

I Am David Study Guide

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Plot Summary

This novel for young people is the story of David, who is allowed to escape from a Nazi concentration camp and makes his way across Europe to a new home in Denmark. As the narrative details his struggles to survive and retain his sense of individuality, the narrative also explores issues relating to the nature and value of freedom and the power of faith.

The story begins with twelve year old David's escape from the concentration camp, an escape motivated and assisted by a character referred to only as "the man." He tells David how to watch for the right time to make his move, where to find some supplies in the nearby woods, and that he must eventually make his way to Denmark. David, not sure that the man can be trusted, nevertheless takes him at his word, and as a result gets away from the concentration camp and starts on his long journey. Along the way, he is helped by several friendly travelers, and by what he believes to be the spirit of his friend Johannes, who guided him through the early years of his life in the camp. Narration reveals that after Johannes died, David resolved never to care for anyone again.

Traveling by night and resting by day, David finds his way to a small town in Italy, where he finds himself a hiding place that quickly becomes a sort of temporary home. During his investigations of the town, he finds himself drawn to the church, which inspires him with its beauty but which he is afraid to enter. He is also inspired to pray for the first time in his life. One night, however, he overhears some of the people of the town talking about him and, fearful that they will turn him over to "them" (the Nazis who ran the concentration camp) David flees. As he continues making his way north towards Denmark, he encounters more friendly travelers, some of whom comment on his unusual ability with languages (which narration reveals he acquired while in the camp), on his watchful eyes, and on his apparent inability to smile.

At one point on his journey through Italy, David saves the life of a beautiful young girl, Maria. In gratitude, her parents take him into their home, and for a while, he enjoys good food, the opportunity to read, nice clothes, and a comfortable bed. However, after overhearing Maria's parents express their concerns to each other about how strange he seems, David again fears that he will be returned to the Nazis and flees.

David makes his way from Italy into Switzerland, drawing closer and closer to Denmark. He continues to get rides from friendly travelers and continues to develop his prayerful relationship with God, always ending his prayers with the declaration "I am David." While traveling through Switzerland, he meets a woman named Sophie, who befriends him and tells him a story of a woman from Denmark whom David quickly becomes convinced is his mother. Determined to find her, he leaves the comfort and safety of Sophie's home and continues his journey, but the bad weather of the approaching winter wears him down to the point of near collapse. He is taken in by a farmer and his family, all of them treating him like a slave over the winter and planning to take him to



the police in the spring. During this time, however, David makes friends with the farmer's dog, King, who follows him when he eventually escapes.

At one point in their journey, David and King accidentally encounter a group of "them" manning an outpost. Fearful of capture but aware that his only option is to run, David is paralyzed with indecision, but King rushes out from their hiding place and distracts the guards, sacrificing his life so that David can get away. Traveling without his friend makes David lonely, but he is more determined than ever to reach his goal, and eventually makes his way to Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark where, at the point of exhaustion, he is reunited with his mother.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

This novel for young people is the story of David, who is allowed to escape from a Nazi concentration camp and makes his way across Europe to a new home in Denmark. As the narrative details his struggles to survive and retain his sense of individuality, the narrative also explores issues relating to the nature and value of freedom and the power of faith.

Twelve year old David waits nervously for the moment when he is to make his escape from the prison camp where he was born and grew up. Narration describes the opportunity prepared for him by a nameless man (see "Quotes", p. 5-6) who told him where to find a particular tree where there would be water and a compass, and to use the compass to find his way first to the coast, then to Italy, and finally to Denmark. Narration also describes how David asks the man for only one thing - a bar of soap, which the man gives him. When the time comes, David escapes the camp, crosses an open field, and makes his way into the woods, convinced the whole time that he is going to be shot and surprised when he isn't. He finds the tree, discovers that bread and matches have also been hidden for him, and sets off on his journey.

For several days, David travels at night and sleeps during the day, occasionally scavenging for food and constantly fearful of being captured and returned to the camp. At one point, he overhears a pair of truck drivers discussing how they're going to get to the coast and climbs into the back of their truck, hiding himself among packing crates. He spends the next few days in the truck, at one point believing that he is being accompanied by the spirit of his friend Johannes, who died in the camp. When the truck reaches the docks at Salonica, David soon finds a ship bound for Italy. He climbs aboard, conceals himself in the hold, and loses track of time as the ship sets sail.

David discovers a bottle of something that pours like water but tastes stronger, and drinks from it whenever he needs to go to sleep. He also realizes that he no longer has the feeling of being accompanied by Johannes. He is eventually discovered by an Italian sailor, who is astonished by David's calmness and by the fact that he doesn't try to run away when he is caught. As the boat approaches its Italian harbor, the sailor gives David a life preserver and helps him overboard. David, who has kept his compass and matches dry, makes his way to shore and then to the outskirts of the city where he lands, climbing to the top of the mountain where he is moved to tears by the colors he sees (see "Quotes", p. 27-28). Narration comments that "now he had learned about beauty he wanted to live ..."



Chapter 1 Analysis

David's story begins at a point of high tension, as he readies himself for his escape - a moment of ending his life in the camp and beginning his journey into a new life. As narration describes the complex interplay of feelings (doubt, worry, hope, fear, anger) he experiences not only in the moments before his actual departure from the camp but also the first several days of his journey; it also introduces several important elements. These include the mysterious nature and agenda of the man, which becomes even more mysterious the more David examines the man's actions in subsequent chapters as well as the guidance of Johannes which, also in subsequent chapters, turns out to have manifested in several ways during their time together in the camp. Other important elements include the soap and the compass, both of which take on both practical and metaphoric value as the narrative progresses. Finally, there is the reference to Denmark, a goal that David accepts for himself without knowing how far away it is, how difficult it will be to get there, why it should be a goal at all, or whether he should trust the man's word that it is his goal. But in his decision to accept Denmark as his goal, the only goal he really has, David enacts one of the book's key themes - the power of faith. The chapter concludes with an important point on the physical and spiritual journeys undertaken by David over the course of the narrative - the discovery that there is beauty in the world, and that as the result of encountering that beauty, for perhaps the first time in his life, he wants to live.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

As he sits looking at the beauty spread out before him, David is surprised to realize that he is weeping. After brushing away his tears, he goes to the nearby stream, strips off his clothes and, using the soap given to him by the man, fiercely scrubs both himself and what he had been wearing in order to cleanse himself of the smell of the camp (see "Quotes," p. 32). He then finds a perfect place to hide - a small cave that he decides to carefully climb to in spite of a powerful sense of reluctance (see "Quotes," p. 32 - 33). Once inside the cave he unpacks his bundle of belongings, placing its contents carefully where he can see them, and thinks about the camp from which he came (see "Quotes," p. 39 - 40) and what advantages and skills he has, including the various languages he learned from listening and talking to the other prisoners in the camp. He also thinks about the fact that he has no real idea of who he is, what he looks like, or how to live outside the camp. He resolves to go down into the nearby town and start finding out. He does remember, however, that Johannes had told him he, David, was definitely not Jewish (see "Quotes," p. 39 - 1)

That evening, when he feels it's possible to avoid discovery by hiding in the shadows if he needs to, David goes down into the town and makes his way through its narrow, crowded streets. He listens to people talk, accepts an offer of food, and at one point finds himself entranced by the beauty of a church, which Johannes had told him could be identified by the cross on its steeple. He also finds a stray piece of paper with some writing on it, which he uses to remind himself how to read. The paper, David discovers, has a reference to a king. "From what he had learned in the camp," narration comments, "David had gathered that the countries that had kings were free and their people had no need to be frightened of THEM". For several nights in a row, he returns to the town, always receiving a gift of food from the same man and always, at some point, standing and staring at the church. One night, however, he overhears the man who gave him the bread talking with some of the other people in the town about him. Fearing that their conversation means they are going to contact "THEM" (his captors) to come find and recapture him, David flees to his cave, where he collects his belongings and weeps briefly over the fact that he has to leave (see "Quotes," p. 50). He realizes, however, that he is still free, remembers everything he has learned, and resolves to keep living and keep being free. In the middle of the night, he leaves the once-welcoming town behind and continues his journey north towards Denmark.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Several important narrative and thematic elements are introduced in this chapter, elements that play important roles in the narrative to come. First is David's determination and choice to get to the cave, a manifestation of both a key component of his identity and one of the narrative's key thematic sensibilities - specifically, the power



of personal choice, its freedom and its power. David's freedom to choose is something new and precious to him, having never had such a freedom in the camp. Throughout the narrative, his actions are, to one degree or another, defined by his determination to hold onto and honor that freedom. The choices of other characters also mean more to him when they come from that same place - see in particular Chapter 8. Meanwhile, it's interesting to note that the establishment here of this aspect of David's identity and sense of self is juxtaposed with narrative commentary that he has no real idea who he is - in other words, no sense of any other kind of identity. This is perhaps a significant factor in why he holds so tightly to his freedom to make his own choices; he has no other way to define himself.

