



Soon

Morris Gleitzman

SYNOPSIS:

After the Nazis took my parents I was scared. After they killed my best friend I was angry. After I joined the partisans and helped defeat the Nazis I was hopeful. Soon, I said, we'll be safe. I was wrong.

Soon continues the incredibly moving story of Felix, a Jewish boy still struggling to survive in the wake of the liberation of Poland after the end of World War Two.

WRITING STYLE / EDITORIAL COMMENTS:

Readers who have come to know and love Felix in the novels *Once*, *Then*, *After* and *Now* will be very excited to continue the story of what happens to Felix between *After* and *Now*.

A note from the editor

Morris is such a master storyteller who is incredibly dedicated to his craft - from the words he chooses so carefully, the characters who are drawn into our hearts, to the places in the world and history that come alive in his stories. Not only that, he is a delight to work with!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morris Gleitzman grew up in England and came to Australia when he was sixteen. After university he worked for ten years as a screenwriter. Then he had a wonderful experience. He wrote a novel for young people. Now, after 36 books, he's one of Australia's most popular children's authors. Visit Morris at his website: morrisgleitzman.com

- In 2006, *Once* was named an honour book in the Children's Book Council Book of the Year Awards, it was a nominee for the 2010 German Youth Literature Prize, and in 2011 won an Australian Book Industry Award for International Success.
- *Then* was an Honour Book in the CBC awards, 2009 and won a UK Literacy Association Book Award in 2010.
- In 2011, *Now* won the YABBA & COOL awards and the Best Book for Language in the Speech Pathology Awards. It has been shortlisted for many awards including the UK Guardian Award in 2010 and the Australian Prime Minister's Literary Award in 2011.
- In 2013, *After* was a Notable Book in the CBCA awards and won a Speech Pathology Australia and a KROC award, as well as being shortlisted for a number of other awards including an Australian Book Industry Award for Older Readers.

THEMES / TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Aftermath of war

- The world that Felix finds himself in immediately after the war is very different from the society he lived in before the war.
- As you read, make a list of all the changes that have occurred as a result of the war.

	CHANGE	EVIDENCE / QUOTE
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT		
FAMILIES		
MORALITY		
ATTITUDES		
SENSE OF SECURITY		
SENSE OF BELONGING		
WEALTH / SURVIVAL		

- Consider what the orphanage looks like: *The floor and walls are covered with gleaming white tiles. They go up twice as high as me. All around are sinks with no cracks. And taps with no rust. Peeing troughs, completely unstained, that are actually attached to the walls. Cubicles, each one with a door* (p48).
What does this suggest about Dr Lipzyk?
- How can places such as this still exist in the midst of such poverty and destruction?

- What does that suggest about the social impact of war?
- What impact would the lack of money and possessions have on the society?
- *War is a bit like blind man's bluff, little bundle. Everyone ends up all over the place and they all want to get back to where they belong* (p137)
Why do people end up all over the place after the war? Why would people want to get home? What challenges would they face in trying to get home?
- What challenges would a society face in trying to recover from war?
- Why did people try to flee to countries such as America, Alaska or Australia after the war?

Survival

- *Most people in the world seem to be doing things that would have horrified them in the old days. And made their parents very upset* (p88).
Under what circumstances is Felix prepared to ignore his morals and values?
- What sort of things do the children have to do in order to survive that they would never usually do?
- How do these behaviours affect them?
- *We do what we have to do to survive. I have to stop pretending we can make things better. We can't. The world is what it is. That couldn't be clearer. Just look around* (p159).
Do you agree with Felix that people will only survive if they manage to accept that things are the way they are?
- Do you think people in these circumstances can make things better? Why?

Right vs wrong

- Why does Felix want to be a doctor? What does this tell us about his humanity and his sense of right and wrong?
- *I should be glad. But suddenly I'm not. Because if Mum and Dad and Zelda and Barney and Genia were still alive, I don't think they'd want the world to be like it is now. Full of people still trying to solve every problem by killing each other. I think they'd want something better* (p173).
In what way does war force us to change our moral code?
- Can people who didn't live through war really understand what it might take to survive?
- Do you think it is possible to maintain pre-war principles or morals during and after war? Why?
- *I know using and lying is how people treat each other in the modern world, but I don't have to accept it, even if I am a thief. I step out the door. I should just walk away. But for some reason I think about how Mum would feel if she'd seen my behaviour today. It's probably because of that first painting. I can't change the things I've done, but at least I could try to be a bit more understanding of other people* (p123).
- Do you agree with Felix that this is how people treat each other in the post war world?
- Do you think we need to accept this decline in humanity?
- Do you think it is possible to return to a more moral society after war, or would society be forever damaged by the experience?

