

Once in a lifetime read

Rating: 5 Stars

Once is a historical-fiction novel published in 2005 by Morris Gleitzman, an Australian author. It is based around World War II and the Nazi's attempts to exterminate the Jewish people under the leadership of Adolf Hitler. The book's protagonist, Felix, is a young Jewish boy that lives at a Catholic orphanage in Poland. Felix's parents were bookshop owners until they were forced to flee due to the Nazis. Felix's character is innocent and has been taught to pray to God, Jesus, Mary, Joseph and Adolf Hitler, to protect him. The only reason he hasn't been taken yet is that the orphanage he lives at says he is Catholic. The Nazis then turn up and start taking books from the library. Felix then escapes the orphanage with the help of his friends and begins his search for his parents, because after what the Nazis did to the orphanage's books, Felix believes his parents are in danger.

He walks his way toward his home village, as he remembers it. He stays at an abandoned house and hears gunfire in the distance. Further proving his innocence, Felix assumes the people from the house are just hunting, but it is actually a raging war. He finds out all Jews have been taken to the city, so he begins finding his way there. It is on this journey that he meets his companion, a young girl named Zelda, whom he rescues from a burning house, in which Zelda's parents die. They continue on, reaching the group of Jews marching, forced by armed Nazis. Felix tries to leave with Zelda and is nearly shot, but a man named Barney saves them. Barney is a dentist and takes them under his wing. After the Nazis find Barney's hiding place, which contains more kids than just Felix and Zelda, they are sent on a train to a concentration camp. The train is chock-a-block full, and Felix, along with Zelda and one of Barney's kids, make the life-changing decision to jump off. Barney's kid dies, but Zelda and Felix survive. The story picks up exactly where it leaves off in Once's successor, Then.

This book thrives on the emotion it puts the reader through. Many people have been known to cry during this book. The depiction of the horrors Jewish people went through is truly terrifying and excellently portrayed in this novel. The reader is sympathetic toward the protagonists and can find themselves immersed within the novel themselves. The descriptive and emotive language creates lively imagery so well that you can gather a complex and detailed picture of the environment the character is in. A unique technique that I have not seen outside of this book series is also food for thought. This technique is the opening word of every chapter is the title, *Once*. This is an intriguing technique that is employed throughout the entire series, *Then, Now, After, Soon* and *Maybe*.