holocaust.

One day Bruno decides to explore. He walks to the fence that he sees from his window. He walks for nearly an hour and he finally finds something. He meets a boy who is his same age and

*Every time he was in trouble I wanted to warn him, to help him.*

was born on the same day as he was. He is very skinny and he is on the other side of the fence. Everyday Bruno comes to visit that boy in the striped pajamas. Some days he is not there. Bruno brings him food and water.

*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is an outstanding book. The author is very good at making it seem like a young boy wrote this. He calls the concentration camp Auschwitz "Out-With." Bruno is a very clueless boy. He has no idea about why other people are on the other side of the fence and why they are in striped pajamas. Bruno has no idea of the trauma they are put through and how they have a horrible life. I wish I could slap Bruno across the face and tell him about how horrible their life is, but who would read the book. It is his cluelessness that makes the book great. His cluelessness is the thing that puts suspense into the book.

The author does a great job at making you think of what he is talking about. He gives a very brief hint then your brain has to do the work. It makes your brain wake up and pay attention. Like when he says, "I heard a metallic clank and the air got sucked out of the room," he makes you think, but then you find out he is talking about a gas chamber. The only part I didn't like about the book was at the end. The story goes by too quickly and it is hard to grasp all that information in a few pages. I would recommend this book to anyone who is willing to read a sad book. This is a great book and I love it.

## A Magical Guy, Not Such A Magical Book

by Sam

**H**arry Houdini – world-renowned stuntman, celebrated magician, admired illusionist. You would think this book would be better.

Sid Fleischman, Newbery Medal-winning author, didn't show his best work this time with *Escape: The Story Of The Great Houdini*. The book was

not doing the wonders Houdini could: "...thrilling audiences, puzzling them, entertaining them, and above all, night after night, selling out the house." Nice try though, Sid.

Many professional reviews state that this book

*He gives a very brief hint then your brain has to do the work.*

is at a second to third grade reading level, and therefore, I have to accept some of the blame for choosing this book without doing any previous research. In fact, this book was recommended to me in second grade by my school librarian. I started to read it, but was bored by the pure facts. So, at least I have some proof it was boring to the age range it was intended for.

Ehrich Weiss was born March 24, 1874, in Appleton, Wisconsin. Or at least that's what he said. As the book states, with its occasionally inserted drama, "Harry, you pulled a trick on us. That's not where you were born. Some snoop dug up your birth certificate. The masquerade is over." That's exactly what doesn't work about this book. I wanted to learn about Houdini, but not this way. It was bland and basic, but that wasn't the bad part. What really irritated me was the how much drama there was for a story that really didn't need it. It's as if the author's trying too hard to make a not-so-boring story better, when it doesn't require it. Houdini was a very intriguing person, and his life is interesting enough to fill hundreds of pages, so I don't see the need for cliffhangers on every other page. Although there was drama (bad may it be), it still seemed like something you could copy and paste off of Wikipedia.

Houdini went on to do wonders and push the limits and boundaries of showbiz forever, escaping deathtraps, restraints, and hazards of his own making, and sometimes even accepting other people's manacles as dares.

I will say, though, this book was as easy to walk away from as it was for Houdini to break out of a simple

*It still seemed like something you could copy and paste off of Wikipedia.*

handcuff. Fleischman intended this novel to be a tribute to the greatest magician who ever lived, a book to inform people of his wonderful life, but if anything, it was an embarrassment to him. I've read *The Whipping Boy*, his Newbery-winning book, and his biography of Charlie Chaplin, which

was much better written, so it amazes me that Sid Fleischman could produce such a poor piece.

The bottom line is: if you want information on Harry Houdini (and you're not at a second grade reading level), get another book. It makes me sad because, in all honesty, Houdini deserved better.

## A Girl, a Suitcase and a Museum

by Sofia

**“H**ana had blonde hair, blue eyes and a very pretty round face.”

*Hana's Suitcase* by Karen Levine is an unfortunate tale of an eight year old Jewish girl named Hana Brady and her suitcase and their travels. Meanwhile The Small Wings, a group of children in Tokyo, Japan, take on the challenge to find the true story of Hana Brady.

