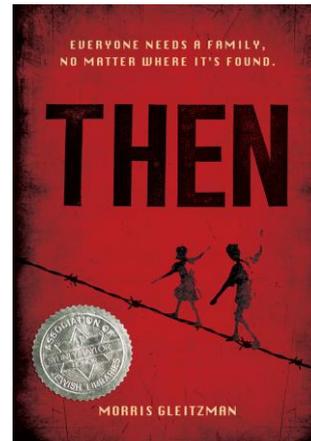


## *Discussion Guide*

### *Then* by Morris Gleitzman

Grade Level:  
7<sup>th</sup> grade and up

**Please note: This guide contains references to plot lines that may spoil the first reading of the book. *Then* is the sequel to *Once* and is followed by *Now*. Discussion guides are available for each title, available from Henry Holt Books for Young Readers.**



By Morris Gleitzman  
Ages 12 and up  
Hardcover ISBN-13: 978-0-8050-9027-7  
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#### *Introduction:*

Ten-year-old Felix and his unlikely companion, Zelda, the daughter of Nazis whom Felix rescued in horrendous circumstances, have managed to escape from a train heading to a concentration camp. Having already experienced many atrocities in their short lives, they set off together in this new country in search of new identities, a new family, and safety.

The beautiful characterization of Felix, his sense of humor, constant faith, love for others, and powerful storytelling ability make compelling and fascinating reading. Just as Felix uses stories as a kind of therapy to help himself and others make sense of the world around him, Morris Gleitzman says in his introduction to *Once*, “This story is my imagination trying to grasp the unimaginable.”

#### *Characters:*

##### Felix

Felix, the narrator, has both the naiveté of a ten-year-old and a maturity far beyond his years, the result of having witnessed many events and actions that not even an adult should be forced to deal with.

- Why do you think Morris Gleitzman chose to tell this story through the eyes of a ten-year-old?
- In what ways does Felix seem childish?
- In what ways is he surprisingly mature?
- Felix forms a strong bond with Zelda, in spite of the fact that her parents were Nazis. What does this reveal about him as a person?
- Even when faced with his own potential discovery and death, Felix remembers to ask Richmal Crompton to protect the other children on the train (page 11). What does this tell us?

- In spite of Zelda's inappropriate behavior, which almost lands them in trouble on numerous occasions, why does Felix never waver in his love for her, nor his determination to protect her?
- After the fishing incident, Felix is sure that retribution will be sought by the Nazis. He spends all night digging a hole for protection, but the hole is too small to hide two people. "I forgot about me," he says (page 131). What does this reveal about Felix?
- Make a list of adjectives that you think describe Felix and provide examples of his behavior in the novel to support your opinion.
- Why is Felix so enamored with Richmal Crompton? Research the William books. Why would a character such as William have held appeal for a boy like Felix?
- Why is it apt that Felix's greatest hero is an author?
- After Genia, Zelda, and Krol are killed, Felix wants to kill as many people as he can. Consider how he has changed from when he was unable to shoot a Nazi at the river. What has caused this change?
- Why does Felix hide away in his hole at the end of the novel?
- Make a list of the ways in which Felix changes during the course of this novel and what causes these changes.

### Zelda

- Felix says, "Zelda may be only six, but she's got the kindness of a ten-year-old" (page 96). What does he mean by this?
- In what ways is Zelda clearly a lot younger than Felix?
- Zelda often says, "Don't you know anything?" Why might Morris Gleitzman have chosen to have her use this expression?
- Zelda's behavior constantly lands the children in trouble. Is she intentionally defiant? Why do you think she behaves so carelessly?
- Why does Zelda claim to be Jewish and denounce her Nazi parents?
- Why is Felix so determined to make her accept her parents?

### ***Discussion Questions:***

- Morris Gleitzman has managed to depict such realistic and human characters that the reader is able to feel some degree of sympathy for almost all of them. Make a list of all of the main characters in the novel and explain whether you feel sympathy toward them and why.
- Why did people such as Genia (and Barney in *Once*) shelter Jews when to do so meant putting their own lives at risk? Would you be prepared to do this? Why?
- How can upbringing shape a person's attitudes or political beliefs? Give examples of situations when you think this may have happened in the book.
- Morris Gleitzman's dedication in *Then* reads "For all the children who have to hide." In many ways, this novel is not about just the children of the Holocaust. Discuss other groups who, throughout history, have been forced to hide to escape persecution.

### ***Themes:***

#### The Impact of War:

Felix asks, "Why do people start wars when they know so many sad things are going to happen? I don't get it." (page 56)

- What is your opinion of this issue?

- What role does fear play during war?
- Why did many young boys want to become members of the Hitler Youth?
- Given what many people see and experience during war, whether on the front lines or at home, do you think it is possible for a war just to end? What might be the long-term social impact of war? Why do many people find it impossible to resume a normal life afterward?

#### Attitudes Toward Jews:

- *Then* gives a chilling picture of how Jews were treated during WWII. Can you think of some examples?
- How does Felix feel about these attitudes towards Jews? How does Zelda feel? Genia? How are each person's feelings complicated by his or her own life story?

#### The Nazis and the Hitler Youth:

- Why did the Nazis take Trotsky and the chickens and shoot Leopold?
- Why were the townspeople ordered into the street to watch the Nazi youth parade?
- Why did the Nazis take over the orphanage?
- How is Amon different from the other boys? How do he and Felix manage to make a connection?
- Why did Amon help Felix?
- In what ways does Amon also suffer because of the Nazis?

#### ***Writing Style:***

- What examples of foreshadowing can you identify in *Then*?
- Each chapter begins with the word "then." Why do you think the author made this choice? How does it affect your reading of the novel?

#### ***Storytelling:***

##### For Discussion:

Throughout both *Once* and *Then*, storytelling is an important notion. At the very end, Felix hopes that others will read his story. It is this belief that carries some feeling of hope despite the otherwise devastating outcome.

- Give examples of how Felix uses storytelling: to distract others, to help keep his and others' spirits high, to provide explanations, to make sense of the impossible.
- Why is it important to tell stories?
- Why is it important that stories of the victims of the Holocaust (and other atrocities) be kept alive?
- What do we learn from stories?

#### ***General Discussion:***

- What does Felix hope will happen when he and his "evidence" are discovered at the end of all these atrocities?
- Do you think the final feeling in this book is one of despair, or does Felix still manage to leave the reader with some hope? Consider Felix's last words, a tribute to Zelda:

“She was only six,” I’ll say, “but she had the loving heart of a ten-year-old.”  
And if people carry on hating each other and killing each other and being  
cruel to each other, I’ll tell them something else.  
“You can be like her,” I’ll say. “Don’t you know anything?”  
Let’s see what they do then. (page 196)

\*Teachers’ notes written by Jean Yates\*

About the Author:



Morris Gleitzman has been a frozen-chicken defroster, fashion-industry trainee, department-store Santa, sugar-mill employee, and screenwriter, among other things. Now he's one of Australia’s best-loved children’s book authors. His books have been published all over the world. You can visit him and learn more at [www.morrisgleitzman.com](http://www.morrisgleitzman.com).

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*Also Available from Morris Gleitzman:*



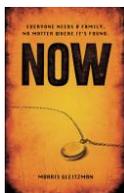
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**Discussion guide available**



*Now*

Ages 12 and up

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