Two other important elements introduced in this section are also made more so by their juxtaposition with one another. These are the reference to kings, and the freedom their presence enables, juxtaposed with the references to "THEM" who, in David's mind, represent and embody oppression and control, the very opposite of freedom. Here it's important to note that narration never refers to "THEM" or "THEY" by who and what they clearly were - the Nazis, who overran and ruled Germany in the early-to-mid 20th Century. Details of the Nazi regime and its cruelties are the subject for another work, but suffice it to say here that David's fear and hatred of them is reasonable and justified.

Finally, there is the introduction of the church, which at this point in the narrative plays less of a role than it does in later chapters, but is, nevertheless, a significant presence. David's mysterious, instinctive attraction to the church here foreshadows the growth of his relationship to God later in the narrative.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The next day, after another night of travel, David considers what to do next, determined to keep making his own decisions. At this point, narration reveals that "the man" who had helped him to freedom had been the camp commandant. Realizing that the man had told the truth about the bundle, among other things, leads David to realize that he should probably believe that the man was also right when he urged David to go to Denmark. As he prepares to leave, however, he slips on a rock and drops his compass into the sea. He immediately becomes desperately worried about how he will manage without it, and says, out loud, "Oh God" (see "Quotes," p. 55). This leads him to consider that maybe he should have a god to help him through difficult times, and after considering the various gods prayed to by the men and women in the camp, decides to pray to the god spoken of by Johannes - the God, narration describes, of a man in the Bible also named David. This David starts his prayer by "God of the green pastures and the still waters", and concludes by saying, "I am David. Amen." This is how he starts and ends all his prayers throughout the book. He then feels greater strength and the courage to keep traveling (see "Quotes," p. 57).

As he travels, David encounters several friendly people. First, he helps a British traveler find his spectacles, and has a brief conversation with the man and his wife, during which the wife refers to the strange beauty of David's eyes and how she wants to see him smile. He refuses their offer of money and hurries off. Later, when he finds a broken mirror, David spends time studying himself and his eyes. He also tries to smile, but gives up when it doesn't feel right. Finally, he thinks hard about why he didn't want to take the British man's money (see "Quotes," p. 63). Then, after traveling for several more days, and realizing that he wants not only freedom but a safe place to live (see "Quotes", p. 68-69), David encounters an American traveler and his wife, whose car runs out of gas. The wife is suspicious of his offer of help, saying that he'll disappear with their gas can. David nevertheless fetches both gasoline and a helpful mechanic, eventually refusing the American's offer of money as well. Later, however, when he reopens his bundle, he discovers that the American put a large sum of Italian money in it, which he initially resolves to save, remembering how Johannes disliked greedy people. He then spends money on some new soap, since he had almost none left, a comb, and some scissors to cut his hair.

While all this is going on, David considers a plan to help him get to Denmark faster - ask for a ride. At first, he is too fearful of being sent back to "them" to put his plan into action, but after he again prays to the "God of the green pastures and still waters," he finds the courage to ask for a ride. For some time he rides with a truck driver named Angelo, who asks David's advice about which bride to choose - the one he loves, or the one his father wants him to marry. David advises him to choose for himself, considering how foolish Angelo is to ask the question in the first place (see "Quotes," p. 76-77). After Angelo drops him off, and despite the success of his plan, David resolves to no longer



ask God for help. God, he worries, might think he's greedy and no longer want to help him. Narration comments, at this point, that "the very next day something would happen that [David] could not tackle alone and he still would not ask for help ..."

Chapter 3 Analysis

The mystery surrounding the identity and motivations of "the man" deepens at the beginning of this chapter, with the revelation that he was the camp commandant, a position of authority far more responsible for death than for life. The implication here is that there is something both strange and unique about his efforts to see David set free, a mystery that deepens as David's contemplations of it continue throughout the narrative. Also at the beginning of this chapter, the loss of the compass is a troubling obstacle for David to overcome. It's interesting to note, however, that its guidance is almost immediately replaced by what amounts to guidance from God. In other words, David's physical/geographical compass is immediately replaced by a moral and spiritual one - the presence and guidance of God. Here again, the narrative continues its thematically central consideration of the nature and power of faith, particularly the Christian faith. (For further consideration of the words of prayer David actually uses, see "Objects/Places - The 23rd Psalm"). This consideration is also explored in indirect ways, for example, in the names of characters like Angelo whose name clearly resembles the word "angel", a spirit that helps people in the way Angelo helps David and, in the following section, Maria whose name is the Italian version of the name of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Meanwhile, David's quest for an identity continues with his examination of his physical identity, which begins with his acquisition of the mirror. An important point to note here is the attention paid by the British woman, by David and by narration to his eyes, referred to several times throughout the book as being quite striking. All these references foreshadow the moment in Chapter 6 when David himself is struck by the eyes of a woman in the photograph, eyes that are described in the same way as David's seem to be perceived (see Chapter 6, Analysis).

At the same time, the narrative's thematic emphasis on the value of free and independent choice manifests in several ways - in David's contemplations of the various levels of freedom (see "Quotes," p. 68-9) and of Angelo and his circumstances. Finally, the narrative concludes with the application of a powerful narrative technique - a foreshadowing of important events to come.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

As he travels through a forest, David comes across a large, beautiful building that looks almost like a church but which he realizes is a house. Narration comments on how he dislikes the idea of being in a house surrounded by walls which limit his freedom, and on the beautiful sound coming from the house which he realizes is music. His thoughts are interrupted when he is attacked by a dark haired boy, who accuses him of trespassing and, when David doesn't fight back, of being scared. David says he doesn't fight back because that would make him as bad and as violent as the boy, but adds that he can easily run off, which he does. He discovers a stream, and washes himself and his clothes in the same way as he did after he left the camp, and for similar reasons - he wants to wash the violence off him. Shortly afterwards, he discovers a group of children at play. As narration describes why David has always avoided other children (see "Quotes," p. 83-84), he sees that one of the children is a beautiful girl who reminds him of a flower. When the two other children leave her in a shed and then run off as part of their game, David realizes there's nothing more to see or to watch, and falls asleep. He is awakened by the cries of the returning children, shouting that the shed is on fire and the girl is still inside. Thinking fast and remembering how some of the inmates at the camp protected themselves from fire by wrapping their heads in wet clothes, he grabs his still-wet shirt and trousers and races for the shed. He wraps his face in his shirt, pushes through the burning door and rescues the girl, burning his hands and feet in the process. Meanwhile, the other children have run and fetched other people, including the girl's father and her brother Carlo, who turns out to be the boy who attacked David earlier. As the others gather around, the girl, Maria, looks at David and smiles. David discovers that he is smiling as well (see "Quotes," p. 91)

David is taken back to the home of Maria's family so that her mother can thank him. He is surprised to discover that they live in the beautiful house he had seen earlier. His curiosity about how they live overcomes his suspicions about houses, and he allows himself to be taken inside where he is seen by a doctor who treats his burns and says they're not too serious, fed, and put into a comfortable bed for the first time in his life. Meanwhile, he remembers conversations with Johannes, who narration now reveals is an older man, about how there is good in people and how David must always claim the good in himself as part of his identity. The next morning, David is dressed in some of the other boys' clothes, and is moved almost to tears by wearing clothes he never thought he would wear. At breakfast, he is offered the chance to stay for a while. He asks whether he would be free to go immediately if he wanted, and is told that he could, but that the family would be grateful if he would stay. He comments that he doesn't have to be on his way just yet, and urges the family to not be too grateful - saving Maria was something he wanted to do.



