

VE DAY ACTIVITIES – ENGLISH

Key Stage 3

Read the extracts from 'Boy in The Striped Pyjamas', 'The Diary of Anne Frank' and listen to the extract when you click on the link of 'The Book Thief'. Write a poem from the point of view of Shmuel, Anne or Liesel.

'Boy in the Striped Pyjamas', John Boyne

This extract is from a novel written in the 21st century but set in the Second World War. It is about a rather unusual friendship which develops between two boys. Bruno is the son of a German soldier who has been sent to work in a concentration camp in Poland. He meets a Jewish boy called Shmuel who has been sent to the camp with his family. They make friends by talking through the fence which divides them.

'All I know is this,' began Shmuel. 'Before we came here I lived with my mother and father and my brother Josef in a small flat above the store where Papa makes his watches. Every morning we ate our breakfast together at seven o'clock and while we went to school, Papa mended the watches that people brought to him and made new ones too. I had a beautiful watch that he gave me but I don't have it any more. It had a golden face and I wound it up every night before I went to sleep and it always told the right time.'

'What happened to it?' asked Bruno.

'They took it from me,' said Shmuel.

'Who?'

'The soldiers, of course,' said Shmuel as if this was the most obvious thing in the world.

'And then one day things started to change,' he continued. 'I came home from school and my mother was making armbands for us from a special cloth and drawing a star on each one 2. Like this.' Using his finger he drew a design in the dusty ground beneath him.

'And every time we left the house, she told us we had to wear one of these armbands.'

'My father wears one too,' said Bruno. 'On his uniform. It's very nice. It's bright red with a black-and-white design on it 3.' Using his finger he drew another design in the dusty ground on his side of the fence.

'Yes, but they're different, aren't they?' said Shmuel.

'No one's ever given me an armband,' said Bruno.

'But I never asked to wear one,' said Shmuel.

'All the same,' said Bruno, 'I think I'd quite like one. I don't know which one I prefer though, your one or Father's.'

Shmuel shook his head and continued with his story. He didn't often think about these things anymore because remembering his old life above the watch shop made him very sad.

'We wore the armbands for a few months,' he said. 'And then things changed again. I came home one day and Mama said we couldn't live in our house anymore -'

'That happened to me too!' said Bruno, delighted that he wasn't the only boy who'd been forced to move. 'The Fury came for dinner, you see, and the next thing I knew we moved here. And I hate it here,' he added in a loud voice. 'Did he come to your house and do the same thing?'

'No, but when we were told we couldn't live in our house we had to move to a different part of Cracow where the soldiers built a big wall and my mother and father and my brother and I all had to live in one room.'

'All of you?' asked Bruno. 'In one room?'

'And not just us,' said Shmuel. 'There was another family there and the mother and father were always fighting with each other and one of the sons was bigger than me and he hit me even when I did nothing wrong.' 'You can't have

all lived in one room,' said Bruno, shaking his head. 'That doesn't make any sense.' 'All of us,' said Shmuel, nodding his head. 'Eleven in total.'

Bruno opened his mouth to contradict again – he didn't really believe that eleven people could live in the same room together – but changed his mind.

'We lived there for some months,' continued Shmuel, 'All of us in that one room. There was one small window in it but I didn't like to look out of it because then I would see the wall and I hated the wall because our real home was on the other side of it. Then one day the soldiers all came with huge trucks,' continued Shmuel, 'And everyone was told to leave the houses. Lots of people didn't want to and they hid wherever they could find a place but in the end I think they caught everyone. And the trucks took us to a train and the train...' He hesitated and bit his lip. Bruno thought he was going to start crying and couldn't understand why.

'The train was horrible,' said Shmuel, 'There were too many of us in the carriages 5 for one thing. And there was no air to breathe. And it smelled awful.'

'That's because you all crowded onto one train,' said Bruno, remembering the two trains he had seen at the station when he had left Berlin. 'When we came here there was another one on the other side of the platform but no one seemed to see it. That was the one that we got. You should have got on it too.'

'I don't think we would have been allowed,' said Shmuel, shaking his head. 'We weren't able to get out of our carriage.'

'The doors are at the end,' explained Bruno.

'There weren't any doors,' said Shmuel. 'Of course there were doors,' said Bruno with a sigh. 'They're at the end,' he repeated. 'Just past the buffet section.' 'There weren't any doors,' insisted Shmuel. 'If there had been, we would all have got off.'

Glossary:

1 People from different faiths in countries that had been invaded like Poland were sent to a concentration camp (a type of prison camp where they were treated very harshly and many were killed).

2 Jewish people were made to wear armbands with the Star of David to make them stand out.

3 A military armband with the sign of a swastika. This was a symbol of the German invaders.

4 Cracow – a large city in southern Poland. Many Jewish families were forced to move there and live in a small part of the city called a ghetto which was walled off from the rest of the city.

