

## Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

### Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

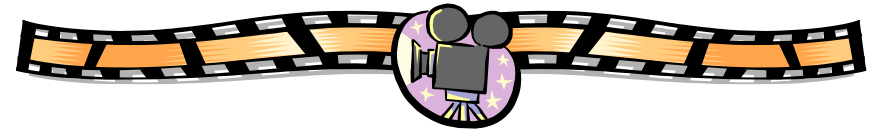
What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

### Some facts about the film

- The film was shot in Budapest, Hungary.
- Although the concentration camp where the movie is set is never actually mentioned by name throughout the movie, we know it is Auschwitz because it was the only Nazi death camp with 4 crematoria. The SS officers are discussing the building's construction in the Commandant's office when Bruno's mother interrupts the meeting. In the book it is referred to as "Out-With" as Bruno, who is only eight years old, can't pronounce his words properly.
- *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is a 2006 novel by Irish novelist John Boyne. Boyne claims to have written the first draft of the book in all of 2 and a 1/2 days. The book was adapted for the screen by director Mark Herman.
- The book, and consequently the film, is not without its critics. The very premise of the book, that there would be a child of Shmuel's age, is, according to critics, an unacceptable fabrication that doesn't reflect the reality of life in the camps. Rabbi Benjamin Blech has condemned it, saying: "This book is not just a lie and not just a fairytale, but a profanation. There were no 8 year old Jewish boys in Auschwitz. The Nazis immediately gassed those not old enough to work. Nor would it have been possible to crawl in through a hole." Such critics fear that such alleged falsification of history might affect the way the victims of the Holocaust might be remembered and commemorated. Similar comments were aired over *Schindler's List*. However, the book is a novel and does not claim to be historical fiction. Also, statistics from the Labour Assignment Office show that on August 30th, 1944, Auschwitz had 619 living male children aged from one month to fourteen years old.
- Rupert Friend (Lieutenant Kotler) was educated at the Marlborough School, Woodstock.



**A chance to watch films together.  
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.  
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

**2nd Aug Slumdog Millionaire  
6th Sep The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas  
4th Oct The Golden Compass  
1st Nov Atonement**

**Films start at 5:30pm  
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road  
Islip**

**Further details from Jonathan (Ox 842214)  
Email: [info@spiritualityonscreen.org.uk](mailto:info@spiritualityonscreen.org.uk)  
Web: [www.spiritualityonscreen.org.uk](http://www.spiritualityonscreen.org.uk)**



## The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas

The film tells the story of Bruno, an eight-year-old German boy who leads a rather comfortable life in Berlin during the World War II. His father is a high ranking Nazi SS officer, but things change when the family has to move due to his father's new post. In his innocence, Bruno sees the nearby concentration camp as a "farm" and wonders why its inhabitants are always wearing striped pyjamas. Eventually Bruno becomes friends with a Jewish boy his own age who lives on the other side of the fence.

### **Friendship and betrayal**

Bruno and Shmuel have much in common. They are both lonely, they both love football, they both want a friend. Their desire to become friends with one another overrides cultural and racial boundaries, as well as a wire fence. What does their relationship tell you about friendship?

When Shmuel ends up working in the house, Bruno offers him a little food. Unfortunately, he is caught eating it by Lieutenant Kotler. Shmuel looks to Bruno for support, but Bruno denies ever having met him before, let alone having fed him. Why do you think he does this? What do you think of Shmuel's ultimate reaction? Would you have done the same? Have you had friendships in which you have felt betrayed? Have you been able to remain friends?

### **Fatherhood**

Do you think Bruno's father was a good father to his son? Why do you think that? The Bible calls on us to honour our father and mother. In Bruno's case he was never really aware of what his father was doing, but what does it mean to honour our father and mother when they themselves might be caught up in something morally wrong?

### **Grace**

When Bruno falls off his swing, it is Pavel who comes to his aid. Despite the treatment and degradation he has received from Bruno's father, and others, despite the dangers involved, he reaches out to Bruno and asks for nothing in return. Why do you think he is able to do this? How might you have reacted? What is your understanding of the word "grace" and how do you think it is evident here?

### **Innocence and childhood**

Although it takes place against a backdrop of war and inhumanity, this is still Bruno's childhood. He remains a symbol of hope, of uncorrupted human beauty. In contrast, his sister is quickly indoctrinated by the Nazi propaganda machine. Who do you think are the "guilty" and the "innocent" in this film? How are Bruno and Gretel different and why do you think they react so differently to Herr Liszt's teaching? How do you think the story would have turned out if Bruno and Shmuel had been 13 year olds? Jesus tells us that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven unless they become like a child. What qualities of childhood do you think are kingdom qualities? Are any of those qualities in evidence here?

### **The Holocaust**

The Holocaust is perhaps the most horrific crime yet committed. Yet, sometimes it can just seem a tragic episode in history and we can be guilty of forgetting it. This is especially true in the church where we can often view it as part of Jewish history and not our own. But is that right? What should our response be?

## Memorable Quotes

<b>Father</b>	You see, Bruno, those people—well, they are not really people at all.
<b>Grandma</b>	I sometimes wonder if this is all down to me, making you those costumes for your little plays when you were tiny. You used to adore all that dressing up. Does it still make you feel special, Ralph dear? The uniform... and what it stands for?
<b>Father</b>	Mother. It's a party. Let's not spoil it.
<b>Grandma</b>	Ha! Me? Spoil things?
<b>Father</b>	[ <i>whisper</i> ] You should be careful. Airing your views so publicly could land you in trouble. You know that.
<b>Bruno</b>	It could be worse than it looks.
<b>Pavel</b>	It isn't.
<b>Bruno</b>	I'm Bruno.
<b>Shmuel</b>	Shmuel.
<b>Bruno</b>	Sorry?
<b>Shmuel</b>	I'm Shmuel.
<b>Bruno</b>	That's your name? I've never heard of anyone called that before.
<b>Shmuel</b>	I've never heard of anyone called Bruno.
<b>Gretel</b>	Dolls are for little girls.
<b>Bruno</b>	What do you burn in those chimneys?
<b>Shmuel</b>	I don't know. Mama says it is old clothes.
<b>Bruno</b>	Well, it smells horrible, whatever it is.
<b>Bruno</b>	Why do you wear pyjamas all day?
<b>Shmuel</b>	The soldiers. They took all our clothes away.
<b>Bruno</b>	My dad's a soldier, but not the sort that takes people's clothes away.
<i>[about Gretel's reading from their tutor of propaganda about "the Jew"]</i>	
<b>Bruno</b>	I don't understand. One man caused all this trouble?
<b>Bruno</b>	There is such thing as a nice Jew, though, isn't there?
<b>Herr Liszt</b>	I think, Bruno, if you ever found a nice Jew, you would be the best explorer in the world.
<b>Bruno</b>	We're not supposed to be friends, you and me. We're meant to be enemies. Did you know that?
<b>Lieutenant Kotler</b>	They smell worse when they burn, don't they?
<b>Grandpa</b>	The work your father is doing here—it's history in the making.
<b>Bruno</b>	Dad's a good man.
<b>Gretel</b>	Of course he is.
<b>Father</b>	I'm a soldier. Soldiers fight a war.
<b>Mother</b>	That's not war!
<b>Father</b>	It's a part of it—it's a vital part of it!
<b>Inmate</b>	It's only a shower.