Chapter 4 Analysis

There are several noteworthy elements in this section. First is the juxtaposition of the concepts of "church" and "house." When David initially mistakes the latter, which he fears on principle, for the former, and as he comes to appreciate the good things a house has to offer (i.e. that which makes it a home), the narrative is suggesting that the church and all it represents (primarily faith and safety) is, or can be, a home of sorts. First, however, David has to work his way through his fear of what he BELIEVES a house to represent (restriction and a lack of freedom), a process that begins with his positive experiences here.

Other interesting elements here include the reference to David wanting to cleanse himself of violence, an interesting echo of his self-cleansing earlier in the narrative. Meanwhile, the violence he experiences at the hands of Carlo, and the feelings of resentment arising from that violence, color many of his actions and attitudes in subsequent chapters. Perhaps the most important elements in this section include David's further discoveries of his identity - specifically, his ability to smile and his perception that he isn't all that different from other boys, at least physically. David is putting the pieces of himself together. While he says over and over again, "I am David," at the beginning of the novel, he has very little actual sense of who that is. The events of this chapter, including the beautifully narrated discovery of both his ability to smile and the feeling of joy and happiness that makes him want to, go some distance towards giving him a bit more of a sense of identity. At the same time, though, it's also important to note that the one aspect of identity he does have, and feels determined to rely upon, is his ability to choose freely. His determination, central to the book's thematic consideration of the value of such freedom, manifests in his choice to save Maria (not because God wants him to, but because HE wants to) and his determination to make sure he can leave the house whenever he chooses.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

As the days pass, David becomes more and more comfortable in the house. He is listening to music, enjoying getting clean, and reading books, even when Maria's father, Giovanni, becomes amused when he insists on only reading books written before 1917, "...because he wanted to be sure that what was in it was true and not something THEY had made up." He enjoys eating and learning to play with the other children, although he continues to avoid Carlo and rejects his apology. David also has difficulty understanding why Carlo and the other children don't appreciate all they have (see "Quotes," p. 109-110). At one point, he refuses to play a game involving prisoners and jailers, and attempts to explain to the others why playing such a game is evil, but ultimately fails to make them understand. At another point, Maria shows him a globe, and David is dismayed to see how far away Denmark is. Narration describes how he doesn't like to be touched except by Maria, and how he comes to realize, after being fed bad-tasting vitamins by Maria's mother Elsa, that the man (the camp commandant) fed him vitamins too - in other words, something to help him be strong. This makes him wonder who, exactly, he was to the man, why the man would want to help him, and whether he is right in believing that THEY were coming after him and always would.

One night, as David is making plans to leave and continue on his journey, he overhears Giovanni and Elsa talking about him. Elsa says she will always be grateful to David for saving Maria's life but comments that she's afraid of him, doesn't understand him, is worried about the things he says to Maria about evil being in the world, and how Carlo is becoming more and more unhappy. Giovanni tries to defend him, but after discussing the various mysteries about him, including how well he speaks so many languages, Elsa says she's willing to help in any way she can, pay for his education, clothing, or safety but he cannot stay in the house any longer. Giovanni promises to talk to him the next day, but neither is aware that David has been listening to the entire conversation. He packs up all his belongings, and writes a letter explaining why he is leaving (see "Quotes," p. 128) and saying that he is revealing all he will ever voluntarily reveal.

As he is going out the door, he is met by Maria, who has just awakened from a bad dream. He disregards her pleas that he stay but agrees to her request that he hug her; narration comments that this is the first time that he had touched someone of his own free will.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Here again, there are several important points to note. The first is factual - specifically, the narrative's reference to the year 1917, which was the year the Nazis ("them" or "they") began their rise to power in Germany. David wants to read books written prior to that year because he doesn't want to read anything the Nazis might have had a hand in



writing or editing. The second point to note is David's reluctance to play the prisoners and jailers game, an aspect of his character that has three important characteristics. The first is literal, in that he, for good reason, doesn't want to play any sort of game that reminds him of his life in the camp. The second, and related, characteristic of David's character at work here is that he doesn't want to have anything to do with a game that goes against, even during play, his intensely held belief in the value of individual freedom. (For further consideration of this particular moment in the book, see "Topics for Discussion - When they're trying to persuade David ..."). Finally, and although the narrative doesn't make this suggestion, there is the sense that the children's playing such a game is what led Maria to be trapped in the shed.

Meanwhile, the mystery of who the camp commandant was and why he cared for David deepens with David's realization that he was being fed vitamins and, in all likelihood, cared for in other ways. This, in turn, makes David question whether he actually has the reason to fear "them" that he always thought he had. Then there is the lengthy conversation David overhears between Giovanni and Elsa, the latter being quite sympathetically portrayed as being torn between her natural gratitude towards David and her equally natural concern for the well being of her children. Finally, there are the manifestations of the novel's thematic focus on the value of freedom to choose - specifically, David's choice to leave, and his choice to embrace Maria, both actions he undertakes, as the narrative carefully points out, of his own free will.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

David walks for several days, living off money he has left over from the American (Chapter 3). He thinks of his route to Denmark, which he learned from studying Maria's globe, which takes him to Switzerland, then Germany, then Denmark, and wonders why Giovanni and Elsa felt how they did about him and how he spoke (see "Quotes," p. 135). At one point, David goes into a beautiful church. There he encounters a friendly, gentle priest from whom he learns that there is only one God. The priest tells him that no matter how a person prays, "it's still the same God that hears our prayers". David remembers how different people in the camp spoke of having different gods, and tells the priest that he intends to keep his own god, saying that "you shouldn't change your mind once you've made your choice, for you must respect what you've said." The priest agrees with him, offers him food, and helps him map out the route to Denmark in more detail.

David then hitches rides with a series of truck drivers, eventually being dropped off at a train station. There, he discovers how easy it is to earn money carrying luggage for tourists and/or interpreting for them. He also sees an advertisement in the paper, written to him by Giovanni and Elsa, saying that they want him to come back. For a while he is happy, but then realizes why he's been so bothered about having stayed at the house. "When he entered the house," narration comments, "he had seen what he could never possess." He comes to realize how different he is, and to believe that he would never be anything BUT different (see "Quotes," p. 143-144). This, in turn, leads him to believe that life was no longer worth living, because the beauty with which he longs to be in touch will never be truly his. He then thanks God for all His help but tells Him that He is no longer enough, because David knows life is no longer worth living.

After avoiding a border checkpoint where guards check the identity papers of travelers, David discovers that, by walking across the unguarded frontier, he has in fact entered Switzerland. One day, while he is sitting by a lake, a woman asks whether she can paint a picture of him. He agrees, and the woman later invites him to her home for dinner. As they eat, the woman reveals her name is Sophie, and David tells her his name, the first time he has told any of the strangers he encounters. Narration comments that he is aware that he may still be sent back to "them," but because he no longer wants to live, he also no longer has any fear of death. For her part, Sophie reveals that she's only ever known one other person by that name, someone she never saw. Noticing David's interest, she quickly changes the subject and shows David a magazine with a photo of the king and queen of Denmark on the cover. David tells her of his belief that kings are not people "who would break their promises or think they had a right to take other people's lives or freedom away from them," and narration comments that he now wants more than ever to get to Denmark.



