

## Studied - Fiction | Sample Answer

**Choose a novel you have studied. To what extent has your understanding of people and human behaviour been shaped by reading this novel? Explain your answer with reference to your chosen text.**

**(Question 5, 2018)**

**Title of novel:** Once

**Author:** Morris Gleitzman

'Once' is a novel set in the time of Nazi Germany. It features a nine-year-old Jewish boy, Felix, who escapes an orphanage in Poland on a quest to find his parents.

Before I read the novel 'Once' by Morris Gleitzman, I did not have a thorough grasp of the effects that trauma and desperate situations have on humans, and how the good balances out the evil in the world.

One of the most important things I learned while studying 'Once' is what humans do in desperate situations. This book is filled with examples of desperate situations as families are torn apart and innocent people are killed by the utmost evil. One of these cases is when the protagonist Felix's parents leave him in an orphanage for his own safety knowing they will never see him again. This tremendous sacrifice shaped my knowledge on human behaviour, knowing now that parents will do anything to protect their kids and their kids will always be a priority.

I learnt the heart-breaking truth of how innocence is stripped away in trauma and how it was for Felix when the brutality of the Nazis took away his childlike innocence and imagination. This is apparent throughout the novel as Felix starts to see the harsh reality of the real world and Felix's thinking process adapts as a result of this.

I recognised throughout the novel the difference between good and bad. For example, the benevolence and generosity of Barney- a Jewish man who protects children from Nazis and chose death over abandoning the Jewish orphans he took care of. In contrast to this pure

goodness there was the pure evil of the Nazis. The Nazis killed and tortured innocent people and tore families apart. The good and evil in this case balance each other out, as some people suffer the evil of the Nazis, but others are saved.

Another example of good and evil balancing each other out in this book is when Felix saved a little girl, Zelda, from a deliberate fire set in her house by the Polish resistance. The evil in this is the Polish resistance shooting and killing Zelda's parents and attempting to kill Zelda. The good is represented in Felix saving Zelda, showing that good can come out of a bad situation. An underlying good versus evil in this is the fact that Zelda's parents were evil Nazis but since she was saved by a Jew, she could be raised with different ideals and grow up to be a good person. My understanding of human behaviour was greatly changed by this example. I learned the primary reason why humans commit evil crimes- the influence of their environment growing up. If Zelda had stayed in this Nazi family, she would have been brainwashed at a very young age to have a hatred of innocent Jews. But since she was taken away from this toxic environment, her ideals were changed, and she grew to hate Nazis. This hatred of Nazis is shown when she bit a Nazi soldier to join Felix and Barney on a train of Jewish people instead of safely staying with the Nazis.

I also learnt that one's positivity and imagination dictate their decisions and can be the difference between life and death. This is shown in the novel with Felix's innocence and optimistic imagination as he made different decisions throughout the novel based on his maturity and caution. For example, when Felix was innocent and was not aware of the dangers of Nazi Germany, he naively waved at Nazis and escaped the orphanage to find his mum and dad. Later in the novel when he becomes more mature and cautious, he runs away when a Nazi finds him in the ghetto, knowing that he would be killed if he did not. This taught me that innocence can create ignorance, which can lead to dangerous situations and the outcome of one's survival is essentially based on luck. But I noticed it can also be a good thing. For example, Felix would not have kept his motivation to go to the city if he had not had the blissful idea his parents were there.

In conclusion, this novel has shaped my understanding of the good and bad in the world, the pros and cons of childhood innocence, human behaviour in different situations and how this is affected by one's childhood environment. I also was educated on the lives Jews led in the time of Nazi Germany.