

Friedrich Study Guide

Friedrich by Hans Peter Richter

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Friedrich Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	5
About the Author.....	6
Plot Summary.....	7
"Setting the Scene (1925)".....	9
"Potato Pancakes (1929)".....	10
"Snow (1929)".....	11
"Grandfather (1930)".....	12
"Friday Evening (1930)".....	13
"School Begins (1931)".....	14
"The Way to School (1933)".....	15
"The Jungvolk (1933)".....	16
"The Ball (1933)".....	17
"Conversation on the Stairs (1933)".....	18
"Herr Schneider (1933)".....	19
"The Hearing (1933)".....	20
"In the Department Store (1933)".....	21
"The Teacher (1934)".....	22
"The Cleaning Lady (1935)".....	23
"Reasons (1936)".....	24
"In the Swimming Pool (1938)".....	25
"The Festival (1938)".....	26
"The Encounter (1938)".....	27
"The Pogrom (1938)".....	28



["The Death \(1938\)"..... 29](#)

["Lamps \(1939\)"..... 30](#)

["The Movie \(1940\)"..... 31](#)

["Benches \(1940\)"..... 32](#)

["The Rabbi \(1941\)"..... 33](#)

["Stars \(1941\)"..... 34](#)

["A Visit \(1941\)"..... 35](#)

["Vultures \(1941\)"..... 36](#)

["The Picture \(1942\)"..... 37](#)

["In the Shelter \(1942\)"..... 38](#)

["The End \(1942\)"..... 39](#)

[Characters..... 40](#)

[Objects/Places..... 45](#)

[Setting..... 47](#)

[Social Sensitivity..... 48](#)

[Literary Qualities..... 49](#)

[Themes..... 50](#)

[Themes/Characters..... 52](#)

[Style..... 54](#)

[Quotes..... 56](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 59](#)

[Essay Topics..... 60](#)

[Ideas for Reports and Papers..... 61](#)

[Further Study..... 62](#)

[Related Titles..... 63](#)

[Copyright Information..... 64](#)

Overview

Fritz, the adult German narrator of *Friedrich*, describes the experiences he shared with his Jewish best friend and upstairs neighbor, Friedrich Schneider, from 1925 until 1942. 'He remembers events of the Nazi regime from the innocent and nonjudgmental viewpoint of his youth.

Richter initially conveys the population's attitude toward Jews through the seemingly innocuous phrases Fritz's mother utters about Jews and the strong hatred his visiting grandfather and the families' landlord, Herr Resch, express. The narrative then relates the historical sequence of escalating hatred, violence, and death suffered by German Jews during the Third Reich. Although Fritz mentions that all Germans know of the "Final Solution" and concentration camps, he does not include details of concentration camp atrocities. Through his objective characterizations of people who interact with the Schneiders, the author reveals how average citizens engaged in and responded to anti-Semitism, while allowing readers to formulate their own interpretations and responses.

Richter explores the serious theme, based upon documented history, that governmental or personal hatred directed toward any group should never be tolerated. He shows that accepting even the first simple inroads of general bigotry without speaking out immediately can lead to utter debasement of personal character and self-respect, which in turn results in social and personal ruin.

Richter shows how easily the veneer of civilization and socialization can be removed from mankind. He also demonstrates that people like Fritz's parents, who passively disagree with bigoted or discriminatory practices of their government, must unite and actively fight for justice in order to maintain a safe world.

To accept evil because of fear is to accept the destruction of civilization. Richter's theme applies to readers of all ages and backgrounds, especially to those who have felt the sting of discrimination and hatred. The author also keeps alive for young people a critical part of recent history by recounting the chilling events and lessons of the Holocaust. But despite the elements of historical fiction and autobiography, *Friedrich* presents a fragmented, incomplete view of the historical reality. As a result, the novel's impact and value could be enhanced by reading it in conjunction with a more historical account of Hitler's Germany.

About the Author

Hans Peter Richter was born on April 28, 1925, in Cologne, Germany, the son of Peter and Anna Eckert Richter.

Educated in German schools, he later studied at several German universities, graduating with a doctorate from the Technical University Hannover in 1968.

He spent three years, 1942-1945, in the German Army, rising to the rank of lieutenant and receiving several decorations, including the Iron Cross. He married Elfriede Feldmann.

Richter has written many types of literature, including essays, radio and television scripts, book-length scholarly publications in journals, and texts on reading and children's literature. Published in German in 1961, *Friedrich* became his most well-known work of fiction and received German prizes in 1961 and 1964. Translated into English by Edite Kroll in 1970, the novel won the 1972 Mildred L. Batchelder Award for best children's book in translation, given by the American Library Association. Also popular are his first book, *Uncle and His Merry-Go-Round*, and *I Was There*. He describes his four children as the inspiration for his books, noting that the books grew thicker as his children grew bigger.



Plot Summary

Friedrich tells the story of a Jewish boy, Friedrich Schneider and his Christian friend, the unnamed narrator, from 1925 until 1942. The story follows them, as they grow up among the Nazis, who relentlessly restrict the rights of Jews. Friedrich ultimately dies in an Allied bombing attack, having been turned away from an air raid shelter.

Two boys, one Christian and one Jewish, are born within a week of one another to parents who rent apartments in a three-floor house. They are friendly, but not close, until Frau Schneider needs a babysitter, and the two boys play together for the first time. Herr Schneider works for the post office, but the narrator's father is out of work and dependent on his anti-Jewish father-in-law, who does not want his grandson to play with Friedrich, the Jew. The neighbors continue to rely on one another. One Friday afternoon, Frau Schneider baby-sits for the narrator. At dusk, he participates in the Sabbath meal and is enchanted. The families together celebrate the first day of school by an outing to an amusement park, which the narrator's family can ill afford.

In 1933, the Nazis come to power and begin restricting Jewish rights. The boys witness incidents of vandalism and intimidation. The narrator joins the *Jungvolk* and takes Friedrich to a meeting, where a rabid Party speaker denounces kosher butchering and makes the boys chant about the Jews being the Germans' affliction. A shopkeeper blames Friedrich for breaking her window, and neither she nor a police officer will believe the narrator, when he admits that he is to fault.

Landlord Resch wants to evict the Schneiders and takes him to court, claiming a Jew under his roof is destroying his standing with Party members and clients. A righteous judge rejects the argument. The Nazis decree that Jews cannot hold civil service jobs, and Herr Schneider finds a better position as a manager at a department store. The Nazis decree separate schools for Jewish children and the teacher explains the 2,000-year history of prejudice against Jews. The Nazis decree young German women may not work for Jews, and Frau Schneider loses her cleaning lady, who is fond of Friedrich. Things get steadily worse, as the Nazis tighten legal clamps.

The narrator attends Friedrich's Bar Mitzvah, as he accepts responsibility for his own destiny before God at age thirteen. Christian and Jewish students in procession meet and the Nazi physical education teacher makes his boys chant cruel cadences. Then, in 1938, official pogroms are ordered, and the narrator is pulled into the vortex of evil, destroying Jewish property. The violence comes to his own building, but he does not join in sacking the Schneider's apartment. Frau Schneider is mortally injured and dies later that night. The widower is again out of work, along with all Jews, and he and Friedrich survive by repairing lamps for friends. Two years later, wanting to see a popular (albeit anti-Jewish) movie, Friedrich panics when IDs are demanded. Jews are forbidden to see movies. Friedrich falls in love with Helga, a beautiful German girl, who refuses to go along with the Nazi party line. He, however, refuses to endanger her and withdraws, brokenhearted. The Schneiders give refuge to a famous rabbi for whom the Nazis are searching. Friedrich demands this is their duty, but the rabbi is willing to take



his chances, trusting God, rather than endanger others. He and Schneider sew yellow stars of David on their clothing, as dictated by the Nazis. They tell the narrator about medieval times, and narrate a parable about persecution.

The police raid Resch's house and haul off the rabbi and Herr Schneider. Friedrich is out for the night, but returns to find Resch looting the apartment. When the landlord screams for help against the Jew attacking him, Friedrich flees and is unseen for a year. He appears in 1942, filthy and ravenous, seeking from the narrator's family a photo that includes his parents taken at the amusement park years ago. He is beginning to forget their faces. A siren announces the daily flight of Allied bombers and the narrator's family goes to the shelter. They convince Friedrich he is safer in their apartment, because Resch is the air raid warden and will turn him in. The bombing is so severe Friedrich pounds on the metal door of the shelter, begging to come in. Everyone favors admitting him, but Resch threatens to turn them in. Friedrich voluntarily leaves and, when the bombing ends, is found dead of shrapnel wounds on Resch's porch. Holding his garden gnome, also wounded by shrapnel, the cruel landlord remarks Friedrich has died a gentler death than he could have expected.



"Setting the Scene (1925)"

"Setting the Scene (1925)" Summary

Germany is full of unemployment and hardship, including the narrator's father. They live in an apartment in the Resch home, one floor below the reclusive Schneiders. The narrator is born one week before Friedrich Schneider, knows her birth adds a financial burden on her family, but feels wanted. The two sets of parents get to know one another better after these births

"Setting the Scene (1925)" Analysis

The first section determines the action takes place somewhere in Germany after World War I, when the victorious Allies are taking economic vengeance on the losers and introduces us to a cranky landlord and the two families who rent apartments from him.



"Potato Pancakes (1929)"

"Potato Pancakes (1929)" Summary

Friedrich visits the narrator's apartment for the first time when his mother must attend to business at city hall. The narrator is defensive of his toys, but is won over when Friedrich produces a twig he uses as a cuckoo whistle. They play happily and then help the narrator's Mother prepare potato pancakes, her husband's favorite, and a rare treat. The boys fight over the first pancake but then share it and consume the whole batch. Mother gives them a rollicking bath and mentions Friedrich's circumcision.

"Potato Pancakes (1929)" Analysis

The second scene portrays two boys playing together for the first time, after being neighbors for four years. We see Friedrich's cleverness and the narrator's childish selfishness and easy awe. Friedrich's being Jewish is first mentioned jokingly, as the boys bathe together.

"Snow (1929)"

"Snow (1929)" Summary

That winter, Frau Resch clears the path of snow to the narrator's chagrin, and Friedrich is allowed to go out and play. The narrator's mother is busy and keeps brushing aside his requests to join Friedrich, which grow more intense, when Frau Schneider comes out to play with her son. The narrator watches them enjoying a snowball fight, slicking down a path for good sliding, and making a fine snowman. Finally, the narrator's mother is ready, and dresses them both warmly. They look out the window, when Herr Resch shrieks at Friedrich to get off his snow covered rose bushes.

"Snow (1929)" Analysis

We next see the contrast between Friedrich and his mother happily playing in the snow, and the narrator, nagging his frustrated, overworked mother to take him out to join them. It ends abruptly with the landlord's angry epithet, "dirty Jewboy," launched at a joyous four-year-old. The narrator's mother meekly orders him away from the window.



"Grandfather (1930)"

"Grandfather (1930)" Summary

The narrator's maternal grandfather works for the railroad and visits when his travels bring him to town. In preparation, Mother scrubs the five-year-old, until his hands are raw, and dresses him in his Sunday best. She cleans the apartment thoroughly and buys expensive real coffee beans. Grandfather inspects the hands before he will shake them and the bottoms of his shoes for proper polishing. He assumes the position at the head of the table and never fails to remind Father of his failure to take care of his family. He ought to have joined the railroad, as the narrator certainly will. Father can say nothing, because Grandfather's checks tide them while he is on unemployment.

