



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary and lower secondary]
(ages 9-13; years 5 to 8)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

Learning areas: English, Humanities & Social Sciences

General capabilities: Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking; Personal & Social Capability: Ethical Understanding; Intercultural Understanding.

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Analyse how language and writing can evoke mood, tension and characterisation
- Encourage creative and imaginative writing
- Understand relationships
- Examine the use and abuse of power
- Examine the impact of racism
- Examine the use of humour and contrasts to examine human life
- Examine historical context.

THEMES

- The importance of family
- Racism and persecution
- The power of love
- The abuse of power
- The notion of treasure
- Narrative structure
- Narrative Voices

PREPARED BY

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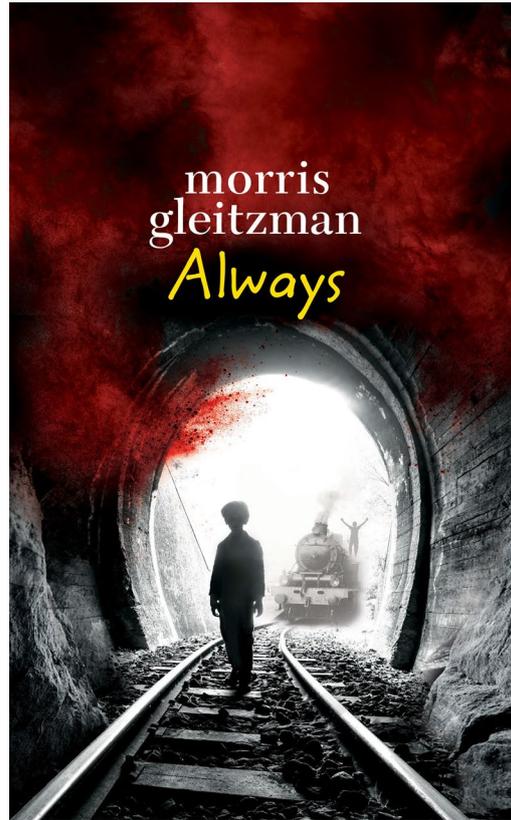
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Always Morris Gleitzman

PLOT SUMMARY

The final powerful journey in the story of Felix, hero of the award-winning *Once, Then, After, Soon, Maybe and Now*.

Always stay hopeful. That's my motto.

You're probably thinking, He's a dreamer, that Wassim. What's he got to be hopeful about? He's ten years old and look at his life.

Thanks, but it's not so bad.

I've got a lot to be hopeful about.

Specially now there's a person who can help me.

A person called Felix Salinger.

Since readers were first introduced to Felix in *Once*, our brave young hero has survived many unforgettable and emotional journeys. In this the seventh and final part of this epic story, we are introduced to Wassim, another young hero in trouble who reaches out to Felix, now an old man. Despite Wassim's desperate situation, he has a familiar youthful optimism that Felix has almost forgotten, creating a sense of purpose that brings to a powerful climax a series that countless young readers around the world will remember – *Always*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morris Gleitzman grew up in England and came to Australia when he was sixteen. After university he worked for ten years as a screenwriter. Then he had a wonderful experience. He wrote a novel for young people. Now, after 42 books, he's one of Australia's most popular authors. He was appointed the Australian Children's Laureate for 2018-2019.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

From Morris Gleitzman:

When I sat down to write this final book about Felix, I was bursting with enthusiasm, and also with relief. I'd just spent two years as the Australian Children's Laureate, a great adventure, but one which kept me away from my writing desk for most of that time. Which meant that Felix's final story, long planned, long dreamed of, the story in which Felix's life comes full circle in ways that brought tears to my eyes just to contemplate, had remained unwritten.

So, finally back at my desk, I was raring to get started. And I did. And in only a few months *Always* was finished. I printed it out, and it felt good in my hands. But not so good in my heart. Something was missing.

I'd always known that this story would take us back to where we first met Felix, and that we'd be taken there by his own voice, as we were that first time in *Once*. But in *Once* Felix was ten years old. In *Always* he's eighty-seven. True, the young Felix lives on inside the elderly Felix, but Felix's voice now is the product of all those extra decades.

How would readers feel about a Felix story without a young voice telling it? As I read through the first version of *Always*, I started to feel unsure. Fortunately, there is a young character in *Always*. A crucial one. The story of Felix's final journey wouldn't be possible without the presence of ten-year-old Wassim. And so I started again, writing a second version of the story, told to us this time by Wassim.

