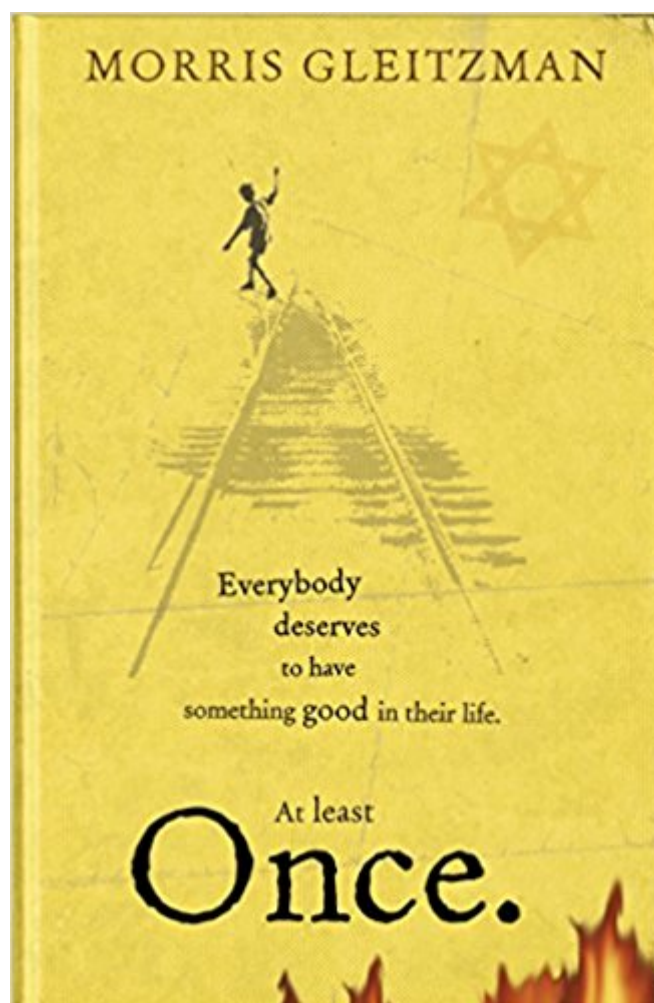


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Once (Once/Now/Then/After)



Synopsis

Once by Morris Gleitzman is the story of a young Jewish boy who is determined to escape the orphanage he lives in to save his Jewish parents from the Nazis in the occupied Poland of the Second World War. Everybody deserves to have something good in their life. At least Once. Once I escaped from an orphanage to find Mum and Dad. Once I saved a girl called Zelda from a burning house. Once I made a Nazi with a toothache laugh. My name is Felix. This is my story. Once is the first in a series of children's novels about Felix, a Jewish orphan caught in the middle of the Holocaust, from Australian author Morris Gleitzman - author of Bumface and Boy Overboard. The next books in the series Then, Now and After are also available from Puffin.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Grade 6
Felix lives in Poland in 1942, and reading is his survival mechanism. Now almost 10, he was sent to a Catholic orphanage three years and eight months earlier by his Jewish bookstore-owning parents, and he's convinced himself that the sole reason he remains in hiding is because Nazis hate books. He's a natural storyteller, and when he finds a full carrot in what is typically a woefully thin bowl of soup, he fantasizes that it's a sign from his parents that they're finally on their way to take him home. When the orphanage is visited by surly Nazis instead of joyous parents, Felix escapes with only his cherished notebook full of his stories into the nearby countryside, still hoping for a family reunion. He soon discovers a burning home with two slain adults in the yard and their young daughter bruised but still alive. He takes Zelda on his journey,

shielding her from the reality of her parents' deaths in much the same way he's been comforting himself, by inventing alternative realities. But, as he encounters the escalating ugliness of the death marches that are emptying his old neighborhood, now a ghetto, Felix becomes increasingly conflicted about the need to imagine a hopeful order and the need to confront brutal reality head-on. An easy first-person narrative in terms of reading level and a good choice as a read-aloud this Holocaust story also taps gut-punching power by contrasting the way in which children would like to imagine their world with the tragic way that life sometimes unfolds. Jeffrey Hastings, Highlander Way Middle School, Howell, MI (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