A bump is heard overhead, and Father explains that it is Friedrich, the narrator's friend. The Schneiders are a nice Jewish family. Grandfather tells about an overly friendly Jewish boss he had once had, whom no one liked. Herr Cohn wore a prayer shawl under his clothing and never removed his hat indoors. Mother and Father have no comment. Grandfather reminds them the Jews crucified Our Lord, and Father objects the Schneiders did not do this. Grandfather stands up to demand that the narrator not associate with Friedrich. Friedrich rings the bell, and the narrator apologizes that he cannot play. The parents tell Grandfather that it is only a neighborhood boy and distract him with coffee.

"Grandfather (1930)" Analysis

We learn the landlord is not alone in his reaction to the Jews. Grandfather has stories about their "otherness" in dress and manners, and declares Christians must remember they are guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He forbids his grandson from playing with Friedrich, and the parents offer only token opposition. This would clearly have been pointless, even if the rigid old man had not held the destitute family's economic fate in his hands.



"Friday Evening (1930)"

"Friday Evening (1930)" Summary

With the narrator's father looking for a job, his mother does other people's laundry, much to her shame. Frau Schneider watches the narrator in her apartment. The six-year-old notices something on their doorpost, and Frau Schneider explains how the mezuzah helps Jews remember God and his commandments. As sundown nears, the narrator watches Frau Schneider prepare for the Sabbath meal. The brilliant white tablecloth, loaves of bread, candles, and wine glasses strike the narrator. Friedrich appears in his best clothes, Herr Schneider arrives from work, and prayers and blessings commence in Hebrew. The narrator partakes of the wine and bread, and takes home some pears when they hear downstairs his mother return.

"Friday Evening (1930)" Analysis

The narrator takes in stride the Sabbath celebration in which he participates, when his mother is late in returning home. Friedrich is obviously excited by the weekly ritual, and the narrator is most struck by the last streak of red in the sky, as the sun sets.



"School Begins (1931)"

"School Begins (1931)" Summary

Friedrich and the narrator sit together on the first day of school, after which it is traditional in Germany for families to celebrate. Their parents give them colorful paper bags. Friedrich opens his immediately and shares candy with everyone. The narrator is ready to do the same, but his mother motions him to wait. When the boys push to spend the day at the amusement park, the narrator's parents make excuses, but the Schneiders will not take no for an answer. The narrator sees his parents fretting over money and their discomfort having the Schneiders buy ride tickets, cotton candy, and sausages. The narrator's father is proud to buy licorice for everyone and, as they are leaving, exhausted, demands to pay for a group photograph of them seated on an expanding wooden horse. Everyone looks happy in the "remembrance" picture, although the narrator's father poses stiffly. At home, the narrator discovers his first-day bag contains no candy, and mother explains it is because they are poor. There will be no lunch tomorrow, because they spent it at the amusement park.

"School Begins (1931)" Analysis

This section shows how the first day of school is celebrated in Germany between the wars and how Jews and Christian families can get along. It also makes clear how deeply the depression has affected ordinary people, making them choose between a day of celebration and food the next day. The narrator's parents are anxious to put on a good face. The Schneiders, whether knowing their situation or not, try unobtrusively to make the day enjoyable, but a six-year-old can accurately his parents' faces and body language.



"The Way to School (1933)"

"The Way to School (1933)" Summary

Friedrich tells the narrator about a visit to a pediatrician to get his ears cleaned, but the doctor had given him some good-tasting medicine instead. They pass Dr. Jakob Askenase's office, and see someone has recently scrawled "Jew" across his sign in red paint. Knowing the doctor has no Saturday office hours, Friedrich rings anyway. After some small talk, the boys tell the doctor about the graffiti. He turns serious and sends them straight home. As they leave, the boys see people gathered at the corner and figure there has been an accident. The crowd is surrounding the stationary shop of Abraham Rosenthal, a kindly old man who allows the children to joke about him looking like a goat. A man in gray pants and a yellow shirt - with a swastika armband on his left sleeve - is trying to keep people from entering the store. He waves a sign proclaiming, "Don't Buy From Jews." An old woman squeezes past, and the bystanders grin, but the Nazi strikes a pose and does not move. Soon, the old woman emerges, muscles past the Nazi, and walks up the street displaying the wrapping paper she has bought. The Nazi demands Friedrich and the narrator leave, when they greet Rosenthal. They stand their ground, to the crowd's horror, until Herr Schneider arrives and takes them home.

"The Way to School (1933)" Analysis

This scene is specifically set on the day the new Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, calls for a one-day boycott of Jewish businesses (Saturday, April 1, 1933. See the "Chronology," pg. 139 and following.) A doctor has his sign vandalized, and a storeowner is picketed, precisely because they are Jews. Friedrich defies the Nazi, but the doctor and his father clearly see the growing menace.



"The *Jungvolk* (1933)"

"The *Jungvolk* (1933)" Summary

The narrator fetches Friedrich to take him to club night at the *Jungvolk*. The narrator has been a member for a while and taken part in public marches. Friedrich envies him and hopes his father some day will let him join. The narrator warns Friedrich not to let members know he is Jewish. He describes the squad leader, whose neckerchief had been slashed by a communist and is displayed as a symbol of valor. The narrator helps Friedrich don a black scarf and is surprised Friedrich has a grand ring for it, complete with swastika, better even than the squad leader. Friedrich feels proud, as they enter the parade grounds. None of the members is properly dressed in brown, but all have a triangular neckerchief with the corner showing below the collar in back. Friedrich is excited to be there.

The platoon leader arrives late, wearing the regulation uniform. They are ordered into ranks and march into the windowless clubroom. Hitler's picture, the squad leader's famous scarf, two black pennants bearing the *Jungvolk* victory rune, and maxims decorate the walls. Friedrich joins in the "*Sieg Heil*" greeting with tears of joy in his eyes. Special Delegate Gelko from the District Office is introduced. A dwarf, dressed in regulation brown, stands on an orange crate to address the boys about the danger Jews represent to the German nation. Gelko seems to sense Friedrich's rapt attention and focuses on him. He talks about the cruelty of kosher butchering - letting the animal slowly bleed to death, as the Jewish God demands. Friedrich nearly faints. Gelko talks about Jews murdering Christian children, committing crimes, and causing wars. The narrator shudders. Gelko makes them repeat the new motto, "The Jews are our affliction!" Gelko singles Friedrich out to repeat it, which he does twice, and then flees, leaving his ring in Gelko's hand. The narrator remains at the meeting.

"The *Jungvolk* (1933)" Analysis

A vigorous Nazi youth organization is mounting parades in town and holding regular meetings. The narrator has joined and Friedrich wishes he could, but his father forbids it. We accompany them to a guest night and hear a guest speaker present the party line. To be certified kosher, animals must bleed out completely, because, the Bible says that life is in the blood, and only God controls life. The Nazi uses this to "prove" Jewish cruelty. He mentions the "blood libel," whereby Jews kill Christian children and mix their blood into their Passover bread. The Nazis with fervor take up these legends, dating from medieval times. One is surprised, seeing Friedrich so naive about the *Jungvolk*, so enthralled with the trappings, and fleeing after denouncing his own people. Heretofore, he has been stronger and more demonstrative than the narrator.



"The Ball (1933)"

"The Ball (1933)" Summary

Friedrich and the narrator hurry home, playing catch. Friedrich misses a throw, and the ball breaks a store window. The owner emerges screaming, "Thieves! Burglars!" while her husband watches calmly. She blames the "good-for-nothing Jewboy," and Jewish department store owners for ruining business. "Hitler will show you," she menaces. The narrator steps forward to admit fault, as the husband cleans up the mess. She demands why he is defending this "rotten Jewboy," just because they live in the same house. The police arrive, and the woman demands that he not listen to the narrator. The officer tells him he is too young to understand how sneaky and dishonest the Jews are. The narrator insists the woman had not seen what happened, but the officer will now allow him to explain. The officer leads the boys home, followed by the angry woman. They meet an astonished Herr Schneider en route. Schneider hears the woman out, then looks into Friedrich's eyes and asks if he broke the window intentionally. The narrator again confesses. Schneider dares the woman to register a formal complaint, remarking, "you know where I live!" and offers payment for the damage.

"The Ball (1933)" Analysis

This scene deepens the sense that hatred and jealousy of the Jews is not limited to a few radicals. The storeowner and police officer both attest to this. Several times, it is said ominously that everyone knows where the Schneiders live - and that they are friends with the narrator's family. Hitler's plans for the Jews are mentioned for the first time.



"Conversation on the Stairs (1933)"

"Conversation on the Stairs (1933)" Summary

Resch meets Schneider on the second-floor landing and demands to speak with him. He rings the narrator's bell and demands the narrator's father witness what he is about to say. Resch gives the Schneiders notice to vacate their apartment. Witnessing this, neither boy understands anything. Schneider and the narrator's father both protest Resch has no right to do this, as laws protect tenants. The narrator's father refuses to act as witness and slams his door. Schneider begs for time to find another apartment and asks why Schneider is doing this. "Because you are a Jew!" is the answer, as the landlord stamps downstairs.

"Conversation on the Stairs (1933)" Analysis

This scene sets up a test of whether Jews can be turned out of their homes. The narrator's father turns brave in refusing to witness the eviction notice, while Schneider appears surprisingly abject, begging for time and an explanation, which by now is obvious to all.



"Herr Schneider (1933)"

"Herr Schneider (1933)" Summary

Friedrich and the narrator sit on the curb of an empty street, with Friedrich explaining math problems to his distracted friend. A downcast drunk shuffles by, and they recognize Friedrich's father. Tears run down his face. It's the first time the narrator has seen a grown man weep. Friedrich goes indoors with his father, and the narrator goes upstairs to tell his mother. Sure something dreadful must have happened, she says they must be quiet today, so as not to disturb the Schneiders. Pale, unkempt and anxious, Frau Schneider comes down toward evening, collapses on a kitchen chair, and sobs loudly. She is afraid. The narrator's mother brews coffee, adds a good shot of brandy, and feeds it to Frau Schneider by spoon to calm her. Eventually, Frau Schneider confides her husband has been forced to retire from his civil service job at age 32, because they are Jews.

"Herr Schneider (1933)" Analysis

The "Chronology" suggests this scene takes place on or soon after April 7, 1933. Herr Schneider is illegally fired from his civil service job for being Jewish. The fate Hitler has in mind for all Jews is growing clear, and both Schneiders shed tears of fear. He is shown shuffling down the street, as the epitome of defeat and weeping. Friedrich is shown drawing away from the narrator in diligence, but they are still constant companions. One wonders whether membership in the *Jungvolk* is what is disturbing the narrator so badly.



"The Hearing (1933)"

"The Hearing (1933)" Summary

After studying the *Resch v. Schneider* lawsuit, the Judge tells Resch's attorney he sees no legal ground for evicting the Schneiders. The lawyer begins a speech about the rights every German has enjoyed since Roman times, but is told to stick to current statutes and be quick. The narrator has never been in court before, but he and his mother have come to support Frau Schneider. Friedrich's eyes show fear. Resch has been a Nazi for a year, the lawyer explains, and having a Jewish tenant violates the Nazi ideology. He demands the Schneider be ordered to vacate and pay legal costs. Schneider firmly demands the case be dismissed, because he has lived in the apartment ten years with no problems. Resch complains party and business friends will not enter his house, because Jews live there, and cites articles in *Der St'rmer*, but the judge cuts off a political speech. Resch confesses he has always known the Schneiders are Jewish but maintains "times have changed." The judge demands what guarantee Resch can give he and the Nazis will not soon turn on Catholics and vegetarians. The attorney withdraws the claim as Resch storms out of court. Friedrich cries out, and the judge asks him warmly why he is weeping. He says his job is to see justice is done. Friedrich says, "You, yes!"

