

Discussion Guide

Now by Morris Gleitzman

Grade Level:
7th grade and up

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

Introduction:

Now brings the story of Felix and Zelda to a conclusion. While it can be read as a stand-alone book, it will have the most impact when read after the other two titles.

In *Now*, Felix is about to turn eighty. He lives in Australia with his granddaughter, Zelda. Her parents are doctors currently working with the underprivileged in Africa. Zelda has some understanding of her grandfather's past, but a lot of it remains shrouded in mystery.

As an outsider newly arrived in town, Zelda faces bullying from others at school. Unwilling to upset her grandfather, she deals with this herself, although it causes her to question her self-worth and makes her act out of fear. As her own situation builds to a climax, bushfires surround the town, threatening its inhabitants. Felix and Zelda are forced to find their inner strength and use their resourcefulness to get them out of this dangerous situation. In doing so, Zelda has to decide whether or not to help her enemies, while Felix confronts many of the demons of his past. Ultimately, the fear and danger they face has a cathartic effect on both of them, enabling them to lay their ghosts to rest and find their own identities.

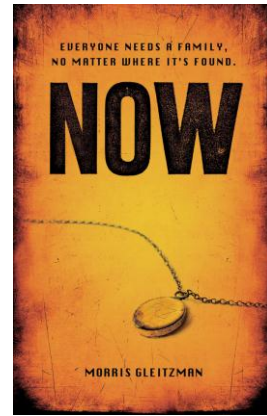
Before Reading:

- Recap the stories of *Once* and *Then*, and consider how *Then* ended. Make some predictions about what might happen to Felix after these events. What do you think Felix will do in his life? Where do you see him as an old man?

Characters:

Felix

- In this third installment, Felix is eighty years old. He still demonstrates many of his childhood characteristics, especially his selflessness and desire to help those less fortunate. How is Felix the grandfather like Felix the child?



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Zelda

- Zelda has been named after the little girl Felix tried so hard to save during the war and for whose death he has always carried guilt. Zelda feels that she does not deserve the name and fears that she will never be able to live up to her namesake. Her fears seem to be true when Felix says that he wishes her parents had not called her Zelda. While she believes this is because he sees her as being inferior, though, Felix says this because he believes the name is unfair to his granddaughter. Why does he feel this way?

Tonya

- Tonya appears to be a stereotypical bully, out to make Zelda's life a misery for no reason. Like many bullies, she gains her power and status from her group and is most fearsome when there are others around. There are hints, however, that she is not as nasty as she appears. What are some indications that she is motivated by good intentions, even though her actions are misguided?

Themes:

The Impact of War

Even seventy years later, World War II has clearly had an enormous impact, not just on Felix but also on the members of his family who did not experience the Holocaust themselves.

- Which of Felix's characteristics are attributable to his experiences during the war?
- In what ways are the lives of Zelda and her parents different from those of other families because of Felix's experiences?
- Felix's marriage dissolved, and his wife went to live in New Zealand. Zelda thinks this is because Felix spent so much time at the hospital with his patients (page 47). But what other factors could have placed stress on his marriage?
- Zelda blames the Nazis for the fire (page 98), which is naive and even humorous. But in what way can she actually be seen to be right?
- Felix met Miklos at his Holocaust survivors group. Why do you think this sort of group would be necessary? Zelda says, "When you've been very seriously bullied, there are sad things you can only say to other people who've been very seriously bullied too, because only they really understand what you're talking about" (page 66). Do you think that people who didn't live through the Holocaust can really have any understanding of it?

Bullying

- Tonya tells Zelda, "You should be locked up. With a tattoo on your head that says liar. Vermin like you are a menace" (page 75). Why would these words have made Felix so angry?
- Felix tells her, "People die because of stupid vicious talk like that. . . . Innocent children. . . . Murdered. Don't you know anything?" (page 75). Is Felix overreacting?

Storytelling

Just as he did with his childhood friend Zelda, Felix uses storytelling to explain things to his granddaughter. While he protects her from many of the horrors he experienced, he draws upon his past to help teach her about life and prepare her for her future.

- Why does Felix react the way he does when his granddaughter Zelda gives him a copy of *William's Happy Days*?
- Why has he kept his Polish edition all these years?

Heroes

- Felix doesn't like being called a hero. Why?
- Do you think Felix is a hero?
- Who would you list as being a hero?

The Bushfire

- In what way is Zelda and Felix's experience in the bushfire similar to the horrors Felix faced as a child? What memories might the fire have dredged up for Felix?
- In a strange way, the fire proves cathartic for both Felix and Zelda. How does it help them both overcome their pasts? Their fears?
- How would people have been affected after the bushfire? How would they feel? What physical and mental challenges would they face? Make a list of any effects you can think of. Now compare these to what Felix experienced in his past. In what ways are they similar?
- Can anything positive be gained from an event like the bushfire or what Felix experienced as a child? Make a list of anything you can see as a positive outcome.

General Discussion:

- Is it possible to leave the past behind us and only focus on the present, or do you think that we are ultimately a product of our experiences?
- Can it be dangerous to dwell on the past? Or to ignore the past? How?
- Do you believe in fate? That certain things happen to certain people at certain times for a reason? Why or why not?

* 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.

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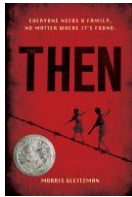
Once

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Discussion guide available



Then

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Discussion guide available

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