The next morning, David becomes more interested in Sophie's photo albums, and in one picture in particular - that of a woman that Sophie identifies as Edith Hjorth Fengel. David says "her eyes look as if - as if she'd known a great deal, and yet she's smiling." Sophie tells him how Edith and her husband had been politically rebellious, how they had been taken prisoner along with their one-year-old son—the boy David she said earlier she had never seen— how her husband and child had both been executed, and how she had escaped to Denmark with the help of a compassionate guard. Sophie goes on to comment that even after all her unhappiness, Edith is as happy "as you can be when you've gone through great unhappiness." She then tells David that sorrow does not last forever (see "Quotes," p. 155).

Chapter 6 Analysis

In the first part of this chapter, it's important to note the juxtaposition of happiness and unhappiness in its events and in the narration of those events. Specifically, David's joy at having his way of faith, in both its physical and spiritual aspects, acknowledged and affirmed by the priest is juxtaposed with his sudden, searing realization of why staying at the house had made him ultimately so unhappy. In these two moments, his emerging identity is first supported and then seemingly undermined to the point of being destroyed. In fact, the joy and identity he has been accumulating all along his journey falls away from him completely as the result of his realization of difference, leaving him dispirited and disheartened. Shortly afterwards, however, David's fortunes change once again when he encounters the sympathetic Sophie, and it is here that David's life, and the narrative telling the story of that life, take a sudden turn, for it is almost inescapably clear to the reader, from the moment she is discussed, that Edith is David's mother.

As previously discussed (see Chapter 3), the narrative's frequent references to the strangeness and beauty of David's eyes foreshadow the reference here to Edith's eyes. The way the latter's eyes are described clearly and vividly evokes the same sort of look that people like the British and American tourists have seen in David's eyes. David himself has gone through a great deal and, as the narrative has already indicated, he is still capable of smiling. In this same moment, the reference to the compassionate guard offers a clear hint as to the identity and nature of the commandant; although the narrative never makes the point explicitly, there is the clear implication that that guard has advanced through the ranks of the army he serves to become a commandant. Further contemplations of the story of David's mother and the guard emerge in the following chapter.

Finally, this chapter also contains another reference to the idea and/or motif (repeated image) of a king as a symbol of freedom and/or of free will. As narration suggests, the discovery that Denmark is governed by a king, and that there is the good possibility that the sort of freedom for which David longs is available to him there, triggers even more determination in him to reach his goal (as if he actually needed it after learning that, in all likelihood, his mother is there). It's interesting to note, meanwhile, that the references to kings here and throughout the narrative all foreshadow the late-story appearance of a

profoundly important character, who sniffs his way into the action in the following chapter.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

This chapter begins with an image of David trudging through a snowstorm, determined to "go on and on until he came to Denmark and found the woman whom he knew must be his mother" (see "Quotes," p. 157). He also becomes more confused about his feelings for the man, hating him and grateful to him at the same time. The storm in his mind is echoed by the storm raging around him, and David finds it increasingly difficult to keep moving but refuses to call on God for help. Just as he's about to faint from the cold, however, he is discovered by a man whom he immediately believes is one of THEM.

Narration reveals, however, that the man is in fact just a farmer, but a cruel and selfish one who lives with his equally cruel family on a remote farm. They take David in and, keeping him locked up in the barn at night, give him a bit of food in exchange for days full of hard work. But while he hates the farmer and his family, David realizes he never would have survived the winter on his own, and in fact has better food and better sleeping conditions than he had had in the concentration camp.

One day, however, a dog named King arrives. Narration describes David's fear of dogs, resulting from bad experiences with the cruel, hungry dogs that had been let into the concentration camp. He tells King that he is afraid of him, but King simply curls up with him as he sleeps. Eventually, narration comments, David and King become friends. Meanwhile, David finds himself imagining a happy, wanted, beautiful life with his mother (see "Quotes," p. 165).

The long winter slowly passes, and David realizes he needs to make a plan to get away from the farm before the farmer calls the police. But the farmer keeps a close watch on him all day, locking him and King in the stable at night. Frustrated and angry, he cries out to God and blames Him for being trapped, but then remembers what Johannes once told him about the necessity for a person to take responsibility for himself. David realizes that by allowing the farmer to lock him in, God is teaching him to do exactly that. With that, he formulates a plan to escape, using an old knife to cut through the wall of the barn and digging through the snow on the other side to make a tunnel. He realizes he has to hurry when King defends him from a violent attack by the farmer who, in response, says that the next day he's taking David to the police. That night, David makes his escape, telling King to stay behind where he can be sure of being fed. David goes through his tunnel, and out onto the road, now clear of snow. As he thanks God for helping him see what he had to do, he becomes aware that he's being followed. Believing it's the farmer coming after him, he quickly hides, but happily realizes that it's King! David keeps going, happy in his faith in God and with King. "The long winter had passed," narration comments, "and he was going down to meet the spring."



Chapter 7 Analysis

The first point to note about this section is the appearance of the dog, and particularly his name. The word, and concept of "king" has, throughout the narrative, been something of a talisman for David, a distillation and manifestation of all his hopes and dreams; if he can get to a land where there is a king, where people are free, then he will be happy. The fact that the author gives the dog the name "King" cannot, in this context, be a coincidence, particularly when the events of the following/final chapter are taken into account. But there is another possibility to consider here. Over the centuries, Jesus has been described and/or portrayed as "the king of kings." Granted, the book's evocations of its Christian sensibility are relatively subtle, and there is nothing in the narrative to suggest that this is literally the case. But there is, nevertheless, the possibility that in giving David a focus on the name and concept of "king," and in naming a self-sacrificing character (the dog - again, see Chapter 8) King, the narrative is evoking the presence and message of Jesus - specifically, his message of hope, joy, and above all, freedom. This message is clearly evoked in both physical and spiritual terms as David fights his physical way to freedom and also sees his way to what Christian theology tends to suggest is the freedom at the heart of its teaching - the freedom to choose one's faith and how it manifests.

But before David can have his encounter with that hope, joy and freedom, he first has to go through the suffering handed to him by the farmer and his family. Here again, David is placed in a situation that is, in many ways, challenging to survive physically, emotionally and spiritually, but again he is given a friend and confidante and ally who will support him in his troubles. In previous circumstances, it had been Johannes, the commandant, various truck drivers, and Sophie Bang, among others. Here, it is King the dog. In other words, the narrative seems to be suggesting that even in times of deepest despair and suffering, ultimately there is always hope and no-one is alone.

Hope also echoes through the final moments of the chapter, as winter, with its metaphorical and literal coldness and destructiveness, gives way to spring, with its metaphorical and literal warmth and potential for new life and growth. As David walks away from the farm and the winter it represents, he is also walking forward, into a new life and new growth into himself and his pieced-together identity.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

As David continues his journey through spring in Switzerland, he is inspired by its beauty, particularly by a tree covered with blossoms that reminds him of Maria. He writes and posts a letter to Carlo, apologizing for his rejection and asking him to thank his parents for placing the ad in the paper. Feeling uncomfortable with the seemingly unfriendly Swiss, he continues along his way, working as he goes to make some money to feed both himself and King who, as David accepts rides from Swiss drivers, including one who gets them into Germany, learns to sit quietly at his feet and do as he is quietly told. Narration describes David's contemplations of the dog's power and courage and affection (see "Quotes," p. 180), and his simultaneous belief that King could never fully protect him from THEM. He soon has an experience, however, that proves him wrong.