5 The Jewish families were taken to the camps in over-crowded carriages with no windows or seats.

The following extracts are taken from 'The Diary of Anne Frank' between 1942 and 1944, when she lived in hiding in Amsterdam with her family. The Franks were discovered, arrested and transported to Auschwitz on August 4th 1944.

July 8th 1942: "At three o'clock (Hello had left but was supposed to come back later), the doorbell rang. I didn't hear it, since I was out on the balcony, lazily reading in the sun. A little while later Margot appeared in the kitchen doorway looking very agitated. "Father has received a call-up notice from the SS," she whispered. "Mother has gone to see Mr. van Daan" (Mr. van Daan is Father's business partner and a good friend.) I was stunned. A call-up: everyone knows what that means. Visions of concentration camps and lonely cells raced through my head. How could we let Father go to such a fate? "Of course he's not going," declared Margot as we waited for Mother in the living room. "Mother's gone to Mr. van Daan to ask whether we can move to our hiding place tomorrow. The van Daans are going with us. There will be seven of us altogether." Silence. We couldn't speak. The thought of Father off visiting someone in the Jewish Hospital and completely unaware of what was happening, the long wait for Mother, the heat, the suspense – all this reduced us to silence.

July 9th 1942: "Here's a description of the building... A wooden staircase leads from the downstairs hallway to the third floor. At the top of the stairs is a landing, with doors on either side. The door on the left takes you up to the spice storage area, attic and loft in the front part of the house. A typically Dutch, very steep, ankle-twisting flight of stairs also runs from the front part of the house to another door opening onto the street. The door to the right of the landing leads to the Secret Annex at the back of the house. No one would ever suspect there were so many rooms behind that plain grey door. There's just one small step in front of the door, and then you're inside. Straight ahead of you is a steep flight of stairs. To the left is a narrow hallway opening onto a room that serves as the Frank family's living room and bedroom. Next door is a smaller room, the bedroom and study of the two young ladies of the family. To the right of the stairs is a windowless washroom with a sink. The door in the corner leads to the toilet and another one to Margot's and my room... Now I've introduced you to the whole of our lovely Annex!"

August 21st 1942: "Now our Secret Annex has truly become secret. Because so many houses are being searched for hidden bicycles, Mr. Kugler thought it would be better to have a bookcase built in front of the entrance to our hiding place. It swings out on its hinges and opens like a door. Mr. Voskuil did the carpentry work. (Mr. Voskuil has been told that the seven of us are in hiding, and he's been most helpful.) Now whenever we want to go downstairs we have to duck and then jump. After the first three days we were all walking around with bumps on our foreheads from banging our heads against the low doorway. Then Peter cushioned it by nailing a towel stuffed with wood shavings to the doorframe. Let's see if it helps!"

October 9th 1942: "Today I have nothing but dismal and depressing news to report. Our many Jewish friends and acquaintances are being taken away in droves. The Gestapo is treating them very roughly and transporting them in cattle cars to Westerbork, the big camp in Drenthe to which they're sending all the Jews. Miep told us about someone who'd managed to escape from there. It must be terrible in Westerbork. The people get almost nothing to eat, much less to drink, as water is available only one hour a day, and there's only one toilet and sink for several thousand people. Men and women sleep in the same room, and women and children often have their heads shaved. Escape is almost impossible; many people look Jewish, and they're branded by their shorn heads. If it's that bad in Holland, what must it be like in those faraway and uncivilized places where the Germans are sending them? We assume that most of them are being murdered. The English radio says they're being gassed. Perhaps that's the quickest way to die. I feel terrible. Miep's accounts of these horrors are so heartrending... Fine specimens of humanity, those Germans, and to think I'm actually one of them! No, that's not true, Hitler took away our nationality long ago. And besides, there are no greater enemies on earth than the Germans and Jews."

October 20th 1942: "My hands still shaking, though it's been two hours since we had the scare... The office staff stupidly forgot to warn us that the carpenter, or whatever he's called, was coming to fill the extinguishers... After working for about fifteen minutes, he laid his hammer and some other tools on our bookcase (or so we thought!) and banged on our door. We turned white with fear. Had he heard something after all and did he now want to check out this mysterious looking bookcase? It seemed so, since he kept knocking, pulling, pushing and jerking on it. I was so scared I nearly fainted at the thought of this total stranger managing to discover our wonderful hiding place..."

November 19th 1942: "Mr. Dussel has told us much about the outside world we've missed for so long. He had sad news. Countless friends and acquaintances have been taken off to a dreadful fate. Night after night, green and grey military vehicles cruise the streets. They knock on every door, asking whether any Jews live there. If so, the whole family is immediately taken away. If not, they proceed to the next house. It's impossible to escape their clutches unless you go into hiding. They often go around with lists, knocking only on those doors where they know there's a big haul to be made. They frequently offer a bounty, so much per head. It's like the slave hunts of the olden days... I feel wicked sleeping in a warm bed, while somewhere out there my dearest friends are dropping from exhaustion or being knocked to the ground. I get frightened myself when I think of close friends who are now at the mercy of the cruellest monsters ever to stalk the earth. And all because they're Jews."