"The Hearing (1933)" Analysis

The judge represents the last of the Old Guard Germans, standing up for law and order and resisting the Nazis' situational ethics. The social pressure put on Germans to break any ties with Jews is clear, even though the political speeches are cut short.



"In the Department Store (1933)"

"In the Department Store (1933)" Summary

Friedrich, wearing a beautiful new suit, leads the narrator to see something amazing. Friedrich exchanges "Heil Hitler!" greetings with a man outside the District Council, and they enter the Herschel Meyer department store by the main entrance. They take escalators to the third-floor toy department, which is laden with toys of all sorts. Heir Schneider, wearing a black frock coat, is the manager and takes them on a tour. Unexpectedly, he asks the narrator how he enjoys the *Jungvolk*, explaining Friedrich has told him about it. The narrator talks enthusiastically about a camping trip they are planning. He wishes that Friedrich could join them. Schneider next asks what the narrator's father thinks about the *Jungvolk*, and he says his father has encouraged him to do his duty regularly and punctually, particularly since he himself joined the Nazi Party. Schneider shows fear. The narrator says his father believes this will be good for the family. Schneider turns the boys over to Frdulein Ewert, a young salesgirl, with orders they may each select a one-mark toy, to be charged to him. Schneider no longer smiles as he turns and waves.

"In the Department Store (1933)" Analysis

This scene shows Schneider landing on his feet after being fired from his job and the high degree of fear that comes when the narrator's father joins the Nazi Party, apparently as expediency rather than for any ideological reasons. The narrator is still completely naive about the party's views on the Jews. Amazingly, after Gelko's speech, he is caught up in the Boy Scouts' like activities. Recall the nasty store owner's claim that Jewish-owned department stores are running small German shops out of business. He warns that everyone knows where the Schneiders live, particularly since the trial.



"The Teacher (1934)"

"The Teacher (1934)" Summary

Teacher Neudorf asks his students to remain after the dismissal bell, and builds anticipation by slowly lighting his pipe and sitting on a front desk. He asks if the students have heard about the Jews recently and says he must talk about them today. Everyone listens closely. Neudorf says 2,000 years ago, the Jews had their own land, Israel, which the Germans call Palestine. Romans governed them, until they revolted in 70 A.D. However, the uprising was put down, the Second Temple destroyed, and the leaders banished. A generation later, the Jews rose again, and the Romans leveled Jerusalem and scattered the Jews over the whole earth. Many of them prospered.

The Crusaders later fought to liberate the Holy Grave, and many people wondered why the Jews living among them were not to be forced to become Christians. Many Jews fled to avoid death, to Poland and Russia, but there too they were persecuted, forced to live in ghettos, and allowed only to work in the trades and money lending. After a pause, he continues, stating that the Christians' Old Testament is the same as the Jews' Holy Scriptures. The Torah ("instruction"), God's commandments through Moses, and the Talmud ("study"), interpretation of the Torah, teach Orthodox Jews how to live. It is difficult keeping the Sabbath and kosher. The Torah also prophesies persecution if they break the law, until the Messiah comes to lead them to the Promised Land and establishes his Kingdom among them. Jews do not believe Jesus is the true Messiah any more than other imposters. Many Christians still do not forgive the Jews for crucifying Jesus, say absurd things about them, and look for opportunities to persecute them alone. They say Jews are strange, sinister, and too capable. It is very quiet when Neudorf finishes. He asks them how Jews could be anything but crafty and sly, when everyone wants to torment them. How can they not be avaricious and deceitful when they never know when they will be robbed and dispossessed again? Jews have survived 2,000 years of persecution by doing things better than those they live among. Many are great scholars and artists. Most of all, they are human beings. Relighting his pipe, Neudorf reveals he is telling them this, because Friedrich will no longer be allowed to attend their school. He emphasizes this is not a punishment, but only a change, and he implores them to remain Friedrich's friends. Everyone proclaims, "Heil Hitler!"

"The Teacher (1934)" Analysis

The "Chronology" shows Jewish students being driven out of German schools since April of 1933. Neudorf's summary of 2,000 years of persecution and survival is compact, factual, moving, and brave in its conclusions. He hopes the children will remain friends with Friedrich after he is banished to the Jewish school, and says the obligatory "Heil Hitler!" as he dismisses them. One wonders whether the righteous judge, seen earlier, has also been compromised.



"The Cleaning Lady (1935)"

"The Cleaning Lady (1935)" Summary

Hardworking, thorough Frau Penk does housework for Frau Schneider and the narrator's mother. The narrator's father finds good work after joining the Nazi Party. Penk works, because she is bored at home and likes buying things. The narrator hears Frau Schneider ring the doorbell and ask to speak with Frau Penk about changing their appointment Friday to accommodate a doctor's appointment. Frau Penk apologetically responds that she had planned on coming to tell her that she can no longer work for her. She hugs Friedrich tenderly. Frau Schneider says she understands the reasons and is not angry. The narrator's mother demands to know whether the women have been quarreling, and how Frau Penk can give up such a good position. Frau Penk says she is only 28, and quotes the new Nazi law forbidding Germans under age 35 to work for Jews. Frau Penk recalls watching a young woman who loves a Jew being paraded through town with a sign around her neck, and fears the same fate or prison. Her husband, a former communist, must be particularly careful about their words and behavior.

"The Cleaning Lady (1935)" Analysis

The story jumps forward a year to show the effects of the September 15, 1935, *N'rnberg Laws* depriving Jews of citizenship and forbidding Germans under age 35 to work for Jews. In Frau Penk, we see how peaceably Jews and Germans have coexisted, and how the Nazis use fear and intimidation to break this atmosphere of trust. Note the communists have been Hitler's worst political enemies and are being dealt with, as Hitler consolidates his power.



"Reasons (1936)"

"Reasons (1936)" Summary

The narrator's father comes home tired and late from a Party meeting and reads his paper absent-mindedly while listening for sounds on the stairway. Hearing Herr Schneider, he insists he and Friedrich come into his apartment. He offers Schneider one of his Sunday cigars and uncharacteristically begins chain-smoking cigarettes. With guilt, the narrator's father first confesses he has joined the Party, which Schneider confesses he knows. Joining has ended his long unemployment and they are doing well. Schneider says that if he were not a Jew, he would also join. The narrator's father asks if every party and leadership does not have a dark side, and Schneider says painfully he is in the shadows this time. Fear has left him. The boys listen to the serious talk but understand nothing.

The narrator's father comes to the point. Why have the Schneiders not yet left Germany, where things can only get worse for Jews? He begs him to think of his family. Herr Schneider thanks him for his frankness but insists that he and all his relatives are German, have nowhere to go abroad, and doubt anything better would await Jews elsewhere. They have not been bothered since the Olympics opened. The narrator's father asks him not to trust this peace. Schneider says Jews have learned over 2,000 years to accept prejudice and is certain modern human beings are reasonable. The narrator's father warns it is not a small group of Jew-haters anymore, but the government itself that opposes them. Schneider is encouraged, because the state might curtail liberties but will not slaughter them piteously, as the people might. God has given the Jews the task of learning to suffer - which means no longer fleeing, but remaining where they are. The narrator's father admires his faith but again urges him to get away. Schneider cannot believe anything horrible could happen in the 20th century. They part solemnly, with Schneider asking the narrator's father to take care of his wife and son, should anything happen to him.

"Reasons (1936)" Analysis

By 1936, the Nazis are the German state, and the two fathers discuss what this means for the Jews. The narrator's father wants his friend to escape while he can, but Schneider feels his life rooted in Germany and cannot believe 20th century people could commit medieval crimes against the Jews. Legally, the Jews are no longer German citizens. They are "subjects." The Nazis have "cleaned up their act" for the 1936 Olympics. The narrator's father begs Schneider to take advantage of this lull, which will not last. Schneider stubbornly insists staying is the faithful Jews' proof of passing a divine test, and to show he is not a wild-eyed optimist, asks his friend to care for his family if he is wrong. He knows the narrator's father, despite his understandable Party membership, remains a good human being.



"In the Swimming Pool (1938)"

"In the Swimming Pool (1938)" Summary

Friedrich on a fine new bicycle and the narrator on his mother's well-used one, peddle to the pool one summer afternoon. Friedrich nearly collides with someone coming the other way on a fine silvery bicycle. They ride on, chain their bikes, change clothes, play in the water, and sun themselves for hours. When they are ready to leave, Friedrich cannot find the tag to claim his clothing. An abusive attendant demands to see his ID card, and make a fuss about a Jew having swum in their pool. He scatters Friedrich's clothes and forbids him from changing in the facilities. Friedrich rides away still dripping wet. The uproar continues, with one boy claiming his silver bike has been stolen. Friedrich returns, offering to tell the police about the thief, but is rebuffed. The police will not believe a Jew.

"In the Swimming Pool (1938)" Analysis

This section can be dated to after August 17, 1938, when the Nazis legislate that any Jew with a German first name, like Friedrich, must add "Israel" or "Sarah" as a middle name. It is shown dramatically at the swimming pool, which all the young people have obviously enjoyed together for years. Friedrich is "outed" as a Jew by his new ID, when he somehow loses his claim tag. The attendant makes a great show of proving how disgusted he is to have touched a Jew. Still, Friedrich is ready to help a German boy get back his stolen bike, but is told Jews no longer have standing in court. We saw this coming, when the police officer automatically sided with the storeowner, and can no longer expect there will be a judge willing to hear Friedrich.



"The Festival (1938)"

"The Festival (1938)" Summary

The narrator disobeys his father's request he not spend so much time with the Schneiders by following Friedrich to the synagogue. Everyone seems to pay particular attention to Friedrich, who, like everyone else, puts on his *yarmulke* (skullcap) and *tallis* (prayer shawl). The rabbi begins praying in Hebrew, and Friedrich accompanies him. The narrator is astonished. Friedrich whispers a commentary to the narrator, as the rabbi removes the Torah from the Ark and carries it in procession through the congregation to the podium. Seven congregants are invited forward and then Friedrich is - singled out for the first time in his life to read publicly from the Torah. While the scrolls are wrapped and put away, Friedrich reads a section from the Prophets and returns to his seat. After a prayer and a short sermon in German, directed at Friedrich, the service ends. The rabbi reminds Friedrich, who is 13, that he alone is now responsible before God for his actions. No one can remove the guilt of breaking the commandments.

Until the Messiah comes, Jews will be persecuted and must accept their fate. The Schneiders have prepared a Sabbath feast, at which Friedrich gives a grown-up speech, thanking his parents for guiding him and pledging to try to be worthy of the honor and duty of being a Jew. His father gives him a wristwatch and others offer presents. Friedrich tells the curious narrator he has practiced his Torah reading and speech for months, and laughingly tells him "Friedrich" is Solomon in Hebrew. Neudorf comes to offer his best wishes on Friedrich's Bar Mitzvah and gives him an engraved fountain pen.

"The Festival (1938)" Analysis

Having witnessed Sabbath rituals in the Schneider's home, we now watch Friedrich become officially a man at his Bar Mitzvah. The reverence Jews hold the Torah scroll is clearly shown. The narrator is amazed at how Friedrich has grown wise, and Friedrich says he is named for Solomon, the wise king of Israel and traditionally the author of several of the Bible's wisdom books. The teacher remains true to his word, to remain Friedrich's friend. The watch and the pen Friedrich receives at his Bar Mitzvah will figure later in the novel.



