

The Boy in the Striped Pajama

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Introduction and Plot Overview

The Boy in the Striped pyjama is a movie which takes place during World War II during the Nazi's time (Centre for Holocaust Education, 2022). The story revolves around a family and how they have shifted near a Holocaust camp. The family's son, Bruno, is a protagonist, and the story revolves around his exploration of places nearby and how he discovered new things and people around him. Bruno's father is a commandant in a Jewish concentration camp. He lives with his mother and sister when his father is on duty. Because of the new place, Bruno has no one of the same age to play with him, and he tries to explore the area on his own. The exploration of Bruno leads him to a physical fence where he meets a boy of the same age, and soon their meetings grow into friendships. The boy's name was Shmuel, but the attire he was wearing was different from Bruno's and had stripes on the dress. Several themes are explored in the movie, such as innocence, friendships, race, and violence.

The Theme of Innocence

The theme of innocence is present throughout the film as Bruno is living in a war and conflicted area but is unable to realize the real truth. He is naïve and considers that having striped pyjamas is just a uniform. He is also unaware of all the difficulties the Shmuel and the people on the other side of the fence have been going through. Also, the development of friendship between these two young boys is because of their innocence and childlike nature, where they do not think that they are different from each other. The emotional and thought-provoking tone of the movie is because of the juxtaposition of such innocence amidst of evil of Nazis for the Jews. Friendship is built out of simplicity and, irrespective of the physical fence or boundaries. Bruno and Shmuel come from entirely different contexts and backgrounds, but they share a bond where, unknowingly, they are attached to each other. Even in the end, because of their friendship, Bruno gets caught in the gas chamber and dies. Holding hands, even in the chambers, provides an essence of friendship even in the toughest times. The theme of innocence and friendship in the war area reinforces that hatred, evilness and prejudices are learned and practised behaviours and inherently, all human beings are kind and friendly toward others (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2024).

Race and Anti-Semitism

Even though the theme of race is not apparent in the movie, it is there in the film when Bruno's teacher is teaching him about anti-Semitism, which is discrimination against Jews and nationalists. The physical fence can be a discriminatory figurative language between Bruno and other Jews. The

fence is an arbitrary boundary between the Jews and the others, and the use of striped pyjamas also can be taken as a difference between Jews and others. Also, how the interaction between the two young boys was not considered a good thing, and they were forced to stop meeting after the incident, which took place at Bruno's home. Also, when Bruno inquires the father about people in the striped pyjamas and his father replies that they are not people, this clearly indicates the hatred towards Jewish people. Giving a certain type of clothing to a group of people is an expression which provides a view that their identity has been taken away. They were brought home for cleaning and other purposes, which also signifies metaphorically the racial discrimination against Jews. The actions of Bruno's father and other soldiers clearly depict the prejudice against Jews (UNESCO, 2024).

Violence and Suffering

The theme of the violence is filmed in a way that makes it seem like an invisible elephant in the room because while watching the film, it can be felt, but there are no violent scenes. For instance, when Shmuel comes after the incident of having cake at Bruno's home during cleaning with a black eye, it shows that he has been beaten and assaulted, but it is not filmed. There are also other incidents of violence which are indirectly shown in the movie, but it is not the upfront theme. There are other things which lead to violence, such as lies, deception, and betrayal. An example of betrayal is when Bruno denies knowing Shmuel, and Shmuel gets beaten by the soldiers. The confinement of Shmuel and other people is also indicating violence, and towards the end, when all the people are in the gas chamber and are not able to find a way is an act of genocide against Jews by the Nazis. Bruno's death with the Jewish people also signifies that people should treat others the way they want to be treated (Centre for Holocaust Education, 2022).

Cultural Conflict

The movie explores race and violence as cultural and conflict issues. Even though the movie is set from the perspective of a young boy, it shows the difference in culture, two different living conditions, and levels of freedom on both sides of the fence. The conflict with the Jews is because of cultural conflicts, and the film has displayed the Jews as a discriminatory group, and their lives are not meaningful since there was genocide occurring during the holocaust. The movie is a slight insight into what happened during World War II and how innocent people also became victims because of belonging to a certain race. For instance, Shmuel and other people just became the victims of violence and genocide because they were Jewish. It also enlightens how the irrational decision of one person can result in violence and the death of many people. The movie has demonstrated the unfairness, fear, and heartlessness of Nazis. Also, cultural unacceptability is one of the reasons why genocide occurs, as what happens in the Nazi's conflict with Jews. The racial conflict was the main reason for the genocide, and this movie is based on that cultural conflict. Even the death of Bruno is because of his father's decision and the thought his father has against the Jews (UNESCO, 2024).

Relevance for Nursing Students

I would strongly recommend this movie to nursing students as the issues discussed here are essential for providing patient care. For example, cultural acceptance is one of the leading problems discussed in the movie and nursing students should be aware that everyone should have the same treatment or patient care regardless of their culture or racial background. The issue is significant because cultural and linguistic barriers between patients and healthcare providers can influence the quality of care (Cicolini et al., 2025). For instance, if a healthcare provider has prejudices about certain cultures or races, then they are more likely to provide treatment which is not sufficient or meets the needs of the patients. Also, the behaviour of the healthcare provider can be rude and disrespectful toward the patient if the healthcare providers are not trained in cultural sensitivity and cultural acceptance. Culturally appropriate treatments and skills can increase the efficacy of the service provided. The culturally acceptable healthcare providers are the nurses and the community workers. Although the organization and healthcare systems are different in different countries, nurses are universal healthcare providers. Other providers are community healthcare workers who aim to provide health services and educational programs and are culturally respectful healthcare providers. Healthcare providers are respectful of cultures, and their work is considered important for serving humanity, and people around the globe respect them. So, it is essential for these professionals to provide patient care without personal prejudices and discrimination of culture, race, religion or ethnicity. Culturally sensitive interventions are implemented across the globe with different models of care and service provision (Cicolini et al., 2025). Global awareness of cultural sensitivity would result in positive change for the country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the movie is thoughtful and puts the horrible Nazi's act of violence from the perspective of a child. The movie explores the themes of innocence, childhood, friendships, race and violence. The cultural conflict of the film provides an overview of the lives of two children and how their context is different from one another. This movie is relatable to nursing and healthcare because cultural acceptance is an essential concept in patient care and the quality of care (Cicolini et al., 2025).

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