The horror of the Holocaust is told here through the eyes of a Polish Jewish child, Felix, who loses his innocence as he witnesses Nazi-led roundups, shootings, and deportations. After nearly four years in a kind Catholic orphanage, he runs away to find his parents. First he returns home, where he is chased away by new residents. Then he journeys to the city (that is, the ghetto), gets help from other fugitives, discovers the Nazis' incomprehensible brutality, and is forced into a train bound for the camps. Through Felix's traumatized, present-tense viewpoint, readers learn of the genocide, in which books and bodies were burned en masse, as well as one victim at a time, including a baby who is shot dead in its high chair. Most moving is the lack of any idealization. Felix rescues a lost little girl, but rather than idolize him, she fights and fumes: Don't you know anything? Felix escapes, but one and a half million Jewish children did not, and this gripping novel will make readers want to find out more about them. Grades 7-10. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

When I found myself having to choose between Morris Gleitzman books to teach my year seven girls this year, I was not thrilled to have to pick this one because the numbers in the class matched the number of books in the box. Another Holocaust book! I'd done 'Briar Rose' with a recalcitrant year 12 class and 'The Book Thief' with an eager year 10 class. And Gleitzman! I could not imagine how he could do justice to the truth and still be Gleitzman with his quirky irreverent characters. So I was pleasantly surprised to be as enthralled with the book (then the next and the next and the now) as my students were. The horror was there, but my students were not overwhelmed by it. The comments after were about having understood something of what it was like to live through awful times. I will teach it again.

When I was in high school, I went to Germany on a school trip. In Germany, we went to Dachau, a concentration camp that has been turned into a memorial/museum. The emotions I felt at Dachau have never left me. The vast camp was completely silent except for the crunch of visitors' feet on the gravel. The pain within those gates was so strong, we couldn't even speak to one another. But more and more, I find my students are finding themselves disconnected from the Holocaust. Sure, they know the mass murder to millions of people is horrendous, but they really can't fathom the fear and agony felt by so many. We read books, we watch movies, but it is hard to grasp the same emotions I felt the moment I stepped foot into Dachau so many years ago. Therefore, as an educator, it becomes very hard to find quality books that will knock my students around emotionally the same way *Night* by Elie Wiesel did the first time I read it in high school. Once, by Morris Gleitzman knocked me around, and will certainly open the eyes of any jaded student. It's 1942, and Felix has lived in a Polish Orphanage for 3 years and 8 months since his parents left him there. They are Jewish and owned a bookstore in town, but they made a deal with Mother Minka to hide Felix, but they told him they were just going to take care of some bookstore business and be back. They still haven't returned. So Felix passes the day writing stories about them saving people and being brave in the outside world. When Felix gets a whole carrot in his soup one day, he decides it is a sign from his parents that they are coming to get him. When Mother Minka sadly tells him it isn't a sign, he decides to leave the orphanage to find them. After watching a group of Nazis come to the orphanage and burn Jewish books, he is worried his parents' books are in danger, and he knows he has to go help. On his way into town, Felix comes across a lot of puzzling situations. First, he tries to hitch a ride on a cattle truck that is full of people, but a soldier on top of the truck shoots at him. He assumes it must have been a mistake and actually feels bad for the soldier who must be upset he accidentally shot at a little kid. Then he goes to his parents' bookstore, but the books are all gone and a local Christian family is living in his house (and threaten to turn him in to the Nazis). Finally he happens upon a farmhouse in flames and discovers a mother and father shot (and all the chickens) and a young girl who is barely alive. He drags her away from the flames and the car coming back to the scene, saving her from whoever did this. At first Zelda is upset, but then she is just plain difficult, arguing with everything Felix says. When they get caught by Nazi soldiers and taken to the ghetto, it is her determination not to lose Felix, though, that saves them both. When a Nazi soldier tries to separate them, a large Jewish man offers the soldier something in German and he allows the man to take the kids. Barney, the man, takes Felix and Zelda and hides them with the other children he has saved in the ghetto. It is here that Felix begins to learn the truth about the Nazis and what they