The story, while essentially still following same journey for Felix, grew and evolved through Wassim's words. I came to know Wassim even more in this second version, and through him to know Felix in new ways too.

After many months, this new and improved *Always* was finished. I printed it out, and Wassim's brave, loving, hopeful voice felt good in my heart.

But ... you can probably guess. Something was missing. Vital though Wassim is to this story, it's also

the climax of Felix's much longer story. It felt unfair for Felix's voice to have no part in bringing us this final stage of his journey. Was there a way I could have him tell this story himself and still have a child's voice present? I spent weeks flinging wild ideas around. Trying to bend the boundaries of time and space with abandon and, increasingly, with desperation.

Until the obvious solution tapped me on the shoulder and told me to calm down. Felix and Wassim could both tell the story. Young voice and old voice, turn and turnabout. After what Felix and Wassim had been through together in the first two versions of the story, with the depth of understanding and care they'd developed between them, sharing this task would be child's play.

Well, not exactly. But the three of us gave it our best shot, and after another nine months or so, the third and final manuscript of *Always* landed at last on the desks of my very patient publisher and editor.

This final version, I'm relieved to say, is far more than just a cut and paste of the first two. In many ways it's a new story yet again, but with Felix's same journey and his same destination. And with even more opportunities for Felix and Wassim to give each other the things they need in their lives.

Throughout my writing career, I've experienced countless times how stories benefit from problems, both in the lives of the characters and in the work of the author. But never to the degree that I have in *Always*.

PRE-READING NOTES

Handled with sensitivity and care, there is enormous potential for using this novel in the classroom with a wide range of students. It can be useful for those students who have not read the other novels in this series to have background knowledge of the Holocaust and the impact it had on those who lived through it. Perhaps extracts could be read from some of the previous books, *Once*, *Then*, *After*, *Soon*, *Maybe* and *Now* to reinforce these feelings and some of Felix's experiences.

Always can also be studied as a stand-alone novel. It is an excellent springboard for discussions about a number of social issues and themes of adversity and resilience, love, power and racism.

By weaving stories of Felix's experiences during World War II and Wassim's difficulties in the modern world, the novel examines the concept of common elements of human nature that can be seen repeating themselves throughout history.



Ultimately, this is a story of love and hope that illustrates how positivity will always help humans overcome adversity.

Pre-reading activity

Examine the cover of the book.

- From the cover, make some predictions about what the novel might be about.
- Consider the colours used on the cover. What type of mood do they create and why?
- This is the last novel in the 7-part series. Make a prediction about how you think the novel might end and why.
- The dedication in this novel reads: *For all the children who have now grown old but are still young*
 - What does this mean? How can people be old and young at the same time?
- The opening line of the novel is *Always stay hopeful*.
 - What tone does this set for the novel?
 - What does it take for a person to stay hopeful? Why is it important to do so?
 - What happens to humans when they lose hope?

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

- The novel suggests the cyclical nature of human life. Some things will always be the same. What are the similarities between the modern world Felix and Wassim now experience and the world of Nazi Germany?
- Why does Gleitzman mix humour and sadness throughout the novel? What does this suggest about life?
- In what ways can 'always' be both a positive and a negative preposition?
- Consider the statement: I always wanted a dog.
- How might this be a positive statement? How might it be negative?
- What positive characteristics and what negative characteristics carry throughout human generations?
- This notion of good and bad, positive and negative runs throughout the novel.
- Both Felix and Cyril Szynsky suffer during the war, but one is shaped in a positive manner and one in a negative manner. What determines how people are shaped by their experiences?
- The word Schatz means both treasure and precious person. How does this notion that one word can have different meanings support the ideas in the novel?

Activities

1. Rather than using a chapter number or chapter title, Morris Gleitzman starts each chapter with a sentence beginning 'Always . . .' The statement that

follows the word 'Always' may be positive or negative. Use these statements to plot a graph of the emotional journey of highs and lows that Felix and Wassim experience.

2. Imagine that the editor has decided not to use this technique, but instead wants to give each chapter a title. Create a title for each chapter that reflects what that chapter is about.

NARRATIVE VOICES

- Throughout the novel, Gleitzman alternates Wassim and Felix's voices. What is the impact of having the two different voices narrating the story?
- Why might Gleitzman have chosen to create a 10-year-old protagonist who is very similar to Felix?
- What does this mirroring of personalities reveal about human nature?
- How are the negative elements of human nature also mirrored in the novel from World War II to the modern day?