After spending a happy afternoon playing with King, David's guard is down, and he realizes too late that he has come dangerously close to one of THEIR outposts. He and King hide beneath a bush, and David considers both his options and his likely fate. Eventually, he realizes he has to run; it's the only chance he has, and he has too much to live for not to try (see "Quotes," p. 184). He prays for God to save King and help him get to a good family, and then resolves to run. As he's finishing the prayer, King nudges him with increasing urgency, and then suddenly leaps out from under the bush, running straight for the guard post. David realizes that King wants him to run in the opposite direction and takes off, not even stopping when he hears a shot and King bark in pain ... and then silence. Once he's a safe distance away from the guard post David weeps, angry with God for allowing King to be killed, but then realizing that King sacrificed himself of his own free will.

Narration then jumps ahead to David's arrival in Denmark, an arrival resulting from his having gotten rides with several drivers, one of whom, out of sympathy for his worn, tired, desperate appearance, concealed David in the back of his truck when they were about to cross the border. Another driver, who takes him into Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, offers to drop him off, but David, who doesn't know the address of the woman he believes to be his mother, evades him. Narration describes his determination to honor King's sacrifice and do everything possible to find his mother, how he looks up her address in a telephone book, and is driven there by a helpful, friendly woman.

When he finally reaches the address, David is so tired he can barely walk. Narration describes how he felt that "if his happiest dreams came true, he could go on living: if not, this was the end." He picks up his bundle and rings the doorbell. A woman answers, and David knows immediately that it is the woman from Sophie's photograph. He begins to introduce himself, but the woman interrupts him. "The woman looked into his face," narration states, "and said clearly and distinctly 'David ... my son David.'"



Chapter 8 Analysis

As both the narrative and David's journey reach their climax and inevitable conclusion, there are several important points to note. First, and perhaps more notably than even the ending, there is the moving sacrifice of the dog, King. This itself is notable for several reasons; among them is its manifestation of the novel's thematic emphasis on free will and choice, as well as its sub-textual (unspoken) affirmation of David's existence, value, and emerging identity. One other important aspect of King's death has to do with the previously discussed implication that King the dog has metaphorical links to Jesus Christ (see Chapter 7, Analysis) who, according to Biblical teaching and interpretation, sacrificed himself for the good of others in the same way as King does here. Meanwhile, the relationship between King and the freedom prized, striven for and respected by David also manifests in the narrative's comments on how David views and treats the dog (see "Quotes," p. 180). Finally, it's also important to note how important a role is played by David's realization that he does, in fact, have things for which to live. This is quite a transformation from his low point in the early stages of Chapter 6. Yes, the discovery of at least the possibility of a mother is a fundamental element of his desire, but the unconditional love and support offered by King, not to mention his eventual self-sacrifice, is almost equally important.

Other noteworthy elements in this chapter include David's acceptance of responsibility for his relationship with Carlo and the beautifully written, metaphoric comparison between Maria and the blossom-laden tree. Here again, the reader can see a connection with Christian theology and teaching; the Virgin Mary (or "Maria" in Italian) is viewed and revered as being both a source of natural, unconditional, spiritual beauty and of new life.

Finally, there is the chapter's final moments, the ending that not only brings David's quest to a resolution that hasn't always been inevitable but has, for both the reader and the book's protagonist, been imagined for quite some time. Aside from affirming the narrative's thematic emphasis on the power of both faith and perseverance, the words of David's mother also affirm the one thing that has sustained David from the very beginning of his quest. This is the gift given to him, as narration reveals, by Johannes right from David's early days in the concentration camp and self-affirmed by David in every prayer - the gift of identity, of individuality, of self-hood, and most importantly of freedom to choose. This gift was at first defined and fiercely clung to only by name but later, as David's mother unwittingly acknowledges, defined by all the things he is, all the things he has seen, all the things he has dreamed, and all the things he has believed in.



Characters

David

David is the novel's central character and protagonist. He is twelve years old as the story begins, living in a concentration camp with no idea of what his background is, where he belongs, or who his parents were. He does, however, have a strong sense of self, a sense of who he is and of his own identity, that manifests in a saying that he repeats over and over to himself, even closing his prayers with it. "I am David," he says, with the only information as to who that is coming from being his own inner sense of personal truth. That truth, narration reveals, is affirmed by the only friend David has ever known, the only parental figure he has ever consciously had - a fellow inmate named Johannes who, while he is still alive, instructs and guides David to a place of trust in his intuition, his values of honesty, integrity and selflessness, and his spirituality.

Meanwhile, as the narrative itself points out, David bears the same name as one of the most important and memorable figures in the Bible - the boy shepherd named David who eventually grew into one of the most respected and honored kings of the pre-Christianity Hebrews. In fact, the book's character David takes one of the Bible David's teachings in one of the Psalms as something of a mantra, or repeated phrase or image that serves as a source of spiritual strength - one of the lines of the 23rd Psalm (see "Objects / Places"). In other words, in the same way as the Biblical David transcends some very daunting obstacles by, in part, relying on his own sense of identity and integrity, so too does the David of this book. For further consideration of this aspect of the work, see "Topics for Discussion - Research and study the story ..."

The Man in the Camp (the Commandant)

This character is never named. He is referred to in the early stages only as "the man," but is later revealed to be the camp commandant. Even after that identity is revealed, he is still referred to more often as "the man." . He enables David to escape from the camp, providing him with information as to when would be the right time, an initial set of supplies, and a goal - Denmark. His motives remain puzzling and ambiguous to David, as over the course of his journey he reflects curiously on why the man seemed to both hate him and take care of him. Later, when the history of David's mother is revealed and David is told that his mother had been helped by a guard at the prison camp where she had been taken, David reasons that the guard loved his mother, took care of David, and grew into the man in the camp, eventually freeing David in the name of that love. Why the man kept David in the camp for so long without finding another way to get him back to his mother is never explained, although David has an idea that although he had saved her child out of love, the man resented the woman's not loving him in return and therefore kept David prisoner. In any case, the man is a complex presence throughout the entire narrative, the mystery of his motives providing an effectively engaging subplot/counterpoint to the main plot/narrative line.



Johannes

Johannes, whose last name and nationality are never revealed by the narrative, is a fellow inmate in the internment camp where David spends his childhood. Educated and articulate, wise and a mentor, he instructs David in the ways and philosophies of personal integrity, morals, and self-worth. He offers guidance to David throughout his journey, both in terms of what David remembers of him and also, early in the journey, as a presence that seems almost ghostly, or spiritual.

The Truck Drivers, the Italian Sailor, the Baker

These nameless characters, embodiments and/or manifestations of the same sort of selflessness and compassion to which David both practices and aspires, all help David on the initial stages of his journey through Italy.

Donald and Alice, the American couple

Donald and Alice are a British couple assisted by David during his time in Italy. They comment on the unlikelihood of his speaking as many languages as he does as well as he does, and on his lack of ability to smile. David feels quite positively towards them. The American couple, by contrast, form a less positive impression of him, presenting themselves as suspicious and untrusting. David makes them feel ashamed of their suspicion, and receives a substantial financial reward, that lasts him several months, in compensation.

Maria

Maria is a girl a few years younger than David whom he rescues from a burning shed. She had been locked in as part of a game she was playing with her brothers when the shed accidentally catches fire. She becomes infatuated with him, while her gentle and grateful regard for him triggers, in him, the first smiles that he can ever remember offering.

Carlo

Carlo is Maria's brother. He encounters David before Maria does - outside the family's house where Carlo thinks David is a prowler and physically challenges him. David stands up to him and Carlo runs off, later trying to apologize after David saves Maria's life. David, however, equates Carlo, his actions and attitudes with the violence of "them" and refuses to accept his apology or his friendship until very late in the narrative.



Giovanni, Elsa

Giovanni and Elsa are Carlo and Maria's parents, relatively well off and protective of both their children. They invite David into their home after he saves Maria's life. Although she is grateful to David for saving Maria's life, Elsa is concerned by his strangeness - his ability to speak so many languages, his apparently mature awareness of the presence of evil, and his apparent inability to forgive Carlo. In spite of Giovanni's protestations, she insists that David leave the house, but later, after they read the letter he leaves them (see "Objects / Places"), they place an advertisement in the paper asking for his forgiveness and his return.