May 18th 1943: "All college students are being asked to sign an official statement to the effect that they 'sympathize with the Germans and approve of the New Order.' Eighty percent have decided to obey the dictates of their conscience, but the penalty will be severe. Any student refusing to sign will be sent to a German labour camp."

March 29th 1944: "Mr. Bolkestein, the Cabinet Minister, speaking on the Dutch broadcast from London, said that after the war a collection would be made of diaries and letters dealing with the war. Of course, everyone pounced on my diary."

February 3rd 1944: "I've reached the point where I hardly care whether I live or die. The world will keep on turning without me, and I can't do anything to change events anyway. I'll just let matters take their course and concentrate on studying and hope that everything will be all right in the end."

July 15th 1944: "It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too will end, that peace and tranquillity will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realize them."

'The Book Thief', Marcus Zusak:

<https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/the-book-thief-an-extract/>

Key Stage 4

Read the extract from 'The English Patient' and the Poem 'Belsen Silence'. How has the writer used methods to make the realities of war come to life?

In 'The English Patient', Michael Ondaatje, it is 1944, and the war in central Italy is over. It has moved north, leaving in its wake a landscape of ruined places and people. In an isolated Tuscan villa that served as a military hospital, two people remain, forgotten by the rest of the world: a young Canadian nurse, Hana, almost destroyed by war and the death of her father, and her last patient, a man burned beyond recognition, who drifts in and out of his own memories and dreams. Into their lives comes Caravaggio, a thief who has been tortured and maimed by wartime inquisitors, and Kip, a young Sikh who has spent the war dismantling bombs. While events taking place in the outside world prove that history has reached a definitive turning point, in the Villa San Girolamo Ondaatje's four protagonists carry on a remote, intensely personal existence, as they play out their interior drama.

She stands up in the garden where she has been working and looks into the distance. She has sensed a shift in the weather. There is another gust of wind, a buckle of noise in the air, and the tall cypresses sway. She turns and moves uphill toward the house, climbing over a low wall, feeling the first drops of rain on her bare arms. She crosses the loggia and quickly enters the house.

In the kitchen she doesn't pause but goes through it and climbs the stairs which are in darkness and then continues along the long hall, at the end of which is a wedge of light from an open door.

She turns into the room which is another garden--this one made up of trees and bowers painted over its walls and ceiling. The man lies on the bed, his body exposed to the breeze, and he turns his head slowly towards her as she enters.

Every four days she washes his black body, beginning at the destroyed feet. She wets a washcloth and holding it above his ankles squeezes the water onto him, looking up as he murmurs, seeing his smile. Above the shins the burns are worst. Beyond purple. Bone.

She has nursed him for months and she knows the body well. Hipbones of Christ, she thinks. He is her despairing saint. He lies flat on his back, no pillow, looking up at the foliage painted onto the ceiling, its canopy of branches, and above that, blue sky.

She pours calamine in stripes across his chest where he is less burned, where she can touch him. She loves the hollow below the lowest rib, its cliff of skin. Reaching his shoulders she blows cool air onto his neck, and he mutters.

What? she asks, coming out of her concentration.

He turns his dark face with its gray eyes towards her. She puts her hand into her pocket. She unskins the

plum with her teeth, withdraws the stone and passes the flesh of the fruit into his mouth.

He whispers again, dragging the listening heart of the young nurse beside him to wherever his mind is, into that well of memory he kept plunging into during those months before he died.

BELSEN SILENCE – BY IOLO LEWIS

This poem was written by Iolo Lewis who served in the British 11th Armoured Division, which liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in April 1945.

Long gone the sound of battle from this foreign dell,
As we tread again the Belsen grass,
Remembering comrades, young men all,
Who died to reach this awful Hell,
Hallowed now for Eternity,
As the clouds from memory swiftly pass.

Listen then, can't you hear,
The silence here around,
Telling us of terror,
And ancient bestial fear;
How real is this silence,

That permeates from underground?
Only fifty years ago, but now,
Forever, the silence condemns,
For here there lie, anonymous,
'Neath the soil, as we reverently bow,
Remnants of a living dead,
Whose silence still transmits, transcends.

Listen to the silence still,
And lift your head on high,
Are you waiting for a question,
Or an answer, and a void to fill?
Quicken then the pulse, breathe deeper still,
Answer the silence to question, why?

Key Stage 5

Use the link below to view moving portraits of holocaust survivors.

Write a creative piece (any genre) using their imagined voices to convey a story.

<https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/moving-portraits/>

Read this article on famous people's accounts of VE day.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/08/ve-day-what-the-end-of-the-war-was-like-for-those-who-were-there>