- Is it really possible to ever fully recover from war? How does it change people and society?
- Should actions performed during warfare be judged the same way as those in peacetime?
- Is it ok to go against your morals if it will ensure your (or another's) survival?
- Stage a debate on the issue of whether or not rules should change during times of war.

Parental influence

- Despite the fact that he lost his parents years earlier, Felix is still very much influenced by the lessons they taught him.
- How can his attitudes be seen to have been shaped by his parents? Why do they still serve as his moral compass even after they have gone?
- What can you tell about Felix's parents from this?
- Felix's parents were Jewish. What is ironic about the sort of values they taught their son and society's attitudes towards Jews?

Family

- What relationship do Felix and Gabriek share? From your reading, can you tell how they came to be together?
- Why in difficult times might people form family units with people to whom they are not related?
- *It's a baby cot, beautifully built by Gabriek from bits of wood. But it's not like any baby cot I've ever seen. For a start it's on cleverly designed wooden rockers. And it's got a roof that slides shut with little wooden animals dangling from it* (p109).
- Why does Gabriek build a cot for the baby?
- *Brilliant,' I say, trying not to let Gabriek see how emotional I feel at the sight of it. Gabriek is so kind and loving, it would be a crime to do anything to hurt him* (p109).
- How does their relationship help both Felix and Gabriek?
- *Maybe I should have lied when he asked me where I'd been and what I'd been doing. But Gabriek and I have never lied to each other. So I told him about the art theft* (p125)
Why does Felix never lie to Gabriek? What does this suggest about their relationship?
- Gabriek and Felix have an unusual relationship. Which do you think is the more mature or responsible? Why might this be the case?
- *'I remember when I first saw you and Pavlo,' says Anya quietly. 'I thought to myself, I wish I was in that family'* (p148)
Why would the idea of a family be so appealing for Anya?
- Do you think Felix is safer or in more danger by being part of a 'family' unit?
- How does Felix know that Anya is his friend and able to be trusted? (p130)

Grief

- How does the loss of his loved ones affect Felix?
- How does it affect Gabriek?
- Why might they react differently?
- Do you think it is possible to ever recover from grief?
- How can grief be seen to be a motivating factor for Felix?

- *'Oh, Gabriek,' I sob. Gabriek can't either when I tell him. We hold each other. Sometimes in life it's all you can do. Wait for the sadness to be over. Hope one day it will be* (p178)
How has loss affected Felix's personality and behaviour? Do you think he would be as mature without these experiences? Find some examples in the novel of his language or behaviour that suggest he is mature beyond his years.

Treatment of Jews

- How were the Jews treated during WWII?
- Why were they so detested?
- Despite his strong moral compass, Felix is prepared to kill Nazis. Why would he feel this way?
- *There weren't just paintings in Dimmi's flat. There was a photo with a very sad inscription on the frame. Dimmi's Jewish mother, killed by the Nazis* (p172).
What does this reveal about how the Nazis treated the Jews?
- *'You children,' he hisses. 'You couldn't possibly know the opportunities such a unique time gave to medical science. The discoveries that were made that will benefit humankind for ever'* (p171)
Why did the Nazis perform medical experiments on Jewish people? What does this suggest about their attitudes towards the Jews?
- Do you agree with Dr Lipzyk that it was too good an opportunity for medical science to resist? Can experimentation of this sort ever be justifiable?
- *'The world is a broken and miserable place,' says Doctor Lipzyk. 'Disease all around us. In this syringe is what's called a vaccination. One little jab, and both of you will be free of disease for ever.' I glance at Anya. She looks like she's thinking the same as me. For Doctor Lipzyk, we're the disease. So whatever is in that syringe definitely isn't good protection* (p170).
In what way might Dr Lipzyk have seen Felix and Anya as a disease?