"The Encounter (1938)"

"The Encounter (1938)" Summary

Herr Schuster, a veteran of World War I and now a commander of the Nazi storm troops in his spare time, pushes the boys unmercifully as their physical education teacher. He loves forced marches with full packs, and one day orders everyone to load their satchels and briefcases with bricks and orders them out in formation. He teaches them a marching chant about how F'hrer has come to restore Germany, but from enslavement to the Jews. They circle the town twice in 90 minutes of steady running and chanting. Shuster mocks anyone who falls by the side, injured. Another class approaches, and when Shuster recognizes Friedrich, he demands his boys show what Germans do to inferior Jews. They run with new vigor, looking straight ahead, chanting about the Jews perishing in the Red Sea, bringing peace to the world.

"The Encounter (1938)" Analysis

Nazi indoctrination in the public schools is shown. An SA commander regularly toughens up his physical education students with forced marches and nationalistic and anti-Jewish chants. In the first one quoted, Shuster pictures Hitler as a messiah and in the second shows the Red Sea closing over the Jews in an inversion of the well-known Exodus story. Their destruction will usher in world peace, a perversion of message of the Jewish prophets, who hold Israel is the light of all nations. This chant reveals considerable learning and must be assumed to have come from above in the Nazi hierarchy. Shuster seems capable of little more than counting cadences.



"The Pogrom (1938)"

"The Pogrom (1938)" Summary

Walking home from school, the narrator finds Dr. Ashkenase's office ransacked and the contents strewn on the street. A trail of broken glass leads to Abraham Rosenthal's shop, which is being looted. Five men and three women, helmeted and armed with crowbars, are heading towards a Jewish home for apprentices. Spectators remark the Jews have had it coming and hope the mob does not miss anyone. The narrator joins the group. The mob builds up courage and demands someone open the door. There is no answer as a woman with an ugly shrill voice eggs them on. Someone tries to break down the door with his shoulder several times and then others join him. The narrator finds himself drawn into the rhythmic chanting, "One - two - three!" The narrator does not know how he comes to be helping with the smashing - but sees everyone else has been likewise drawn in. The door gives way; they crash in, and set to destroying. The narrator finds the women with the shrill voice slashing mattresses. She wonders why he does not recognize her, as she is the paper carrier. People are now looting.

The narrator grabs a hammer and begins smashing things, enjoying the sounds, until finally he runs out of things to destroy. He goes home, tired and disgusted, and does not tell his mother about where he has done. A mob assaults their front door, which Resch opens for them, and they pour up the stairs. The Schneiders' door is smashed. Through the ceiling, they hear Frau Schneider cry out. Friedrich tells his mother the police will not do anything if she calls them. They hear a man swearing and Friedrich howling hopelessly. The narrator disobeys his mother and rushes upstairs. Frau Schneider lies on the kitchen floor, blue, and breathing with difficulty. Friedrich, with a bump on his forehead, kneels over his mother. Looting and vandalism continue. Friedrich slinks downstairs when someone invites him to help. They hear the violence continue overhead and weep.

"The Pogrom (1938)" Analysis

The "Chronology" puts the pogroms in November of 1938, and we are taken through four assaults. The reader notes the trail of broken glass between sites, as the pogrom is usually referred to as *Kristallnacht*, or the night of the glass. Here, it is carried out in broad daylight, hits two of the Jewish businesses we have seen thus far, and ends in an orgy of violence in the Schneiders' apartment. The landlord, not surprisingly, is complaisant, although he doubtless resents his property being destroyed, including his beloved rose bushes. The fact that the narrator is dragged into watching, then chanting, then smashing is surprising, but suggests the power of mob psychology. The paper deliverer is an agitator. A strong man tears books dramatically in half, and the Nazis soon will burn all ideologically repugnant writings, beginning with Jewish titles. Huddling with his mother, the narrator weeps, but it is unclear whether he weeps for the Schneiders or himself.



"The Death (1938)"

"The Death (1938)" Summary

The narrator's family is anxious when a hesitant knock comes on their door at 1:30 AM, but father eventually opens it to find Herr Schneider asking apologetically for a lamp so they can treat his wife, who is in bad shape. A while later, Schneider brings Dr. Levy to the door. He asks if they may sterilize his last syringe. The Schneider's stove is ruined. He goes back to his patient while the narrator's mother builds water. She carries it upstairs and the narrator brings an electric heater. The Schneider apartment is destroyed and plunged in darkness. The patient lies on a pallet of rags, shredded curtains, and torn blankets. The narrator's mother demands they carry her downstairs to their apartment, but Levy says it is too late for that. He gives Frau Schneider an injection and advises her to confess her sins to her husband. As violent death throes begin, Dr. Levy puts on his hat and begins chanting, "Hear of Israel." His voice tapers off as Frau Schneider breathes her last. Friedrich and his father take up the chant, rend their clothing, and fall upon the body. Levy lights a candle and places it beside the dead woman.

"The Death (1938)" Analysis

We watch Frau Schneider die of the wounds inflicted by the mob, and see the Jewish rituals of death, particularly the cleansing of one's conscience and the chanting of the triumphant *Shemah*, which declares the oneness and ultimate victory of God. Friedrich, now a man, joins in the prayers. Friedrich is surprised to see them tear their clothing in ritual mourning that dates back to biblical times. Notice Levy does not pray, until he has covered his head.



"Lamps (1939)"

"Lamps (1939)" Summary

Herr Schneider pays to have his door and the rose garden repaired. He is defensive when the narrator delivers a letter mistakenly delivered to them. Friedrich is in the kitchen, surrounded by lamps of all kinds, which he is testing and repairing. No longer allowed to work, his father collects rusted old lamps from his friends. He polishes them, once Friedrich has fixed them. The narrator promises to look around for business for them. Friedrich takes his father's letter and opens it. His face changes suddenly, and he announces Resch has again given notice. Herr Schneider comforts his weeping 14-year-old son, and then sees their visitor out. He begs the narrator not to give them away, lest they take away what little they have left.

"Lamps (1939)" Analysis

Forbidden to work legally, the Schneiders mend old lamps in their apartment until evicted, once again. Legally, Resch must have another apartment ready for them before he can evict them, but they surely know no judge will stand up for their rights this time. The times are desperate.



"The Movie (1940)"

"The Movie (1940)" Summary

The film *Jud S'YA* ("Sweet Jew"), in theaters for eight weeks, is obligatory viewing, and wartime entertainment is so scarce, people attend, and talk and write about it. The narrator has been reprimanded for consorting with a Jew, but still meets Friedrich, who wants to see the movie but is afraid to attend alone. The narrator buys two tickets, without having to show his ID to prove he is over 14. Friedrich sneaks after his confidently striding friend, and they get in without a search. Friedrich is sorry about the deception. A smiling usherette shows them to very good seats. It is Friedrich's first movie since his mother's death. He says that he is glad she has not had to suffer all they have in the last two years. He jumps, as an unfriendly, older usherette passes by. As the theater fills, the house lights come on, and it is announced that all teenagers' IDs must be checked.

The usherettes work swiftly, escorting 2-3 teens out. Friedrich turns pale and slides down in his chair. The narrator tries to calm him, until Friedrich reveals that Jews are now forbidden to see movies. When the old usherette confronts him, Friedrich makes a break for the door, but she is sure this is a ploy to hide and sneak back in. She ignores the narrator, when he tries to intervene. Friedrich claims to have left his ID at home. The young usherette vouches for him, and he offers to leave voluntarily, but the old woman, grinning, says something is going on, picks his pocket, and finds his Jewish ID. Everyone watches, as she drags the boys out, declaring Friedrich must be tired of life and dying to go to a concentration camp. The show begins behind them.

"The Movie (1940)" Analysis

Given the posters advertising the anti-Semitic *Jud S'YA*, Friedrich may indeed, like the old usherette declares, be tiring of life. All Germans may be seeing it and talking about it, but surely the Jews with whom he lives and worships are not. This tallies with Friedrich's earlier interest in attending a *Jungvolk* meeting, but that too is rather far-fetched. How can he feel bad about lying to buy tickets and not feel bad about watching his people vilified? The scene may be intended to show the Nazis have even denied movies to the Jews or may want to get "concentration camps" on the table in the mouth of an ordinary character, since many Germans after the war will deny knowing anything about them.



"Benches (1940)"

"Benches (1940)" Summary

Friedrich approaches the narrator to get off his chest something his father cannot understand. He has been in love with a German girl, named Helga, for a month. One day, he notices her in the park. The net of apples she is carrying splits, and he helps her pick them up, after having wished he could steal one and run away. A soldier's daughter, beautiful Helga teaches kindergarten, but this is her day off. At her door, she thanks Friedrich and gives him an apple, which he keeps as a memento rather than consuming. Learning when kindergarten lets out, Friedrich watches Helga every day and hopes she will see and greet him. He dreams of Helga and is overjoyed when she lets him walk her home or looks at him. She tells her his name but nothing more. Friedrich's father grows suspicious even before he gets dressed up for their first real date, and warns him but to no effect.

The weather is beautiful, the roses in bloom and empty. Helga is delighted with the book of poetry Friedrich gives her and recites many by heart. Friedrich tries to stay on lonely paths where no one will know them. Helga sits on a green bench and pulls him down onto it. She notices he is too nervous to sit still or to enjoy the chocolate she gives him. Suddenly, Helga stands up and leads Friedrich to a yellow bench marked "For Jews Only." Friedrich is shocked she can tell, but Helga says it just occurred to her. They cannot sit together on this bench either, so Friedrich takes her home in bitter disappointment. Helga tells Friedrich about her life and tries to hold his hand. She wants to meet next Sunday and go to the country where there are no color-coded benches. She refuses to be talked out of it and silences Friedrich with a kiss. Friedrich is lucky not to be caught breaking curfew and is bawled out by his father. Friedrich does not meet Helga the next week, fearing if they were caught, she would go to a concentration camp.

"Benches (1940)" Analysis

A second scene ends with the threat of concentration camp. The segregation of German society is complete, with color-coded park benches. Still, Friedrich falls in love with a beautiful German girl, Helga, and she with him. She is fearless - even more so than Friedrich during the three weeks he stalked her - so he must be all the more careful for both of them, and he does not keep a follow-up date.



"The Rabbi (1941)"

"The Rabbi (1941)" Summary

An aunt gives the narrator's family a small sack of potatoes, which they hide, laying aside a portion for the Schneiders. When they hear footsteps overhead, the narrator goes up. No one answers repeated ringing and knocking. He calls Friedrich's name, and Herr Schneider opens, looking angry. He pulls him inside. Friedrich nods, takes the potatoes, and asks why his father is scolding someone who brings them something they need so badly. Schneider is offended his son would talk to him like that and turns away. Father and son continue arguing, oblivious to the narrator's presence, until it comes out - with sobs and fury - that they are hiding someone in their apartment. A bearded old man steps into the living room, announcing he is leaving to end the feuding. Both shout "No, Rabbi!" and Herr Schneider blocks the door bodily. The rabbi insists he must leave, now that the narrator has seen him. Too many witnesses endanger the Schneiders. The rabbi proclaims he is old and knows how to bear suffering, with the help of the King of the Universe. Friedrich vouches for the narrator and his father introduces them. The rabbi says the Nazis are searching for him, and he has friends who will help him further. If he is caught, he will be killed, if God has pity on him. Otherwise, he will suffer unspeakably. Anyone who shelters him will suffer the same fate. He understands the danger to the narrator if he fails to inform against him. The narrator worries about endangering his parents and about standing up to the strain of keeping this terrible secret. He does not know what to do.

