

Student Sample: Grade 9, Argument

This argument was written in response to a classroom assignment. The students were asked to compare a book they read on their own to a movie about the same story and to prove which was better. Students had six weeks to read and one and a half weeks to write, both in and out of class.

The True Meaning of Friendship

John Boyne's story, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, tells the tale of an incredible friendship between two eight-year old boys during the Holocaust. One of the boys is Bruno, the son of an important German commander who is put in charge of Auschwitz Camp, and the other is Shmuel, a Jewish boy inside the camp. Throughout the story their forbidden friendship grows, and the two boys unknowingly break the incredible racial boundaries of the time. They remain best friends until Bruno goes under the fence to help Shmuel find his father when they are both killed in the gas showers of the camp. By comparing and contrasting supporting characters, irony, and the themes in the movie and the book, it is clear that the movie, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (Mark Herman, 2008) is not nearly as good as the novel of the same title.

Characterization is very important to a story and influences how a person interprets the novel or movie, and one important way that the book differs from the movie is how Bruno's mother is characterized. In the movie, she is unrealistically portrayed as an honest woman with good moral values, and is almost as naive as Bruno is about what is going on at Auschwitz. When she discovers what her husband is doing to people at the camp she is deeply disturbed. Mortified by her husband's cruelty, their relationship declines. In contrast, she is a far more sinister character in the book. Though Bruno is too young to understand what his mother is doing, one of the reasons he dislikes Lieutenant Kotler is that, "... he was always in the living room with Mother and making jokes with her, and Mother laughed at his jokes more than she laughed at Father's" (162). Bruno's mother is very unhappy in her new situation away from Berlin, and her discontent leads her to cheat on her husband. This also leads her to unknowingly hurt her son, for Bruno is upset that she is paying more attention to Lieutenant Kotler than she is to his father, and the damage she causes could be magnified if she continues to disrupt their family. Further examples of her abysmal character and unfaithfulness are revealed when Bruno's mother finds the young lieutenant and says, "Oh Kurt, precious, you're still here . . . I have a little free time now if—Oh! she said, noticing Bruno standing there. 'Bruno! What are you doing here?'"(166). Her disloyalty further allows the reader to see that her character is far from virtuous, contrary to the opinion of a person who viewed the movie. Throughout the story, it also becomes apparent that Bruno's mother is also an alcoholic, and, "Bruno worried for her health because he'd never known anyone to need quite so many medicinal sherries" (188). Unable to come to terms with her new circumstances and strained relationship with her husband, Bruno's mother tries to drink away her problems, further conveying that she is a weak character. Bruno's extreme innocence about his mother and situation at Auschwitz are magnified by the use of irony in both the movie and the book.

In some ways the book and the movie have similar aspects, and one of these aspects is how irony is used to emphasize Bruno's innocence and to greatly emphasize the tragic mood of the story. In the final climactic scene of the movie—just after Bruno has gone under the fence to help Shmuel find his father—the two boys are led to the gas showers to be killed. Unaware of what is about to happen to them, Bruno tells Shmuel that his father must have ordered this so it must be for a good reason, and that they are going into the air-tight rooms to stay out of the rain and avoid getting sick. This statement is incredibly ironic because, unbeknownst to Bruno, his father has unknowingly commenced his own son's death sentence. In addition to this, the soldiers have no intention of keeping their prisoners healthy. It never occurs to Bruno that anyone would want to destroy another human being or treat them badly, and his innocence makes his premature death all the more tragic. Although the movie may be incredibly ironic in a few specific instances, the book contains a plethora of ironic events that also accentuate Bruno's childishness and naivety. A profound example of this is exhibited when Bruno thinks to himself that, "... he did like stripes and he felt increasingly fed up that he had to wear trousers and shirts and ties and shoes that were too tight for him when Shmuel and his friends got to wear striped pajamas all day long" (155). Bruno has no clue that the people in the "striped pajamas" are being cruelly treated and murdered, and is jealous of what he thinks is freedom. Bruno once again reveals his innocence when he asks Pavel, the Jewish man from the camp who cleans him up after a fall, "If you're a doctor, then why are you waiting on tables? Why aren't you working at a hospital somewhere?" (83). It is a mystery to Bruno that a doctor would be reduced to such a state for no transparent reason, and his beliefs should be what all adults think. Though

what he says is naive, it points out the barbarity of the German attitude toward the Jews. If an uneducated child could be puzzled by this, then how could learned adults allow such a thing? Through Bruno's comment, John Boyne conveys the corruptness of the German leaders during the Holocaust, an idea that the movie does not relay to the watcher nearly as well. The book impels the reader to think deeper about the horrors of the Holocaust, and all this ties into the true theme of the story.