The Priest

On his journey through Italy, David, who is struggling to develop and understand his relationship with God, goes into a church and encounters a priest, who tells him that no matter which God the members of a particular religion pray to, it's all the same God. For further consideration of this aspect of the work, see "Topics for Discussion - The priest that David encounters ..."

Sophie Bang

While journeying through Switzerland on his way to Denmark, David encounters the painter Sophie Bang, who takes him into her home and gives him information that leads him to his mother.

The Swiss Farmer and His Family

As winter is drawing on in Switzerland, David is taken in by a Swiss farmer and his family, who essentially use him as a slave to do farm work over the winter. The family, as portrayed by narration, is cruel, selfish and exploitative, using David only for what they can get out of him before taking him to the police.

King

King is the dog owned by the Swiss farmer and his family. David, although initially afraid of him because of bad experiences with dogs in the concentration camp, eventually makes friends with him, a relationship solidified when King defends him from an attack by the farmer and later follows David when he escapes. When the two of them stumble upon an outpost manned by "them," King sacrifices his life so that David can and will go free. King is an embodiment and/or manifestation of the narrative's thematic consideration of the value and importance of free will (see "Themes").



Edith Hjorth Fengel

This is the woman whose photograph David is particularly moved by when he sees it at Sophie's. When Sophie tells him the woman's story, David intuitively realizes that Edith Hjorth Fengel is his mother, and becomes determined to get to Denmark to find her. He eventually meets her, and when she refers to him as her son, realizes that he has found what he has been looking for not only throughout his journey, but his entire life.



Objects/Places

The Internment Camp

This prison camp, run by "them" (i.e. the Nazis - see "Characters"), is where David spent his childhood, and is the place from which he escapes in the narrative's first chapter.

David's Compass

Before he gets out of the camp, "the man" (eventually revealed to be the camp commandant - see "Characters") directs him to make his way to a certain tree, where he will find supplies to help him on his journey. The most important of these is a compass, which David has never used but which he quickly realizes will be invaluable in helping him find his way to Denmark. When he loses the compass (Chapter 3), he is forced to find other ways to navigate. For further consideration of the metaphoric value of the compass, see "Chapter 3, Analysis."

Salonica

This port city in Greece is David's first destination after he escapes from the camp. From there, he hitches a ride on a boat to Italy.

Italy

David has to navigate his way from the southern part of Italy to the northern border as the initial phase of his journey to Denmark. Several communities in Italy (some unnamed, others identified as Bologna or Milan) are the setting for key spiritual and personal encounters that offer either challenges or opportunities for support to David along his way.

Germany, Switzerland

After leaving Italy, David has to cross first Germany and then Switzerland to get to Denmark. Switzerland is the country in which he has some of his most memorable encounters - specifically, with Sophie Bang who gives him the information that he needs to reconnect with his mother- and with the farmer and his family, where David meets the dog King who will eventually save his life.



Denmark

This is David's destination from the moment he leaves the camp, identified as such by the camp commandant who never actually tells David WHY Denmark is his goal. The story eventually reveals that Denmark is the home of David's mother, a woman who, David surmises, was loved by the camp commandant.

The 23rd Psalm

The Book of Psalms in the Bible is a collection of poems and/or songs written in praise of God and his works. Legend suggests that the Psalms were written by the fabled King David (see "Characters - David" and also "Topics for Discussion - Research and Study...") The 23rd Psalm, which begins with the phrase, "The Lord is my shepherd," is one of the most famous of the psalms, if not THE most famous, and is the source for the lines that symbolize and embody David's faith in the God of "the green pastures and still waters."

Maria and Carlo's House

After he saves the life of the girl Maria (see "Characters"), David is temporarily taken into the home of her parents, Giovanni and Elsa (see "Characters"). The house is expansive and welcoming, luxurious in David's post-prison camp experience but still something of a trap, in which he comes to feel so restricted from being who he truly is that he eventually has to leave.

David's Letter

Before he leaves the home of Giovanni and Elsa as the result of overhearing their conversation about him, David leaves them a note explaining some of who he is and why he is, and also assuring them of his integrity and good intentions.

Maria's Necklace

As she says goodbye to David, Maria gives him a small jeweled crucifix to take with him. The crucifix can be seen as a symbol of David's growing faith in the Christian God.

The Newspaper at the Train Station

Some days after leaving Giovanni and Elsa's home, David discovers that they have listed an advertisement in the newspaper, saying they've read his letter and asking him to return to them. This prompts him to write a letter of apology to Carlo, but not to return to the house.



The Photograph of Edith Hjorth Fengel

While visiting at the home of Sophie Bang in Switzerland, David becomes fascinated by a photograph of a woman with eyes that, in description, sound much like his own ("her eyes look as if - as if she'd known a great deal, and yet she's smiling"). His fascination prompts Sophie to tell him the story of the woman, whom she identifies as Edith Hjorth Fengel (see "Characters").

The Farm in Switzerland

After leaving Sophie's and as he continues his journey through Switzerland towards Denmark, David is taken in for the winter by a farm family and made to live in their barn. There he is essentially kept as a working prisoner/slave, but manages to make friends with the family's dog King, who eventually plays an essential role in helping David achieve his ultimate freedom (see "Characters - King")

Edith's Home in Copenhagen

David's journey finally comes to an end in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark where Edith lives. When he reaches the house, which he has found through searching a telephone book, his energy almost fails him completely; but when Edith opens the door, both she and David realize that he, her son, has finally found his home.



Themes

Freedom from Oppression

David's journey, from beginning to end, is a manifestation and/or enacting of his desire to be free from anything that keeps him from being everything he is, everything he can be, and everything he wants to be. He leaves the camp because he doesn't want to be oppressed by the people who run it, by their rules, or the cruelty-defined ideology behind those rules. He leaves the towns where he begins to become comfortable as soon as he begins to feel oppressed by what he believes to be the similar attitudes of people he had thought or hoped were friends and allies. He makes a point of fighting against oppression-by-preconception as shown by the attitudes of the female American tourist, and the oppression-by-suspicion shown by Maria's mother, Elsa. He is also suspicious of the oppression represented, for him, by Elsa and Giovanni's house, eventually equating Elsa's suspicions with that oppression and fleeing for what he believes to be the open freeness of Denmark. Finally, he finds an ally in the struggle against the oppression of the farmer in King the dog, who also gives his life so that David does not have to return to the life of oppression threatened by the possible encounter with "them." David's struggle to obtain freedom and then to remain free from all these oppressions is fueled by his determination to live by a pair of basic tenets taught to him in the concentration camp by Johannes, both of which serve as secondary themes.

Individuality and Identity

The first of the work's secondary themes, all of which are related and/or define the first, is the value of individuality and identity. Throughout the narrative, David proudly, and often defiantly, proclaims his identity. This proclamation forms the title of the book - "I am David," he says to himself, over and over again, in his prayers, in his reflections, and in his contemplations. His determination to both discover and maintain his identity in the face of the oppressive forces against him fuels and sustains his physical journey and his emotional/spiritual/psychological journey of transformation, both of which lead him to freedom. The narrative's thematic suggestion seems to be that only through a strong and powerful sense of individuality and identity, such as that displayed by and manifest in David, is true freedom from oppression possible. The further suggestion seems to be that if that individuality continues to exist, even in the face of circumstances like the concentration camp which, by its very nature, denies and breaks down that individuality, the individual is still truly free. This seems to be the message embodied in the existence and teachings of the character of Johannes, the older male inmate of the camp who takes David under his wing and teaches him how to survive not only in the camp, but, as narration reveals, in the world as well. Johannes helps David to realize his own individual identity, laying the strong foundation for the sense of inner freedom that gives him his courage to seek an outer freedom to match.