are really doing to the Jews. When the ghetto gets emptied, Barney and the kids have no choices but to be packed into the trains with the other Jews. You might think all was lost at this point, but at some point, Felix's luck has to change! This was such a beautiful little book (150 pgs). I loved Felix so much I just wanted to gather him up and keep him safe. He is so sweet and innocent and just wants to protect his parents. His naivete about the Holocaust was so scary and endearing at the same time, it broke my heart. But something I think kids might relate to is the fact that he is just a kid. He does kid things like protect kids from bullies in the orphanage and make up wild, fanciful stories. Yet, at the same time, he is stuck in this time period that has been written about, talked about and filmed ever since it ended. I think kids can relate to his childish ideas and that alone makes this story more powerful than others. They can imagine how they might feel if they were in the same situation. The story is very short and perfect for any middle school student, but its beauty lies within the multiple layers that can be pulled back for a wide age range of people. For a middle school student, this story might be a face-value story about a boy in the Holocaust, but for an older student, this can be a way to quickly examine the plagues of war, such as the loss of life and innocence. It gives them a chance to delve deeper into the consequences of war. This is quite simply a beautiful story and as sad as it made me to read it, it also made me hopeful for Felix and for the growth of the young people I work with each and every day.

My 7th graders sat on the edge of their seats when I read this aloud at the end of the year! I used the document camera so they could follow along, and I had a "During Reading" worksheet where after every two chapters they had to write a connection, prediction, summary, or question. It's an endearing story with characters that my students really seem to get involved with and have sympathy and appreciation for what it must have been like to be a child during the Holocaust. I teach a small group class of students with learning disabilities.

Once you've opened this novel you will be immediately conscious of his strong symbolism regarding a sad childhood - why? Because the first element is the title "Once" a reminiscent of our past "once upon time" and then the most powerful phrase "You know how" this implies that from now we are a part of this book, technically speaking a perfect introduction of the 3rd person omniscient. This is also a masterpiece of mysterious contradiction when he declares, that he is living in an orphanage and after some paragraph he will say....." I'll have to say good-bye to everyone here soon. That makes me feel sad. And when the other kids see Mum and Dad are alive, they'll now I haven't been truthful with them. That makes me feel even sadder" (page 5) In my opinion this is a strategy for

continuing our reading, which is also reinvigorated by an enigmatic conclusion of phrases like "you pray to God, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, the Pope and Adolph Hitler?", automatically you'll ask to yourself if there will be a connection between the religion and the dictator? Even the second chapter is entitled "Once" Once upon time the childhood of the main character is now at risk, thanks to the delirium of a human being: Hitler, which is introduced in the following form: "I stare, numb with disappointment. It's not Mum and Dad. It's just a bunch of men in suits with armbands" One second ago our main character was happy because he was waiting for his parents after two long and endless years. Reading this line I felt the sensation of the imminent atrocities of that time through the eyes of a child. "I have another thought. That poor soldier. Tonight in the barracks he'll hardly be able to swallow his dinner he'll be so upset. All he wanted to do was play a little trick, and now he thinks he's shot an innocent kid." (page 35) In brief this phrase summarises a fierce war between the age of innocence and the adult world which has been corrupted by our selfish genes due to a wrong human evolution and Felix will be maintain his "virginity" of his soul? At the end of this tale all your question are answered. You will be able to feel the love of an unknown parents for their son Felix in order to preserve him from the evil. "You know how when you jump off a moving train and the Nazi shoot at you with machine guns and you see sharp tree stumps coming at you and then you hit the ground so hard you feel like you've smashed your head open and bullets have gone through your chest and you don't survive even though you prayed to God, Jesus, Mary the Pope, and Richmal Crompton? that's what's happened to poor Chaya (Once, Morris Gleitzman, page 149) I never jumped out from a train, but reading this phrase so realistic, I felt like Chaya. A small part of me has died with her, in particular the awareness of the pros and cons of having a free will and hoping in a divine punishment for those direct and indirect supporters of the holocaust. IP

Great book to read to middle school and Jr high.

I really did enjoy this novel. I selected this novel to read as part of a list of books for a class paper. The plot was pretty creative but the main character was sometimes so oblivious that it was aggravating. The text is an easy read and the author allowed for the reader to clearly envision the events. Would consider the other books in the trilogy.

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