The *Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and its movie counterpart both have different themes, but it is the book's theme that accurately states the author's message. The movie ends with a race against time as Bruno's family searches for him in the camp, trying to find him before he is killed. They are too late, and Bruno and Shmuel die together like so many other anonymous children during the Holocaust. The theme of the movie is how so many children died at the ruthless hands of their captors; but the book's theme has a deeper meaning. As Bruno and Shmuel die together in the chamber, ". . . the room went very dark, and in the chaos that followed, Bruno found that he was still holding Shmuel's hand in his own and nothing in the world would have persuaded him to let it go" (242). Bruno loves Shmuel, and he is willing to stay with him no matter what the consequences, even if it means dying with him in the camp that his father controls. They have conquered all boundaries, and this makes the two boys more than just two more individuals who died in Auschwitz. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is not the story of two children who died in a concentration camp; this story is about an incredible friendship that triumphed over racism and lasted until the very end. It is the story of what should have been between Jews and Germans, a friendship between two groups of people in one nation who used their strengths to help each other.

Based on the analysis of supporting characters, irony, and themes of John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and the movie, it can be concluded that the book is far superior to the movie. Though Bruno's mother is a dishonest woman in the book, her bad character is more realistic for the time when compared to the mother in the movie who is horrified by Auschwitz. John Boyne uses many examples of irony in the book to emphasize Bruno's innocence and to magnify the tragedy of his death. Unlike the movie the irony in the book leads the reader to ponder on the barbarity of the German leaders during the Holocaust. The book's theme of long lasting friendship gives purpose to the story, while the movie's theme of the cruelty of concentration camps does not lead the viewer to delve deeper into the story. It is necessary for the person to read this book in order to understand the true message of friendship and cooperation in the story, a message that a person who had only seen the movie could not even begin to grasp.

Annotation

The writer of this piece

- **introduces a precise claim and distinguishes the claim from (implied) alternate or opposing claims.**
 - . . . it is clear that the movie, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (Mark Herman, 2008) is not nearly as good as the novel of the same title.
- **develops claims and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's need for information about the book.**
 - Reason: *In the movie, she [the mother] is unrealistically portrayed as an honest woman with good moral values . . . she is a far more sinister character in the book . . .*
 - Evidence: . . . one of the reasons he [Bruno] dislikes Lieutenant Kotler is that, ". . . he was always in the living room with Mother and making jokes with her, and Mother laughed at his jokes more than she laughed at Father's" (162) . . . Bruno's mother finds the young lieutenant and says, "Oh Kurt, precious, you're still here . . . I have a little free time now if—Oh! she said, noticing Bruno standing there. 'Bruno! What are you doing here?'"(166). . . Bruno's mother is also an alcoholic, and, "Bruno worried for her health because he'd never known anyone to need quite so many medicinal sherries" (188)
 - Reason: . . . it is the book's theme that accurately states the author's message . . . the book's theme has a deeper meaning . . . The book's theme of long lasting friendship gives purpose to the story . . .
 - Evidence: *The movie ends with a race against time as Bruno's family searches for him in*

the camp, trying to find him before he is killed. They are too late, as Bruno and Shmuel die together like so many other anonymous children during the Holocaust . . . [In the book] As Bruno and Shmuel are standing together in the chamber, “. . . the room went very dark, and in the chaos that followed, Bruno found that he was still holding Shmuel’s hand in his own and nothing in the world would have persuaded him to let it go” (242).

- **uses words, phrases and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claims and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claims and (implied) counterclaims.**
 - *In the movie, . . . In contrast, . . . Though Bruno is too young, . . . Further examples of her abysmal character . . . Throughout the story, it also becomes apparent . . . In the final climactic scene . . . because, unbeknownst to Bruno . . . A profound example of this . . . Based on the analysis . . .*
- **establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone.**
 - *John Boyne’s story, The Boy in the Striped Pajamas, tells the tale of an incredible friendship between two eight-year old boys during the Holocaust. . . . Characterization is very important to a story and influences how a person interprets the novel or movie, and one important way that the book differs from the movie is how Bruno’s mother is characterized . . . In some ways the book and the movie have similar aspects, and one of these aspects is how irony is used to emphasize Bruno’s innocence and to greatly emphasize the tragic mood of the story . . .*
- **provides a concluding section that follows from and supports the argument presented.**
 - *Based on the analysis of supporting characters, irony, and themes of John Boyne’s The Boy in the Striped Pajamas and the movie, it can be concluded that the book is far superior to the movie. Though Bruno’s mother is a dishonest woman in the book, her bad character is more realistic for the time when compared to the mother in the movie who is horrified by Auschwitz. John Boyne uses many examples of irony in the book to emphasize Bruno’s innocence and to magnify the tragedy of his death. Unlike the movie the irony in the book leads the reader to ponder on the barbarity of the German leaders during the Holocaust. The book’s theme of long lasting friendship gives purpose to the story, while the movie’s theme of the cruelty of concentration camps does not lead the viewer to delve deeper into the story. It is necessary for the person to read this book in order to understand the true message of friendship and cooperation in the story, a message that a person who had only seen the movie could not even begin to grasp.*
- **demonstrates exemplary command of the conventions of standard written English.**