"The Rabbi (1941)" Analysis

The 16-year-old narrator walks into an ethical dilemma. Whom should he safeguard? The Schneiders are hiding a famous Nazi being sought by authorities. He will be tortured or killed if caught and anyone harboring him will share that fate. (This is the first mention of the Nazis' use of systematic torture.) Must his parents' well being not stand higher than a stranger's? Will he have the rabbi's courage or will he crumble like Herr Schneider? The rabbi puts others' safety above his own and wants to leave. He praises God and depends on him to keep him free or give him a quick death. Caring for strangers is a tenet of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan to answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?" The narrator finds no answer for this timeless, and potentially lethal, question



"Stars (1941)"

"Stars (1941)" Summary

When Friedrich fails to answer the pre-arranged signal knock, the narrator creeps into the pitch-dark apartment and whispers his name. The rabbi grips his arm and leads him into the living room, where he lights a candle. The windows are thickly covered and the table is all that remains of the old furniture. Herr Schneider says Friedrich is out with friends, probably stranded somewhere until morning by the curfew. The rabbi asks the narrator to thread a needle for him. On the table lies a pile of yellow stars of David with "Jew" woven in the center in mock-Hebrew letters. Herr Schneider stands up to show one already sewed to his coat, another to his jacket, and another to his waistcoat. He relates how in the Middle Ages Jews had to wear pointed yellow hats. Now, they are back. The rabbi predicts they will soon burn Jews, as they did in the Middle Ages. He tells the narrator it is God's will that his people be separate, persecuted, and killed.

The rabbi tells the narrator a story about Solomon. Once upon a time, a king's advisors tell him the army has grown restless and needs someone to attack, lest they turn on their own people. The king allows them to choose a town whose Jewish population they may kill and loot. Among the Jews in the town selected is one devout family, Schloime, Gittel, and their son Solomon. Schloime learns of the plot and the parents decide they are too old to flee, but Solomon will find a future elsewhere. They sell all they own to send with him, but the soldiers arrive and begin butchering, stealing, and destroying wantonly. They force Schloime to show them his rooms, which he does, keeping hidden only the place where Solomon sleeps. Furious at finding nothing, they strike down Schloime and Gittel, who crawl, bloodied, into the doorway to keep other soldiers away from Solomon. Schloime prays to God in tears, asking why he has forsaken him and will not answer. He proclaims God is the holy one in whom his fathers trusted and from whom they received deliverance. Schloime dies in the middle of his prayer. Passing warriors spit on their corpses but will not enter, and leave after two days of horror. Solomon buries and mourns his parents without knowing of their self-sacrifice, and heads off into a new land. The king's army lusts to attack another town.

"Stars (1941)" Analysis

In this episode, we see the rabbi and Herr Schneider obeying the Nazi order to sew yellow stars to all their outer clothing to identify themselves instantly as Jews. They note the medieval precedent and hint at the ovens in the death camps when they discuss how Jews and other "heretics" had been burned at the stake. The rabbi tells a parable of flight and sacrifice. Schloime's last prayer is a recitation of Psalm 22, the same lamentation quoted by Jesus on the cross in the Christian gospels.



"A Visit (1941)"

"A Visit (1941)" Summary

The narrator's family is in bed when they hear footsteps on the stairs. The police pound on the Schneiders' door, and Resch, breathing heavily, brings them a key, lest they break down his door. A helmeted, trench coated tough snarls at them to go inside their apartment, but they stay where they are. The rabbi is lead out in handcuffs, then Herr Schneider, who calls out "You were right, Herr..." before he is bloodied and silenced. Resch locks the door and screams after the police one is missing, but is told to shut up. Still, he is happy he has gotten rid of his unwanted tenant and has "caught a pretty bird on top of it." The narrator's father slams the door in his face.

"A Visit (1941)" Analysis

In this scene, we see the rabbi and Herr Schneider dragged away, but Friedrich is at large. Resch again proves himself a pig, doubtless expecting a reward for the famous rabbi. By this point, we can have little doubt what horrors will befall the two prisoners, but wonder where Friedrich may be.



"Vultures (1941)"

"Vultures (1941)" Summary

The narrator's family spends a sleepless night, worrying about the Schneiders. They watch for Friedrich, to tell him what has happened. Hearing him climb past their floor, the narrator's mother sends him upstairs. Friedrich is standing motionless over Resch, who is rummaging through a mattress. He has already filled a shopping bag with loot. Clearly, someone has searched the apartment. The narrator's heart is beating wildly as he watches the confrontation. Friedrich spits in Resch's face and calls him a vulture. Resch wipes his face, turning red, grabs the Sabbath candleholder, and begins screaming for help. Friedrich can only retreat and disappear, as the vulture screams for the police, and for someone to stop the Jew.

"Vultures (1941)" Analysis

Resch is *the* vulture standing for all the vultures who loot those whom they turn into the police. Old and out of shape, he would doubtless have been no match for Friedrich, who could have disarmed him and beaten him to death, had Resch not used his only defense - to rally neighbors against the Jew in their midst.



"The Picture (1942)"

"The Picture (1942)" Summary

The narrator's family is packed, waiting for the air raid siren to summon them to the shelter. As they wait quietly, there is a knock at the door - Friedrich's signal. Mother lets him in. He is filthy and jumpy. He talks of loneliness and forgetting what his parents looked like. He has had to sell his watch and has only the engraved cap of the pen Herr Neudorf gave him for his thirteenth birthday. Friedrich wolfs down three sandwiches before asking for the snapshot taken at the amusement park. Mother finds a box of pictures and father sets to looking through them. Mother draws Friedrich a hot bath and lays out clean clothes for him. The sirens begin to wail, and the narrator's father advises Friedrich to stay in the apartment, because Resch will arrest them all if he shows up at the shelter. They grab their suitcases and run. Antiaircraft guns thunder, searchlights sway across the sky, planes hum, and shrapnel falls.

"The Picture (1942)" Analysis

After a year's absence, Friedrich appears. He seeks the memento of their first day of school, because it shows his parents, whose faces he is forgetting. A glance at the "Chronology" for 1942 shows how tightly the Nazis have squeezed the Jews, and Friedrich's appearance and hunger suggests his life has been bleak. He talks only about being lonely. The Allies have clearly been flying overhead daily at a set time, so the siren summoning everyone to the shelter causes no panic. All is routine. This time, however, flares are dropped that look like Christmas trees.



"In the Shelter (1942)

"In the Shelter (1942) Summary

The steel door to the air raid shelter is locked when the narrator's family arrives, but Resch opens when father hammers. Resch wears a steel helmet and armband. No one answers the "Heil Hitler!" greeting. Women, infants, and old men are scattered around the room, each with luggage. A pair of lovers embraces in a corner. The man is a sergeant. The narrator's family sits where it always does, near the fresh air pump. Resch interrupts the sergeant, boasting of German power. The sergeant says that the Allies will easily replace any planes shot down today. Overhead bombs are falling in groups, and the narrator's mother sighs, "The poor boy!" There is pounding at the door, but Resch refuses to see who is whimpering outside. The sergeant demands he open up, and mother recognizes Friedrich's voice and calls out his name. Friedrich, repeating "Afraid," is let in and the sergeant confronts Resch about letting him stay. He does not care if Friedrich is a Jew - or even a dog. Everyone in the shelter supports him. Resch is insulted and threatens to report them all, which shakes the sergeant's confidence. Bombs are still falling, as the sergeant asks Friedrich to leave voluntarily. Mother cries on father's shoulder. He asks her to control herself, lest she endanger everyone.

"In the Shelter (1942) Analysis

Resch is the official master of the air raid shelter and revels in his power. The bombing grows so intense that Friedrich pounds on the steel door, demanding to be admitted. A sergeant takes his side and the villagers stand behind him, but when Resch threatens to report them for sheltering a Jew, all lose their courage and Friedrich is asked voluntarily to leave. Like the old rabbi, he must decide between his own safety and that of innocent onlookers. He flees into the terror, and the narrator's father worries about his wife making enough of a fuss to make Resch suspicious of where the runaway had come from.



"The End (1942)"

"The End (1942)" Summary

The town is aflame and in ruins when the people emerge from the shelter. The narrator's home still stands, but the windows have been shattered. Resch picks up his wounded garden dwarf, Polycarp. Friedrich sits on the stoop, eyes closed, face pale. The narrator's father involuntarily asks if Friedrich is crazy, and Resch orders him away. Mother thinks he has fainted. Resch is pleased to see such sympathy for a Jew showed by the wife of a Nazi Party member. Resch kicks Friedrich, and he topples onto the path, trailing blood. The narrator clutches a thorny rosebush. Resch judges, "his luck that he died *this way*."

"The End (1942)" Analysis

Friedrich, of course, is killed. Resch is pleased to see the narrator's mother show sympathy for a Jew - it may give him an edge some day. He is disappointed, however, Friedrich has escaped the death camps like Auschwitz, to which he could have surrendered him, had he lived.



Characters

Friedrich Schneider

The novel's protagonist, Friedrich is born in 1925 to reclusive Jewish parents a week after the Christian narrator's birth. The Schneiders occupy the apartment one floor above the narrator's in Johann Resch's home. The boys become close friends, enjoying games and sports, even as the Nazis increase restrictions on Jews. Friedrich accompanies the narrator to a Nazi *Jungvolk* meeting and invites him to his Bar Mitzvah just before his thirteenth birthday. Jews are segregated in their own schools and other rights. Friedrich's civil service father bounces back from his firing to become manager of a department store, and Friedrich has one of the finest bicycles around. Friedrich's mother dies after being injured during a 1938 pogrom, his father loses his job, and Friedrich organizes a home business repairing electrical lamps. Their landlord evicts them from their vandalized apartment, but the Schneiders remain - and take the monumental risk of harboring a fugitive rabbi. Friedrich is away over night when the police raid the house and arrest his father and the rabbi, and goes into hiding for a year. He ventures back in 1942 to ask the narrator's family for the memento of the first day of school, which shows his parents, whose faces he has begun to forget. Fed, bathed, and waiting for the picture, Friedrich dares not seek shelter when Allied bombers attack, but cannot endure the horror and pounds on the reinforced door, begging for admittance. Turned away by Resch as a Jew, Friedrich returns to the porch of his old home, where he is found dead of shrapnel wounds.

The Narrator

Friedrich Schneider's downstairs neighbor from the time of their birth, one week apart, the narrator appears as less inquisitive, enthusiastic, intelligent, and determined than Friedrich. He is a follower, even when leading Friedrich to a meeting of the *Jungvolk* or the theater. He is curious about Jewish life and ritual and takes Nazi doctrines with a grain of salt, doubting they can mean what they say. He arranges secret knocks and special out-of-the-way rendezvous, rather than forsake his Jewish friend, as the segregation laws stiffen. However, he surprises himself by being easily drawn into the pogrom, as he had been into the Sabbath dinner and Friedrich's Bar Mitzvah ceremony. He progresses (or regresses) into an active role in vandalizing a Jewish institution but refuses to take part in destroying the Schneiders' apartment when he goes up to see what all the noise is about. He vacillates between protecting his family and protecting an unknown rabbi when he discovers the old man living in the Schneiders' apartment, but is spared making a decision when the police arrest the two men. In the shelter and before Friedrich's bloody corpse, the narrator is timid, like his father.



Johann Resch

Resch works his way up to district manager in a bathing suit sales company and likes to dominate both workers and tenants in the upstairs apartments of his home. The narrator's family occupies the second floor and the Schneiders the third floor. Overweight and suffering respiratory difficulties, Resch takes pride in his lawn gnome and his rose bushes, but leaves yard work to his wife. He is content to watch the street from his window and come outside on holidays, provided the weather is good. As Nazi pressure against Jews increases, Resch attempts to evict the Schneiders on the grounds they are hindering his business, but is thwarted by a principled judge. After a mob ransacks the Schneiders' apartment, Resch presents another eviction notice. They remain, however, hidden, but are found out, and Resch lets the police into haul Herr Schneider and a famous rabbi away, but Friedrich is not home. They confront one another when Resch, the local air raid marshal, turns Friedrich away from the shelter during a deadly Allied bombing attack. Resch notes without feeling that Friedrich is lucky to have avoided a worse fate when they find him dead of a shrapnel wound on the front porch of Resch's damaged home.