Hana lived a perfectly regular life with George (her brother), along with their parents in Nove Mesto, Czechoslovakia, until WWII started that is. She eventually was taken from Nove Mesto, where she had lived her eight years of life, to Auschwitz. Hana was a passionate, nature-loving, generous person. In the winter Hana always loved to ski and skate, in the summer she would take walks in nature. How do we know? George Brady said it himself. I even felt like George as I was reading this book as I felt protective of Hana. Karen Levine writes like you feel you're there, but you are not.

Years later Hana's suitcase was purchased by a teacher in Japan, Fumiko Ishioka, and put in the Tokyo

Holocaust Center. It came with socks along with photos and drawings. "From the day the suitcase arrived in Tokyo, Fumiko and the children were drawn to it."

What struck me most about this story, was how the kids and Fumiko would get together and just solve this puzzle of Hana's life. They didn't get forced to do this, but rather the opposite. They were mesmerized by the story of one out of more than twenty-two million Jewish people.

"Karen Levine has never forgotten a visit to the Buchenwald concentration camp when she was thirteen." She found it appealing to write a book about a young girl being discovered by Fumiko and The Small Wings because it is "such a dramatic mix of tragedy and hope." She lives in Toronto. She works for CBS radio. She won two "Peabodys." Originally *Hana's Suitcase* was a radio documentary, then she wrote it as a book. Karen Levine is an excellent writer and she has won many awards.

## A Sad Story of the Holocaust

By Ishaan

The Holocaust was a tragic moment for the Jews. The Holocaust was where the Germans persecuted millions of Jews because the Germans believed that they were "racially superior" to Jews. Jews were facing unforgettable struggles in concentration camps. These camps imprisoned millions of Jews from across the world. The Germans treated the Jews brutally by shooting, beating, and holding back on bare necessities such as food and water. *Stones in Water* written by Donna Jo Napoli describes how Roberto and his friends



live through the Holocaust.

Roberto was captured by the Germans at eleven years of age. One day while Roberto and his friends were watching a movie the Germans captured them and walked them down the street. The Germans stopped as soon as they arrived at the

train station where they loaded the kids into box cars. The train took off to the border of Austria. Boys who did not want to stay on the train, the Germans shot dead which frightened other kids from saying anything. The German soldiers feared that as they crossed the Austrian border, the border patrol may stop the train and set the kids free. However, the German soldiers successfully passed the Austrian border. Roberto woke up to a screeching sound of the train stopping. The children got off the train and were put into groups at the train station. Roberto was grouped with his friends and was happy to see them safe. Roberto missed his parents and the thought that he would never see his parents petrified him. Roberto's friend, Enzo, gifted a pair of boots to Roberto during their stay at the camp. The boots were

not new but Roberto was glad to own the thick black rubber boots. However, one night the thieves attacked Enzo at the cabin where they were stealing the boots. Enzo was fighting back with the thieves to save the boots. During this time Roberto was sleeping but woke up to a loud sound and jumped out of bed to throw his fist at whoever he could see. Suddenly, a gun shot went off and the thieves ran away with the boots. This event caused Roberto to feel unsafe and not trustful of the people around him.

This book illustrates Roberto's

experiences during his stay in the camp. Roberto was captured by the Germans and was brought to camp where he was separated from his family. He missed his parents and the thought that he would never see his parents made him sad and doubtful. After the theft in the camp he was very doubtful of his friends and the people around him. As the people were shot, he felt threatened and insecure. His life in the camp was unpredictable. It was the most treacherous time in his life and the book illustrates the life of a young boy who lived through the Holocaust.

This book was not my favorite because not only was it a little hard to follow the book but it was hard to understand what was going through his head. I did not know when he was happy with his friends or if he was regretful that he left to the movie. Even after everything I said, I found myself being interested in this book. Honestly I don't know why but I guess it just happens.