The Power of Free Will

The second of the narrative's sub-themes is the idea of free will, the power to choose. This sub-theme manifests several times throughout the narrative, starting at the beginning when David makes the conscious choice to escape the camp not because he was told to do so, but because he himself sees that he can. It manifests several times in the middle such as when he encounters others who don't make their own choices and often reminds himself to do so and into the end where, in spite of feeling a surge of fear, he exercises his free will one last time and chooses to take the last few steps in search of his dream. The key point to note here is the interaction between this sub-theme and the previous one relating to individuality and identity. Free will and the power to choose are portrayed throughout the book as fundamental manifestations of individuality and identity. David's strong sense of self is in no small part defined by the freedom to make his own decisions and to choose his own destiny, to be himself and be defined by his choices, good and bad. He makes the point repeatedly, perhaps most memorably in his conversation with the priest (Chapter 6), in which he defends his choice of God by saying not only that he made his choice and intends to honor it, but that people in general have a responsibility to live up to their choices. Nowhere in the book is this theme more poignantly explored than at the moment during which King the dog sacrifices his life for David's. As narration reveals, David at first feels bad about King having died, but then realizes that the dog chose freely to do what he did and, in spite of being left alone and sad, realizes that if he truly values free will and the power to choose, he has to honor the same, even in a dog.

The Power of Faith

David's entire journey, both physical and mental/emotional/spiritual/psychological, is triggered and motivated by faith - in fact, by several different sorts of faith. There is, for David, the essential faith that his life and identity are worth living, preserving, and enacting. There is his faith, despite his suspicions, that the camp commandant is giving him correct advice when he says to go to Denmark. There is the fundamental faith that, along the way, he will find help and support, food and transportation and money. There is the faith that there is a better life ahead, that there is freedom ahead, and later in the narrative that his mother will be waiting for him. Finally, there is religious faith, which is presented in a way that may seem to contemporary readers surprisingly broad minded when it is considered that the work was first written and published in the early 1960's (a period not known for its spiritual open-mindedness - that came later in the 60's). Yes, much of David's experience of religion and God unfolds within a context of Christianity, but the priest he encounters in Chapter 6 makes a point that, in many ways, could be perceived as being a quite modern perspective - the idea that no matter what god a person prays to, all the gods are essentially the same God.

Style

Point of View

The novel is narrated from the third person past tense point of view, describing events and situations solely from the perspective of its central character and protagonist, twelve year old David. This means that the actions and feelings of other characters are experienced by the reader solely through the lens of David's interpretation - in other words, the reader sees the other characters and their actions as David sees them, considers them, and reacts to them. The main narrative benefit of this point of view is to engage the reader thoroughly and deeply in David's experiences. This takes place on several levels - firstly, in he and the reader sharing the same experiences at the same time. For example, he and the reader both experience his appearance for the first time in Chapter 3 (up to that point, the narrative carefully avoids describing how he looks) while his puzzlement over the motives of the camp commandant, for example, is also the reader's. On another level, by focusing so exclusively on David and his experiences, the narrative engages the reader in the personal MEANING of those experiences. A telling example here is David's reaction to the overhearing of the conversation about him in Chapter 2. In books with a wider point of view, the actual meaning of that conversation, the actual intentions of the people participating in it, might have been included. As it stands, however, the narrative describes this incident solely in terms of what David hears, what he believes, and how he reacts in response to both. In short, the book defines its narrative focus so tightly that there is no option for the reader but to thoroughly empathize and engage with its central character, even as wrong or as misguided as he sometimes is.

Setting

In terms of the work's setting in time, the narrative never explicitly defines a particular year. It's possible, however, to draw some reasonable conclusions simply from what happens and who is involved. As previously discussed, "they" and "them," the evil controlling forces who imprisoned David and whom he believes are still after him, are easily identifiable as Nazis, which means that the novel is set somewhere between 1917, when the Nazis started their rise to power in Germany, and 1945, when they lost that power at the end of World War II. Because of the existence of the concentration camp, which is near Greece and which wouldn't have been in existence there until after Germany's advancement through Europe was well underway, it's reasonable to infer that the narrative is set somewhere in the early years of the war - specifically, the early 1940's. This idea is further supported by the fact that David's journey through Italy, not to mention the life of that country, is relatively unimpeded by "them," who didn't occupy Italy until late in the war and Germany's alliance with Mussolini had dissolved. In short, the novel would appear to be set somewhere between 1940 and 1942/3, probably closer to the earlier of those dates.



In terms of the work's setting in place, the above commentary on the pervasiveness of the Nazi presence in Europe is also relevant, but with this addition. Europe was the only part of the world in which Nazi authority had any sort of substantial influence. Placing a story with the themes that this story has—the value of individual identity, the power of faith—within a geographical and temporal context that was, in many ways, defined by circumstances and values directly OPPOSED to those themes essentially raises the stakes for that story and the characters playing it out. In other words, setting in time and place can, and does in this book, provide as much of an obstacle to the journey of transformation undertaken by the main character as other characters and/or that character's internal conflicts.

Language and Meaning

The first point to note about this work is that it is a translation from the original Danish, meaning that, as is the case with any translation, there is always at least some degree of removal from the author's original narrative and stylistic intention. That said, there is the sense about this book that the translator has effectively and thoroughly respected the voice and style of the original, in that the language used in narration and the meanings associated with that language are shaped in a very particular style. This style is effectively and idiosyncratically balanced between poetic and literal, between dynamic and reflective, between generalized and detailed. This, in turn, is a manifestation and/or reflection of the identity, experiences and persona of the central character. David himself is both poetic and literal in his sensibilities; he sees Maria's beauty in terms of flowers, but is so driven by fear that he is unable to imagine the conversation of the townspeople in Chapter 2 as anything but literal expressions of their desire to be rid of him. David is also dynamic and reflective, taking action when he needs to and, at the same time, deliberately pausing, as he does in Chapter 2, to consider his strengths and weaknesses, his situation and his options. Finally, there are points at which language tends to gloss over, or summarize, long periods of David's journey, generalizing the events along that journey, while at the same time going into extensive, curious detail about events such as David eating his first orange (Chapter 2). In short, language and meaning throughout the work are both literal and revelatory, fact driven and emotion driven ... again, thoroughly reflective of the experience and perspective of the central character.

Structure

The work's structure is essentially linear, following David on his simultaneously physical and spiritual journey from the place where it begins to the place where it ends. There are no flashbacks, although David does experience some fairly intense flashes of memory, no narrative detours into, for example, the lives and experiences of other characters, and no points at which the narrative's movement forward is halted for extended thematic and/or metaphorical considerations. The work's structure is, in fact, tightly and inextricably tied to its point of view, each in some way serving as a manifestation of the other, with the focus of both being exclusively on David - on his



experiences, on his actions as the result of those experiences, and on the reactions and insights triggered by both action and reaction. There are times when the narrative's previously discussed tendency to speed over the longer stretches of David's physical journey seem somewhat rushed and even somewhat un-engaging, almost as though the author is more interested in getting to the next high/low point of David's journey rather than creating a more accurate sense of time passing. This is particularly true of the book's final stages, in which events following the death of King (David's traveling into Copenhagen, his discovery of his mother's address, the mother and son reunion) happen so quickly that it almost undermines the careful, often introspective, sense of intimate specificity that is such a strength of the rest of the work. It must be remembered, however, that this particular sequence, as well as the other glossed over travel sequences, can also be considered as reflective of David's experience - that such transitional moments really do blur together for him and become indistinct. If this is in fact the author's intent, to reinforce the potential for identification between the reader and David through a blurring of experience as well as amplification of certain details, then this sort of structure works well as a component of the work's essential linear nature to give a truer, varied sense of all the aspects of David's journey.