Frau Schneider

Friedrich's mother avoids contact with other people other than to smile in passing, but opens up to the narrator's family after the birth of the two boys. We see her as an exuberant mother, playing in the snow with her four-year-old. She accepts philosophically the Nazis' growing restrictions on Jews, and dies in agony of wounds suffered during a pogrom.

Herr Schneider

Friedrich's father, a friendly but quiet postal worker, loses his civil service job, as Nazi restrictions tighten. He finds a better job as manager of a department store. After the pogrom that claims his wife's life, Herr Schneider grows fearful and bitter, but shelters a famous rabbi whom the Nazis seek. The two are arrested one night while Friedrich is away from home and disappear from sight.

Dr. Jakob Askenase

Friedrich's doctor, the middle-aged, observant Askenase specializes in children's ailments. He holds office hours daily except Saturday. On the day Hitler calls for a one-day boycott of Jewish businesses (April 1, 1933), the graffiti "Jew" appears on Askenase's sign.



Frdulein Ewert

A young salesgirl in the Herschel Meyer department store, whom the new manager, Herr Schneider, orders to take Friedrich and the narrator on a tour and allow each to select a one-mark toy, to be charged to him.

Special Delegate Gelko

A speaker provided by the Nazi District Office is a dwarf, dressed in regulation brown. Standing on an orange crate he tells the *Jungvolk* boys about the danger Jews represent to the German nation and makes them repeat a new motto of, "The Jews are our affliction!"

Grandfather

The narrator's maternal grandfather, a crusty train worker, pays a visit - more an inspection - during which he fulminates against the Jews for crucifying Jesus Christ and demands the narrator not play with Friedrich Schneider.

Adolf Hitler

Never seen in the novel, the F'hrer of the Nazi Party, Chancellor, and President of Germany, lurks behind the action from the seventh scene onward. The "Chronology" summarizes his decrees that steadily restrict the Jews' rights, segregate them, and lead to the "final solution" of the Holocaust.

Dr. Levy

Dr. Levy is the pious Jewish physician, who attends the mortally wounded Frau Schneider.

Teacher Neudorf

Neudorf is Friedrich's and the narrator's teacher who, in 1934, outlines 2,000 years of persecution against the Jews to prepare his students for Friedrich's expulsion to a Jewish school. He points out the intellectual superiority of Jews and begs the children to remain Friedrich's friends. Neudorf pays a visit on the Schneiders to congratulate Friedrich on his Bar Mitzvah and present him an engraved fountain pen.



Frau Penk

Hardworking and thorough, 28-year-old Frau Penk does housework for Frau Schneider and the narrator's mother. One day, she quits the Schneiders, because the Nazis have passed a law forbidding Germans under age 35 to work for Jews. Frau Penk recalls watching a young woman who loves a Jew being paraded through town with a sign around her neck, and fears the same fate or prison. Her husband, a former communist, must be particularly careful about their words and behavior.

Abraham Rosenthal

The kindly old owner of a neighborhood stationary shop of, Rosenthal sports a pointed beard and not only lets the children to joke about him looking like a goat, but sometimes bleats to entertain them more. On the day Hitler calls for a one-day boycott of Jewish businesses (April 1, 1933), a young Nazi pickets Rosenthal's store and tries unsuccessfully to bar customers from entering.

Herr Schuster

A veteran of World War I and currently a commander in the Nazi storm troops (SA), Shuster is an unmerciful physical education teacher whose favorite activity is forced marches with full packs. We watch one circle town for 90 minutes before confronting students from the Jewish school, and Shuster orders his students to straighten up and chant resolutely, as they pass.

The Nazi Boycotter

On the day Hitler calls for a one-day boycott of Jewish businesses (April 1, 1933), a young unnamed Nazi pickets Rosenthal's store. He wears gray pants and a yellow shirt with a swastika armband on his left sleeve. He waves a sign proclaiming, "Don't Buy From Jews," and physically threatens an old woman, Friedrich, and the narrator. He postures in ways one sees Hitler affecting on old newsreels, snarls at people, but cannot command their loyalty.

The Old Woman

On the day Hitler calls for a one-day boycott of Jewish businesses (April 1, 1933), a nearsighted, polite old lady pushes past a Nazi boycotter to buy wrapping paper in Abraham Rosenthal's stationary shop.



The Famous Rabbi

A bearded old man sought by the Nazis, the Rabbi is taken in by the Schneiders. His discovery by the narrator raises the question of whom to defend - one's own family, who will be killed if they are found complicit, or the innocent old man? To make clear his position, while sewing yellow stars on his clothing, the rabbi tells the narrator about an old Jewish couple who sacrifice themselves to set their son free.

Schloime

Schloime is the hero in the rabbi's parable of an evil king, who allowed his troops to kill and loot the Jews. He dies with the words of Psalm 22 on his lips, barring the door to his home, so his son Solomon can survive.

Gittel

Gittel is the wife in the rabbi's parable of an evil king, who allowed his troops to kill and loot the Jews. She dies beside her husband Schloime, barring the door to his home, so their son Solomon can survive.

Solomon

Solomon is the Israelite king known for his great wisdom. At his Bar Mitzvah, Friedrich tells the narrator his Hebrew name is Solomon. In the parable of the evil king and his rampaging troops, told by the old rabbi, Solomon is the name of the son, who survives the rampage and departs to a new life without knowing his parents sacrificed themselves for him.



Objects/Places

Air Raid Shelter

The place at which Friedrich Schneider's neighbors must make the ultimate moral decision of whether to obey the Nazi laws or the universal imperative to save the defenseless. A sergeant stands up for Friedrich and the people back him enthusiastically, until the warden, Resch, threatens to turn them all in. The sergeant caves in and asks Friedrich to sacrifice himself willingly.

Bar Mitzvah

This is the day on which a thirteen-year-old Jewish boy becomes officially a man, responsible for his own behavior rather than being under his father's care. The candidate studies for weeks to learn the portion of the Torah he will read and to prepare a speech. The narrator accompanies Friedrich to the synagogue to observe his friend's great life passage.

Herschel Meyer Department Store

The swanky department store in which Herr Schneider finds a managerial position after being fired from his civil service job, Herschel Meyer is symbolic of the Jews' ability to thrive in trouble times. It also illustrates the reason for German small store owners to feel threatened and hostile - as small businesspeople are often today when Wal-Mart super stores move into a community.

The Jungvolk

The Hitler Youth movement formed after the Nazi Party takes power in Germany in 1933. The narrator joins, takes part in marches through town, and once brings Friedrich to a Wednesday "club night" when strangers are welcome. None of the members is properly dressed in brown, but all have a triangular neckerchief with the corner showing below the collar in back.

National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP/Nazi Party)

Followers of Adolf Hitler, who in 1933 after years of political struggle against a plethora of political parties, the Nazis come to power in 1933 and quickly consolidate power (see the "Chronology"). NSDAP is the German acronym. *Friedrich* shows Nazi racial ideology consistent with medieval prejudices about the Jews, but sharpened and turned into law.



Many ordinary Germans find it expedient to join the Party even if they do not subscribe to its doctrines, because Party members receive good jobs and promotions.

Park Bench

Among the laws passed by the Nazis to segregate Jews from Gentile Germans is one requiring different colors for park benches. Friedrich is afraid to be seen sitting with Helga either on a German green bench or a Jewish yellow bench. Those who disobey face the concentration camp.

Polycarp

Polycarp is Johann Resch's beloved red-, green- and blue-clad lawn gnome, wounded by shrapnel in the Allied bombing at the end of the book.

Star of David

A six-pointed star also known as the "Star of Solomon," used to symbolize the Jews. Beginning September 1, 1941, as part of the "final solution," all Jews are required to wear plate-sized yellow stars of David on their outer clothing, so they can be identified at a glance. It is based upon a medieval practice having the same goal of making Jews stand out from other people.

Swastika

The double bent cross symbol of the Nazi Party. Friedrich is proud of his neckerchief ring bearing the symbol as he makes his only visit to a *Jungvolk* meeting.

The Torah

The first five books of the Bible, also known as the Pentateuch, the Torah is held to be the guide to how God wants people to live. The Talmud offers more guidance by providing orthodox interpretations of the Torah. In the synagogue, the Torah, hand-written on parchment, is preserved in a special niche on the East wall behind a curtain, as the Holy of Holies had been in the Temple. It is carried in procession through the congregation before and after being read and is venerated by those present. Jewish boys officially become men by reading a portion at services during their Bar Mitzvah.

Setting

Set in Germany just before and during the Third Reich, *Friedrich* begins in 1925 with the births of the two protagonists, Fritz and Friedrich. The narrative then follows the events leading to Hitler's installation as chancellor of the German Reich in 1933, recounts Hitler's treatment of Jews as it affects the novel's characters, and ends in 1942 when all the Jews still in German concentration camps are transferred to the Auschwitz extermination camp.

The novel mentions no specific town, but the setting appears to be a representative suburb of a large city. Most of the residents know each other, and many townspeople know where Friedrich lives and that he is Jewish even before the government forces Jews to wear identifying yellow stars. Friedrich is expelled from school, cursed on the town streets, and barred from the swimming pool and theater because he is Jewish. When Friedrich appears in court, however, the judge surprisingly renders a fair decision and thus represents the single person in the town willing to risk his personal reputation and safety to defend a Jew from injustice.



Social Sensitivity

Originally published for German readers, *Friedrich* has been acclaimed in both Germany and America. Extreme authorial sensitivity is evident when both German and American readers respond with similar praise to a treatment of the Holocaust by an author who fought in the German Army. Richter attempts to explain why the average German citizen did not rebel against the Holocaust, noting difficult economic times and implying overwhelming odds against success and understandable fear for the safety of loved ones. Unfortunately, he places considerable responsibility for the genocide upon the victims themselves because they did not do the "sensible" thing that Jews have done in the past: flee for their lives. Even when Allied bombs kill Friedrich, the narrator blames Friedrich himself because, after being denied entry to the bomb shelter, he sits outside on the porch during the raid instead of staying inside the apartment house as Fritz's father has advised.

For readers unfamiliar with Jewish customs and history, some scenes require careful explanation. For example, before expelling Friedrich from school as ordered by the Third Reich, Herr Neudorf explains to his students why Jews are hated by many people. He says, "Jews are accused of being crafty and sly. How could they be anything else?"

Someone who must always live in fear of being tormented and hunted must be very strong in his soul to remain an upright human being." He further explains, "Because Jews did not believe Jesus to be the true Messiah, because they regarded him as an impostor like many before him, they crucified him."

These statements, among others, are typical of past and present anti-Semitic propaganda. Because on the surface they appear to be sympathetic phrases, they may not be recognized as slogans of hate. Even more importantly, after the expulsion, Herr Neudorf attends Friedrich's Bar Mitzvah and gives his former student a pen with his name engraved on it. Toward the end of the novel, Friedrich has nothing but the dirty clothes on his back and one memento—the part of the pen bearing his name.

Because Richter portrays the teacher as a sympathetic friend whom Friedrich admires, readers may not recognize his statements as subtle anti-Semitic propaganda.

With discussion, this book can provide young people with valuable information about the Holocaust. If the text's voids in emotional responses are filled with an empathetic understanding of Fritz, Friedrich, and their families, readers can formulate answers to the past and prescriptions for the future.



Literary Qualities

This piece of historical fiction effectively puts readers into the atmosphere of World War II and provokes them to think seriously about what they might have done had they been members of either Fritz's family or the Schneider family.