History

- *'A photo,' he says. 'A photo proves nothing. It doesn't begin to tell the whole story.'* (p171)
Dr Lipzyk argues that you can't tell the truth from a photograph. Do you agree with him?
- History is usually written by the victors. What does this suggest about history as we know it? Can we really believe everything that we read, see or hear about events in history?
- How can history be manipulated or controlled by those in power?
- Is it possible or fair for those not present at the time to pass valid judgement on the actions of those who were?
- Why are books so significant to Felix?
- Why are they important in society?
- Why did the Nazis burn books? What does this do to a civilization?

Beauty

- *I peek into the room. Anya and Doctor Lipzyk are sitting at a table in front of a fire. The room is a bit like the library, but it's not a book room. The walls are covered with paintings. Paintings of love. Paintings of tender human goodness (p169).*
What is the irony of these paintings being present in the midst of all this destruction and hatred?
- What do these paintings suggest about human nature and values?
- *This is amazing. Here, in the middle of a wrecked city, are hundreds of years of love (p117).*
Why does Felix see these paintings as a symbol of love? Do you agree that this is what they represent?
- *Come on,' says Anya. 'Get to work.' I take one last look at the unwrapped paintings, at what we humans can do when we have the chance to be loving and generous. Then I throw a dusty sheet over the nearest one and get on with the work of stealing them (p118).*
What does this suggest about how war and its impact can alter our appreciation of beautiful things?
- Why does Dr Lipzyk want to steal the paintings?
- What does this suggest about the modern world in contrast to that which existed before the war?

Fear

- *'Tell them,' he says to her. 'When they see the boy and the brat nailed to trees, tell them this is what will happen to them all if they interfere with our work.'* (p62).
How did those in power use fear to maintain their status and control?
- *'Don't make me shoot you here,' he says. 'I want you where people can see you. One thing I learned from killing Nazis, bodies are easier to transport when they can still walk. But if I have to kill you here, I will'* (p62).

Appearances

- Is it possible to judge people by their appearance or by social expectations?
- Which people (or groups of people) in the story behave differently from how society would expect them to behave?

SOCIAL GROUP	EXPECTATION	ACTUAL BEHAVIOUR
CHILDREN		
JEWS		
ADULTS		
DOCTORS		

- *Doctor Lipzyk is amazing. He's exactly the sort of doctor I want to be. Kind, skillful and excellent at making people feel relaxed and like they've got good vocabularies (p79).*
Much of the power and success enjoyed by the Nazis stemmed from their appearance and persona. How did they appear to people in their society when they first came to power? Why might these traits have been appealing to the German people?
- How can behaviours and mannerisms be seen to be deceptive?

Corruption

- What is meant by the term 'black market'?
- Why did black markets emerge during and after the war? What would motivate people to use them?
- What does this suggest about human nature?
- *'It's a simple swap,' says Anya. 'The paintings go to Doctor Lipzyk's place, the penicillin goes to Gogol, you and the baby go around the city unharmed. With all the milk powder you want.'*
'But only if I break into that apartment for you,' I say. 'Only if I get the lock open.'
(p106)
Do you agree with Anya that these sorts of deals were legitimate?
- Why would Dr Lipzyk sell Gogol fake penicillin?
- What does this suggest about the dangers of black markets?
- How can they be manipulated by those who are particularly corrupt?

Sacrifice

- *I'm proud of Gabriek too. It's not easy saying goodbye when most of the people in your life have already gone* (p136).
Why do Gabriek and Felix give Pavlo away to another home?
- What is the motivation for this decision?
- Do you think they did the right thing in doing this?
- What other sacrifices do people make in this story?
- What sort of character does it take to be prepared to make a sacrifice such as this?
- What sort of sacrifices do people make in extreme circumstances?

Hope vs Hopelessness

- *Soon, I hope, I'll get used to it this way. Not getting involved in other people's business. Not taking unnecessary risks. Accepting the world the way it is and probably always has been* (p160).
Do you think Felix will ever really get used to having to live this way? Do you think society has always been this way, that you need to stop yourself from getting involved in other people's business and not take risks?
- How would this sort of behaviour affect a society?
- Would there be any hope of things improving if we all behaved in this way?
- How does the word *soon* at the start of each chapter suggest the idea of hope?
- Do you think this is a story of hope or hopelessness? Why?