My review of this book as a star rating would be three and a half stars. The reason I say that is because I did not enjoy the book at all. But I did like how the book was descriptive, consecutive,

and nonbelligerent. If you were going to read this book, I will warn you ahead of time that there was a very little amount of inappropriate content. Overall this book is a book that you should read even though everything

I said was not positive. There was one quote in this book that stated, "You should never give up on your dreams." I thought that was a good quote because if you give up your dreams then you won't be able to achieve them and they will just stay a dream.

## A Book that Needs Trying

by Joaquin

Moving away from your home country is always hard. In the book *Whirlwind* it is moving away from Germany during



the Holocaust. It is really hard moving away from your family under the age of 21.

Ben has to leave his grandparents and his cousin behind. He is going to have to leave all of his other life behind. He is going to Seattle thanks to his Uncle. He has to get smuggled through many ships and into the USA. When he comes to class, everybody thinks he is weird. From moving to USA I feel like they should have made the trip feel longer. This is not the only time the book goes along too quickly. When he goes to Canada the author makes it feel like going to Canada was as easy as getting a bus ticket. He then goes to Canada and lives with his uncle. After that his father comes and picks him up and they go back to Seattle and then everything works out.

I think that the book shows that Ben is having inner conflict. One side of Ben is happy that he escaped and is now in America and the other part is he is just mad at everybody. Throughout

this book Ben lets either side of him try and win. In this way I think that the book is split in two. I don't think that that is too good for a Jewish book. In a way it almost ruins the book of its feeling. But if you do like really hard-core books, this is the book for you. It makes you look on both sides of his life in two different ways which can be good and bad, which is up to you.

Ben's friend Jon gets sent to a camp because he looks Japanese. After that his life gets ruined. "We sat crowded around the radio. There had been a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii. I felt so badly for all those soldiers and their families, but I had to admit that a small part of me was glad." This is a quote

from the book. It shows how Carol Matas perfected making him have two different personalities.

Carol Matas should make this book a little longer. But this book is great if you're looking for an informative book about Jewish life. This book lacks enough detail to really get a deep

thought about what Jewish life is like. The book does really make you feel like you're there. Like at one point when Ben is escaping from his home and moving with his Uncle in Canada. I feel like the plot could have been a little more thought out because it is a really simple plot. The book is missing the true characteristics of a Jewish book. I think the book does make you want to keep on reading because he is fighting his inner self. You want to know if he is actually going to Canada and, if he does, does he make it back. I feel like if Carol Matas just added a little bit more this book could win some awards. She makes *Whirlwind* seem like a book for eight year olds but it could be a book for a lot more ages.

The ending is very obvious. But the part that he went to Canada is very unusual. In the end he does end up being with his family back in Seattle and lives happily ever after. The book doesn't give any information about what their family past was. They just started by talking about what Ben's daily life was like.

I feel like this book could be for you if you like hard depressing books. If you don't, then it might be hard reading it. In some cases this book is really appealing to everybody like when it first starts you can tell it took a lot of work. Overall *Whirlwind* is informative.



The Portland Jewish Academy Book Review is a Sixth Grade Humanities publication celebrating Jewish Book Month. During November 2012, all sixth grade students read a book with Jewish content. This year's class chose both works of fiction and non-fiction. After reading their chosen books, students closely examined several reviews of children and young adult literature from *The New York Times Book Review*. Students appreciated the informal tone of these reviews, how plot summary and opinions were well-integrated, and how the writers shared content without giving away too many surprises. The sixth graders then wrote their own reviews incorporating their opinions about the plot, setting, characters and author's writing style, as well as short excerpts from the texts that helped support particular points they wanted to emphasize. Each student revised his or her written work several times before submitting it for publication. Final reviews may contain occasional grammatical errors as well as opportunities for idea clarification or elaboration. This is to be expected from developing writers, especially when experimenting with a new form of writing.

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