The simple and direct language of both the narrative and dialogue speaks more profoundly through what is not said than what is said. Told from an objective, first-person point of view, Friedrich does not reveal the inner thoughts of the characters. This technique gives the portrayal of escalating violence against the Jews a sense of incompleteness that elicits strong internal responses from the readers by prompting them to supply what the characters themselves do not provide.

Because the characters are not fully rounded and the war does not change their attitudes in a recognizable way, they appear more as symbols of real people rather than individuals with distinct personalities. For example, interactions between Fritz's and Friedrich's parents remain minimal and superficial throughout the novel. Because Fritz's surname is never revealed, his family appears as an unremarkable middleclass German family whose responses typify those of the general population.

Fritz's grandfather's strong anti-Semitism, Fritz's mother's slight prejudice, and the close friendship between the Jew and non-Jew in the third generation appear to represent the culture. Likewise illustrative of the German population as a whole are Fritz's family's motivations for joining the Nazi party and the rationale preventing them from active rebellion against the horrors they witness.

Herr Resch evicts and informs against the Schneiders, looting their few remaining possessions and finally committing a premeditated murder, thus identifying himself as an extreme anti-Semite.

Meanwhile, the Schneiders exemplify the middle-class Jewish-German families who considered themselves German first and Jewish second and could not even imagine the depravity to which humans could sink: therefore, they died.

The novel becomes more realistic and credible because Richter reprints actual mandates issued against the Jews by Hitler and terminates the narrative before the war ends. The episodic narrative details each of the mandates and their impact on both Jews and non-Jews.

The reader should note that in 1942 Hans Peter Richter, the author himself, became part of the German Army and won medals for bravery in a three-year military career. Perhaps the ultimate meaning of the novel rests in the sequence of events that led Richter to publish *Friedrich* in 1961, nineteen years after the last date noted in the novel.



Themes

Anti-Semitism

Friedrich shows German society between the world wars harboring the medieval uneasiness of having Jews living in their midst. Even the narrator's mother feels compelled to notice Friedrich's circumcision when she gives the two boys a bath. Her father and the landlord are openly prejudiced against Jews, and shopkeepers use their department stores as excuses for not prospering themselves. As Nazi policy strengthens, prejudices emerge more strongly. The landlord tries to evict his Jewish tenant, because it is inconvenient for a Party member to have his house defiled. A just judge thwarts him for the moment. To prepare his students for Friedrich's forced transfer to a Jewish school, a teacher outlines 2,000 years of history, from the Roman expulsions to the Polish and Russian ghettos, and claims the Jews must excel in business to survive the onslaughts against them.

A hunted old rabbi relates how, in the Middle Ages, Jews were required to wear yellow hats to make them stand out from the Christians and tells a parable about deadly onslaughts on Jews. The Nazis revive both, forcing Jews to sew large yellow stars of David embroidered with the word "Jew" in mock Hebrew lettering, on all their outer garments. The Jews depicted in this novel accept their fate to be not only a people specially chosen by God, but also one destined to suffer and die, until the Messiah comes. The Jews who flee or fight in this period are not depicted, as are the Righteous Gentiles who actively helped them. *Friedrich* is the story of meekly submissive, fatalistic Jews being steadily put upon by amoral and immoral -but always somewhat prejudiced - Germans.

Destiny

Friedrich shows only those German Jews who accept their destiny is to suffer as God's chosen people scattered across the world, enduring suffering and death as a test of their faith, until such time as God sends his Messiah, returns them to the Land, and establishes his Kingdom. As the Nazis consolidate, power and issue more and more detailed and restrictive legislation about the Jews, they accept them fatalistically and comply. They accept being fired from jobs, swimming in public pools, and sitting on park benches with Germans. Friedrich's father, advised to flee the country during a lull in the persecution occasioned by the 1936 Olympics, considers himself a true German, cannot imagine any other country will welcome Jews openly or treat them any better, and believes 20th century human beings cannot treat fellow humans with the ferocity witnessed in earlier times. He sees a wider destiny for mankind that, alas, has still not been realized. The "Chronology" shows clearly that Hitler and the Nazis see themselves destined to free the world of Jews through a "final solution." Whether rank-and-file Germans, including Party members who join only as expediency, share in a sense they are destined to be the "Master Race" plays no part in this novel. They are portrayed as



sheep, destined in the sergeant's view at the novel's conclusion, to be bombed into oblivion by the Allies.

Self-Interest

Friedrich opens in a period of massive unemployment and hyperinflation, caused by the will of the Allies to keep Germany from threatening the peace of the world again. The crisis only deepens, as the Great Depression of 1929 spreads worldwide. Everyone worries about money, food, and housing. Then, in 1933, Adolf Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany, and those who join his Nazi Party receive jobs and promotions. Many join, even if the militant anti-Jewish doctrines the Nazis propound are personally repellant - and most Germans have at least some prejudice ingrained in them. Once one joins finds good-paying work through the Party, one naturally encourages one's children to join the Hitler Youth movement, to attend meetings regularly, and to participate actively. Friedrich and his father accept such motivation and admit they would join the Party if Jews were allowed in. Germans are well advised to avoid contact with Jews, but the narrator and Friedrich invent secret door knocks and obscure meeting places so they can remain friends. In several cases, individuals' self-interest, including the safety of their immediate families, is pitted against protecting the helpless, and the helpless must decide whether to sacrifice themselves for those who might be destroyed for hiding them. At the climax of the novel, as Allied bombs rain down, the people in the air raid shelter must decide whether to save a Jew and be denounced to the officials or send him to almost certain death. Everyone looks to his own self-interest and Friedrich is asked to go away. Damned if he does and damned with his friends if he does not, Friedrich is stripped of self-interest. The evil landlord, finding Friedrich's corpse, suggests cynically that he has looked after his own self-interest. He says that a shrapnel-wound to the head is a swifter, milder death than the concentration camps to which he would have been sent had he been turned in.



Themes/Characters

The characters in *Friedrich* constitute a cross section of the German non-Jewish and Jewish populations, and through them the reader learns how various people in both groups responded to the increasing persecution of Jews by the Third Reich. Richter draws his characters to represent larger groups within German society. Thus he sacrifices well-rounded characterizations for broader social perspectives.

In a straightforward and unemotional manner, the adult Fritz reports his experiences as a young person from the age of four to the age of eighteen. Although the child matures, the narrative style remains consistent. Fritz reports that when his mother bathes the two little boys in the same tub, she jokes that Fritz looks like a "little Jew." His visiting grandfather demands that Fritz not play with a Jew. Fritz explains that his family is poor because his father earns far less money than Friedrich's father earns as a government postal official. Fritz also states that his own participation in the German Jungvolk is a necessary and expected part of everyday life, as is his father's joining the Nazi party.

Rather than expressing his feelings about what he reports, Fritz functions as a camera, simply recording what he sees and hears. His parents represent the obedient non-Jewish portion of 1930s German society who could have opposed Hitler's madness but, in the interest of personal convenience and comfort, did not act. Whereas Fritz's mother appears as a sympathetic, warm housewife who would deny her own mild anti-Semitism, his father knowingly accepts the evil because it offers financial and social benefits for him and his family. By joining the Nazi party in 1936, Fritz's father secures better work than he has ever hoped for, has enough money to take his family away on their first vacation, and receives an offer of an even better job. Although he does not agree with everything the Nazi party does, Fritz's father rationalizes his stance by asking, "Doesn't every party and every leadership have its dark side?" Fritz's parents demonstrate to the reader how genocide can occur in a highly educated and civilized society.

Friedrich's family observes different customs, such as welcoming the Sabbath on Friday night. But he and Fritz share the same interests, activities, and expectations. Therefore, Friedrich does not understand why he cannot share in all of Fritz's activities, and he even wishes to be part of the Nazi Jungvolk.

Unfortunately, Friedrich's character is not sufficiently defined for the reader to understand the chilling innocence that prevents the boy from comprehending the scope of the danger enveloping him.

But Friedrich is not the only one unaware of the imminent danger.

Like Fritz's mother, Frau Schneider is loving, helpful, concerned with her family, and uninvolved with the outside world. A fine provider for his family, Herr Schneider loses his government postal position because he is Jewish. He then obtains work at a Jewish-owned clothing store and continues to be generous to Fritz, as is Frau Schneider, who



voluntarily cares for Fritz when his mother washes clothes for other people to help support her family.

Herr Schneider is also an uncomprehending optimist and nationalist. When Fritz's father joins the Nazi party and infers part of what is planned for Jews, he tells Herr Schneider to leave Germany. Friedrich's father refuses because he considers himself and his extended family German. Convinced that Jews will be treated equally badly anywhere abroad, he is certain that everything will "quiet down eventually," especially because the 1936 Olympics are scheduled to be held in Germany.

The interaction between the two families provides significant character insights. Even though they have spent almost twenty years as neighbors and parents of inseparable friends, the adults remain distant. The Schneiders are sensitive and generous both in words and actions, whereas Fritz's father gives only cryptic advice and does not offer to help Friedrich's family, even in the most desperate circumstances.

This trait becomes most evident when Fritz's father breaks his unspoken promise to Herr Schneider. In spite of their fervent handshake in response to Herr Schneider's appeal that Fritz's father look after Friedrich and his mother, eighteen-year-old Fritz and his father do nothing to help Friedrich in his greatest time of need.

The major theme of *Friedrich* lies in the truths it reveals about how flawed human relationships can lead to such a tragedy as the Holocaust. When evil, irrationality, and madness are approved and supported as means to a seemingly good end, the process of civilization is in its infancy. When voices and actions of basically good people, such as Fritz's parents, can be stilled with the fear of violence, no one is safe anywhere.

Although Richter's choice to review evil events of the past through the eyes of youthful innocence may appear to signal hope for the future while also providing a sort of purification through expression of sorrow and guilt, that hope appears naive. Thematically, *Friedrich* echoes the same overwhelming pessimism expressed by Nobel Prize winner William Golding in *Lord of the Flies*: "The child is father of the man." Just as Golding's evil children destroy the others and survive to become Father, so might this novel be viewed both as a history and as an oracle of the future. Especially disturbing is Fritz's inability to recall comments his parents make regarding the plight of the Schneiders, and he himself appears to be only minimally affected by the action he describes. Readers are left to wonder whether Fritz has learned the moral lessons taught and demanded by history.



Style

Point of View

Friedrich is told the past tense by an unnamed narrator who is born a week after the protagonist and is his constant companion for sixteen years. He narrates memories from boyhood and adolescence in days of economic depression and recovery, and the grown of political and racial fanaticism. In each scene he writes in the moment rather than as a memoir, recreating the emotions, psyche, and intellectual development appropriate to the age. He tells stories that illustrate the gradual evolution of the Nazi state and its segregation, degradation, and depravation of the Jews. The narrator does not attempt to conceal his own intellectual or moral shortcomings, or his admiration for what he sees of Jewish life, or his enthusiasm for the trappings of Nazism. The narrator seems always to find himself caught up in something and hard-pressed to sort it out.

Setting

Friedrich is set in an undisclosed city or large town in Germany, almost certainly not Berlin or Munich, but arguably Dresden, because the last scene shows the results of incendiary bombings in 1942. It opens in 1925, a time of chronic unemployment, hyperinflation, disillusionment, and yearning for redemption, the direct result of the peace terms laid down by the Allies in the Treaty of Versailles. Germany pays heavy indemnities, gives up territory, and is disarmed. As in the Middle Ages, fanatics like Adolf Hitler use the Jews as scapegoats. We see incipient anti-Semitism from the second scene, and watch it gradually build. It ripens fully in 1941-42, when the Nazis have set themselves on the road to the "final solution" of the Holocaust, and Allied bombers are flying daily overhead.