Quotes

"David had known him all his life, but he never spoke to him more than was barely necessary to answer his questions; and though he had known his name for as long as he could remember, he never said anything but 'the man' ... giving him a name would be like admitting that he knew him; it would place him on an equal footing with the others." Chapter 1, p. 5-6

"It was the second time he had found himself close to a town, and for the second time the compass was directing him to cross a main road. He dared not disobey it; it was almost as if some part of the man himself were traveling with him." Ibid, p. 15

"David was familiar only with various tones of grey and brown, and of course the blue of the sky. Well, yes, he had once seen a little red flower that had strayed inside the camp wall. Apart from that, color was something he had only heard of: he had seen only a pale and muddied reflection of it - in the ugliness of the camp and the equally ugly quarters of the guards." Ibid, p. 27-28

"He was David. Everything else was washed away, the camp, its smell, its touch - and now he was David, his own master, free - free as long as he could remain so." Chapter 2, p. 32

"Ever since the night he had found the bundle lying under the tree ... his feet had carried him along, deciding the way for him. This time it was he who had made the decision ... from now on he would think for himself and make his own decisions, and his feet and hands and body would be his servants to do his bidding." Ibid, p. 32 - 33.

"[David] did not know who he was, did not even know what country he came from. He had always lived in the camp, and even Johannes, who knew so many things, had not been able to find out anything about him for the simple reason that no one knew anything." Ibid, p. 39

"As a rule, the people THEY imprisoned were those who wanted to decide for themselves what they should believe and be free to write books and articles about it ... Jews, on the other hand, were sometimes imprisoned just because THEY did not like Jews. They said they did, but it was not true." Ibid, p. 39 - 40

"Before he had come to the town he had known about nothing but death: here he had learnt to live, to decide things for himself ... he had learnt the sound of laughter that was free from cruelty; he had learnt the meaning of beauty - and now he must leave it and never return." Ibid, p. 50

"He did not know why. It was what the men sometimes said in the camp when they were most in despair. But as for himself, he had no God." Chapter 3, p. 55



"He felt a sense of relief and added strength just as he had the morning he had determined to go on living. He was glad he had thought of it: a god would be a lot better than a compass - though, of course, it would have been nice to have both." Ibid, p. 57

"It had felt almost like possessing something, something so big that he could give some of it away. If he had taken the money, it would not have felt the same." Ibid, p. 63

"David wondered whether it were always like that - whether when you had something you not only wanted to keep it, but wanted something else as well - it sounded greedy, but he could not help it. Freedom and a country where he could live in safety: David wanted both. 'But nothing more,' he told himself ... 'Johannes said greedy people can never be happy, and I would so much like to know what it feels like to be happy.'" Ibid, p. 68-69

"Angelo was ... a good man, but he was stupid. David was puzzled, for he had always thought that good people must be clever ... had he been mistaken? He knew so little about anything. But no, Angelo was a grown man, and here was one thing he was quite free to decide for himself, and yet he was ready to let others make up his mind for him - that could only be stupidity." Ibid, p. 76-77

"One thing alone would give him away: he had no idea how to play. People were always talking about children playing, but playing seemed to mean so many different things that David had given up trying to find out what it was. There were so many more important things to learn about ..." Chapter 4, p, 83-84

"[David] could not bring himself to take his eyes off the little girl's face, for he knew it was she who had made him smile. And suppose his smile went when he stopped looking at her, then he would never find out how one came to smile. One smiled for joy, of course! Or was it happiness? Johannes had said there was a difference - joy passed, but happiness never completely disappeared." Ibid, p. 91

"...the children were so stupid David did not understand them at all. He did not understand why they did not like washing. He did not understand why they preferred to live without knowing anything ... he did not understand either why they did not regard mealtimes as gracious occasions ... but the most dangerous thing about them was that you could not follow what they were thinking about." Chapter 5, p. 109-110

"I have never murdered anyone and never used force, nor stolen from anybody. I've taken no-one's joy or happiness or freedom or property away from him. And I've never betrayed anyone. I am telling you this because you want to know something about me and to let you know that's all I'm going to tell." Ibid, p. 128

"The way you spoke had to do with the way you thought, not with possessions." Chapter 6, p. 135

"He was not - right. He was different from other children who had not been brought up in a concentration camp. There was nowhere he belonged. Now that they no longer believed he was really bad, they would do their utmost to make it appear that he did



belong. But it would not be the truth. He would continue to be himself, David ..." Ibid, p. 143-144

"... he had always known it did not matter whether you died or not: it was only after he had made his escape that he had come to think he really did want to live." Ibid, p. 153

" 'All suffering has an end, David, if only you wait long enough ... sorrow has its life just like people. Sorrow is born and lives and dies. And when it's dead and gone, someone's left behind to remember it. Exactly like people.'" Ibid, p. 155, Sophie to David.

"The man had saved the woman's life because he liked her, in the way grown-up people like those they wanted to marry. He had not saved her husband because he hated him for being her husband. He had saved David's life because he was her child. He had not told her the child was still alive, however ... because the woman did not care for him, the man had got his revenge by turning David into a boy from a concentration camp."
Chapter 7, p. 157

"Now and then he would find himself in a wonderful, happy day-dream where she would see at once that he was David and would want to love him just as the children's father and mother loved them. Then he would have a place where he belonged and could ask about all the things he did not know. She would say 'my son' when she spoke of him, and he need never be afraid again." Ibid, p. 165

"...he had made a good choice after all when he had chosen the God of the green pastures and still waters! He was very powerful, and the fact that He expected you to think for yourself and do something in return for His help did not matter, as long as you could work things out." Ibid, p. 173

"King had chosen to go with him, and he was not going to show ingratitude by ordering him about. David hated orders himself, and loud commanding voices, and as long as he was with him, King should remain a free dog." Chapter 8, p. 180

"David remembered all the pain and bitterness he had ever known ... he recalled, too, all the good things he had learned about since he gained his freedom - beauty and laughter, music and kind people, Maria, and a tree smothered in pink blossom, a dog to walk by his side, and a place to aim for ..." Ibid, p. 184



Topics for Discussion

When they're trying to persuade David to play a game of prisoners-and-jailers, Carlo and the other children respond to his comments that no one should be imprisoned by asking him what he thinks should happen to murderers, thieves and other criminals - should they be put in jail (i.e. have their freedom taken away), or should they face some other punishment. What do you think are the limits of freedom? Is freedom an absolute right for every individual, or are their circumstances in which depriving someone of his/her freedom is justified?

Throughout the narrative, David defines himself by his name. How does your name define you? To other people? What is the story behind your name - what does your name mean? Why did your parents choose it? What other names are you called, and how do they define you? What does your name mean to you?

Research and study the story the story of the Biblical David. In what ways does his story parallel that of the David in this book? Consider themes, events, relationships, and other characters.

The priest that David encounters in Chapter 6 tells him that no matter how people pray or what religion they belong to, they are all praying to the same God. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why? What makes the gods of the various religions different from one another? Or is it the way people express their beliefs in God that makes the difference?

Discuss the issue of oppression, and its different manifestations. What kinds of oppression are there? Aside from physically violent forms of oppression, what non-violent forms are there? What is your response to oppression when you see it happen to other people? When you experience it yourself? Have you ever unconsciously oppressed someone else? If yes, how does it make you feel? If no, have you ever thought about doing such a thing? Why is oppression and its power appealing?

Other than a person's name, what defines their identity? Other than your name, what defines you? What would you do to protect and defend your identity? Do you think you could undertake the same sort of journey that David does? Why or why not?

What aspects of your life have come into being as the result of your own choice? Where and how have free will and the power to choose defined who you are and how you fit in the world? What do you think is the relationship between the power to choose and an individual's sense of identity?

What role does faith play in your life - not necessarily religious faith (although that's part of it) but faith in positive outcomes ... faith in self and identity ... faith in other people? Conversely, what role does so-called "dark faith," or fear, play in your life? What do you experience as the relationship between the two? How does the one define and/or affect the other?