Language and Meaning

Friedrich originally appeared in German as *Damals war es Friedrich*. The English translation by Edite Kroll is smooth, dramatic and idiomatic. The novel appears aimed at teenaged readers, but nothing in its themes or treatment puts it below adult readers. By a series of scenes, Richter uses his narrator's direct observation, learned exposition by teachers and thugs, and by a rabbi's pious parable to help readers feel what it was like to be a German or a Jew in Germany before and during the Nazi era. It is a spare novel, including almost nothing superfluous or out of place.

Structure

Friedrich consists of 31 scenes from the life of a young Jew and his Christian friend, the unnamed narrator. Each is appropriately titled and dated, providing a handy cross-reference to the "Chronology" at the end. The scenes are selected to illustrate the



march of Nazi power. The Chronology says, for instance, on April 1, 1933, Hitler proclaims a one-day boycott of all Jewish shops. "The Way to School (1933)" shows two eight-year-olds seeing Nazi toughs in action, obeying the F'hrer's command. The story unfolds chronologically, and even when several years are skipped, there is no confusion or disjuncture. Pressure on the Jews builds constantly (except a brief reprieve during the 1936 Olympics), Jews philosophically bow to their destiny to suffer (at least all of those depicted in this novel), and everyday Germans, mostly predisposed to anti-Semitism, look the other way or enthusiastically join in the persecution. The narrator and his family, tied closely with their upstairs neighbors and friends who happen to be Jewish, stand up for them as much as possible without themselves becoming liable to prosecution.



Quotes

"Grandfather looked at us. Then he said, 'We are Christians. Bear in mind that the Jews crucified our Lord.' "Here Father interjected, 'But not the Schneiders!' Mother's face changed color. "Grandfather got up from the chair. He leaned on the table with his knuckles. So sharply it came out like a snarl, he ordered, 'I do not wish the boy to associate with this Jew!' He sat down again as suddenly as he had stood up."
Grandfather, pg. 15.

"Mother stroked my hair. 'But you know, my boy,' she said, 'that we are poor.' "Father washed his hands and asked, 'What's for lunch today?' "Mother sighed. 'Nothing!' she replied. 'We spent the lunch money at the amusement park.'" School Begins, pg. 25.

"Without moving and without looking at the woman, the picketer recited in a monotone: 'DON'T BUY FROM JEWS!' "'But I want to!' the old woman insisted; and when the man didn't budge, she squeezed between him and the wall and flitted down the stairs and into the shop. "The bystanders grinned. In the back rows, some even laughed out loud. The man with the sign didn't move a muscle; only his left hand, thumb stuck behind the buckle of his belt, clenched into a fist." The Way to School, pg. 30.

"'With a large knife,' he said, 'a knife as long as my arm, the Jew priest steps beside the poor cow. Very slowly, he raises the knife. The beast feels the threat of death; it bellows, tries to wrench free. But the Jew knows no mercy. Quick as a flash he drives the wide knife into the animal's neck. Blood spurts; it befouls everything. The animal is in a frenzy, its eyes fixed, staring in horror. But the Jew knows no pity; he doesn't shorten its suffering; he wallows in the pain of the bleeding animal; he wants that blood. And he stands by and watches the animal slowly bleeding to its pitiful death. It's called kosher butchering! - The God of the Jews demands it!' "Friedrich bent so far forward I was afraid he'd topple off the bench. His face was pale, his breathing labored; his hands clutched his knees. The hunchback told of murdered Christian children, of Jewish crimes, of wars. Just listening made me shudder." The *Jungvolk*, pgs. 36-37.

"'But you can't do that, Herr Resch,' my father interrupted. 'Her Schneider has his rights as a tenant.' "Herr Resch shot a mean glance at my father. 'I didn't ask you to support this gentleman!' he snapped. 'You are supposed to be a witness, nothing else!' "My father cleared his throat. 'You cannot order me to be quiet, Herr Resch. Do not count on me as a witness!' He pushed me back and slammed the door." Herr Schneider, pgs. 43-44.

"Pretending to be conscience-stricken, the attorney lowered his head until his chin touched his chest. Then he leaned back again, tugged at his robe, and began afresh. "I watched, excite. I had never been in a courtroom before. Mother clung to my hand; it was a new experience for her, too. Herr Schneider had asked us to come - 'just in case.'" The Hearing, pg. 50.



"Herr Neudorf turned Friedrich around by his shoulder. 'I wish you all the best, Friedrich!' the teacher said, 'and *Auf Wiedersehen!*' Friedrich bent his head. In a low voice he replied, '*Auf Wiedersehen!*' "With quick steps Herr Neudorf hurried to the front of the class. He jerked up his right arm, the hand straight out at eye level, and said: 'Heil Hitler!' "We all jumped up and returned the greeting in the same way." The Teacher, pg. 64.

"Mother pulled a face, as if Frau Penk had given her a riddle to solve. 'What on earth has the fact that you're only twenty-eight got to do with it?' "Over her shoulder Frau Penk peered at my mother in astonishment. 'But don't you know about the new law the Nazis have passed?' she asked in a superior tone of voice. "'No!' "Jews and non-Jews are no longer allowed to marry. All marriages between Jews and non-Jews are dissolved. And non-Jewish women who are under thirty-five are no longer allowed to work in the houses of Jews.' "My God!' signed Mother." The Cleaning Lady, pg. 67.

"Everyone looked at Friedrich. A lane formed between him and the owner of the silver bike. "The boy stepped closer to Friedrich. 'Say,' he asked, 'aren't you the Jew from the pool a while back?' Friedrich blushed, lowered his eyes to the ground. 'You don't think the police would believe you, do you?'" In the Swimming Pool, pg. 78.

" 'Tell me,' I asked Friedrich in a whisper, 'where did you learn all that, the Hebrew and the speech?' "Friedrich smiled proudly. 'Learned it. Had to practice my Torah section and the speech for almost three months.' I showed my astonishment." The Festival, pg. 84.

"Herr Shuster ordered a song. Eyes staring fixedly ahead, laden down but erect, we marched past the Jewish class and belted out: 'Crooked Jews are marching along, / they're marching through the Red Sea. ' The waves close over them, / and the world is at peace!'" The Encounter, pg. 88.

"Frau Schneider's face had turned quite dark. Her breath came in short bursts. She reared up. Her head flew from side to side. She groaned. Her hands clawed at her chest. "In a strange, chanting voice, Dr. Levy began to pray, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!'" The Death, pg. 99.

"Today is the first time since Mother died that I am seeing a movie,' Friedrich said softly. 'And what a movie! I'm glad Mother didn't have to live through all that's happened in the last two years. We are suffering, and not just because there's a war on.'" The Movie, pg. 105.

"But Helga behaved the whole time as if it were natural to go out with a Jew. She told me about her home, about the children in the kindergarten, and about her vacations. And she took my hand and held it tightly. I could have fallen around her neck and wept! But I was much too excited and stupid to do or say anything sensible like that.'" Benches, pg. 113.

"He unbuttoned his coat. On his jacket was a yellow star! He opened his jacket. On his waistcoat a yellow star! 'In the old days Jews had to wear pointed yellow hats!' His voice



was mocking. 'This time it's yellow stars - we've gone back to the Middle Ages!'" Stars, pg. 119.

"Do you know who that is?' Herr Resch sputtered. 'That's a Jew!' "'So?' the sergeant asked with astonishment. 'And even if it were a dog, you'd let him stay until the raid is over.' "The other people in the shelter also took part now. 'Let the boy stay1' came from all sides. "'Who do you think you are!' Herr Resch screamed. 'How dare you mix in my affairs? Who is air-raid warden here, you or I? You follow my orders, is that understood? Otherwise, I'll report you.' No longer sure of himself, the sergeant stood and looked at Friedrich. Everyone was silent. The guns still sounded." In the Shelter, pg. 136.

"Herr Resch lifted his foot and kicked. "Friedrich rolled out of the shelter entrance way onto the stone path. A trail of blood went from his right temple to his collar. "I clutched the thorny rosebush. "'His luck that he died *this way*,' said Herr Resch." The End, pg. 138.



Topics for Discussion

1. Although several characters in *Friedrich*, such as Herr Neudorf, Fritz's parents, and people in the bomb shelter, express sympathy toward the Schneiders, no one helps them. Why not?
2. Fritz's father feels guilty for joining the Nazi party. Why does he join a party with whose beliefs he cannot agree totally?
3. How might Friedrich feel after Herr Neudorf's brief history and explanations of Jewish culture?
4. How do the social and economic situations in Germany just before the war help to spur the pogroms and "final solution" against the Jews?
5. Which character in *Friedrich* might be called the most heroic? Why?
6. Herr Resch says that it is Friedrich's "luck that he died this way." Would most people agree or disagree with this statement?
7. What does Fritz learn about Jewish customs and values in the course of the novel?
8. What are the differences and the similarities between the characteristics of the German people shown in the bomb shelter and those of German people described in other episodes?
9. The cross-section of German citizens presented in *Friedrich* seems to indicate that the majority did not support the killing of Jews. If this evidence is correct, what might the majority have done to prevent the "final solution"?
10. After Mr. Schneider decides not to leave Germany as Fritz's father suggests, what, if anything, could he have done to protect himself and his family?
11. When Fritz's father suggests that Mr. Schneider leave Germany, he lists reasons for going, and Mr. Schneider lists reasons for remaining. In what ways are both viewpoints reasonable?

What would have been the best solution?

12. In what way does Helga's choice of the "Jews Only" bench suggest a possible method of resistance against the Nazis? Could this method of resistance have prevented further violence against Jews?



Essay Topics

What role does the narrator's grandfather play in the novel?

How does the narrator relate to the Sabbath dinner?

Why would Friedrich and the narrator go to the *Jungvolk* meeting together?

What is the role of the righteous judge?

How does the swimming pool incident affect the story line?

What motivates the narrator during the pogrom?

How does the movie theater scene affect the story line?

What is the role of the famous, old rabbi?

What is the role of Dr. Levy?

What is the role of the sergeant?

What is the role of Polycarp, the gnome?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. What is gained by telling the story from Fritz's point of view as he grows up rather than telling it from his parents' or Friedrich's point of view?
2. For what purposes has Richter written this story?
3. In writing fiction, authors frequently make it easy for the reader to decide what the right or wrong solutions to problems are. Richter, however, provides no easy answers to decisions the central characters must make. What are some of the dilemmas Fritz's parents face, and why are there no easy answers?
4. What evidence, if any, does the narrative give to indicate that if their roles in German society were reversed, the Schneiders might offer Fritz's family more, the same, or less help than Fritz's family offers the Schneiders?
5. Following the war years, with what emotions might Fritz and his parents remember how they responded to the Schneiders before and during the war?
6. Would the reader's involvement with and sympathy for the Schneider family be different if Fritz were to tell how he and his family feel during each episode instead of just explaining what he sees and hears?
7. What factors in the history of the German people help to explain their behavior during the Third Reich as shown in the novel? What historical factors would lead an analyst to expect different, even opposite, behavior?
8. What factors in the history of the Jewish people help to explain their behavior as shown in the novel? What historical factors would lead an analyst to expect different, even opposite, behavior?

Further Study

De Montreville, D., and E. Crawford, eds.

Fourth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1978.
Biographical materials supplement this short autobiographical sketch translated from the German.

Evory, Ann, ed. Contemporary Authors, New Revision Series. Detroit: Gale Research, 1981. This short biographical sketch covers personal and career highlights.

Related Titles

Richter's autobiographical reminiscence, *I Was There*, serves as interesting complementary reading to the "somewhat autobiographical" Friedrich.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996