Activities

- Make a list of the similarities between Wassim and Felix (this could be done as a Venn diagram). Why might these similarities be surprising given their ages and backgrounds?
- How would the story be different if seen through a different perspective? Choose a scene in the novel involving the Iron Weasels and re-write it from their perspective. How does it change? What does this suggest about how our attitude can affect our outlook and our interpretation of events?

THEMES

Family

- Both Felix and Wassim understand the importance of family. In *Once*, Felix tried desperately to create a family for him and Zelda. What does it mean to be part of a family? What does family provide for us?
- Does your 'family' have to be your own flesh and blood?
- Uncle Otto believes that he will never have the strength of a real parent. Do you agree with this? What parental qualities does he show?
- Why does Wassim feel so close to his Grandpa Amon even though he died when Wassim was only 3 weeks old?
- What qualities does Wassim believe he inherited from each of his family members?
- Why do we often look for links and similarities between family members? Do you believe that we inherit characteristics genetically or learn them from interaction with family (nature vs nurture)?



- Why does Wassim want to believe that his parents aren't actually dead?
- Why does Felix have a strained relationship with his son?
- The concierge that Felix and Wassim meet in their hotel tells them:
... my grandfather was a part of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.
You must be very proud, I say.
'I wish I could be,' he says. 'But my grandfather was an SS commandant...Anything I can do for you during your stay, anything at all, please don't hesitate. It would mean a lot to me.' (p151)
What does this reveal about the concierge? How might his grandfather's actions have affected him? Why does he offer to help in any way he can? Does the concierge need to be ashamed of his grandfather's actions?
- What might the fact that the concierge is reading that book suggest about the changing attitudes in modern society?
- There is a saying 'The sins of the fathers are visited on the sons'. What does this mean? How might it apply in this case?

Racism/Persecution

- Amon Kurtz had blond hair and blue eyes and pale skin. Wassim doesn't have any of those things (p52). Given the Nazis' attitude towards other races, what is so surprising about Wassim? What does it suggest about the attitudes of the post-war society?
- Why would Wassim's family have had to keep moving from where they live?
- Wassim's father offers to leave to make their lives easier. Do you think he should have left?
- Who are the Iron Weasels? What sort of world do they want? How do they gain and maintain power?
- What is different in the way Otto responds to the Iron Weasels and the way Wassim does? (pp25-29) Is either one better?
- Why do the Iron Weasels call Wassim *Jungle boy*?
- Why do they treat the footballer Daouda Ndione badly, throwing bananas and making monkey noises?
- Consider the treatment of Adam Goodes, the Australian footballer. In what way was his treatment similar and why?
- Consider why Wassim's parents were killed. *A warning to European women. Not to do what the boy's mother did. Foul themselves with men like the boy's father. Foul our nation* (p229). What attitude does this reveal?
- Felix says: *Our genes are the most adventurous parts of us. Thanks to them we live in a world of wonderous*

possibilities as well as terrible ones (p53). What does he mean by this?

- Why won't Wassim talk to the police? (p60). The minute we talk to the police...Uncle Otto would be dead. The Weasels would know. Some of them are police.

Power

- How do the Iron Weasels exert their power?
- In what ways can the Iron Weasels be seen to be typical bullies?
- Why do the Iron Weasels kill Jumble and burn Felix's house?
- Felix says: *People like the Weasels want us to blame ourselves for things they do. Because it makes us weaker and them stronger* (p77). What does he mean by this?
- *Cashed up Weasels and those like them would be a nightmare. Most elections can be won with enough violence or enough money* (p240). What does this suggest about power and the way it is gained and maintained in society? Are those in power always the best leaders?

Treasure

- What images does the word 'treasure' usually conjure for us?
- Consider the difference between the image of the train Wassim had created in his mind and the reality (pp270-272). How does this reveal the different ways of thinking? How can people see treasure as such different things?
- Why did the Nazis steal and hide treasure?
- Why would they booby trap it?
- Why would Amon not have told his own family about the treasure? (p237)
- Why would he have given the clues to the treasure's location to Felix?
- *We can't just leave the treasure for the Weasels. They'll do the same thing the Nazis wanted to do. Use it to build a new Nazi world. Take over everything. Get rid of everybody's who's like Mum and Dad and me and you* (p240). How would the Weasels use the treasure?
- The word Schatz means both treasure and precious person. How is this appropriate with regards to what Wassim finds in the train?
- Why is the train full of children's bodies? *[The Nazis] covered their illegal stolen treasure with the bodies of children they'd killed. So if anyone saw the treasure train rolling through a station, they'd think it was just another Nazi train on its way to dump a whole lot of kids who deserved to die* (p273) What does this reveal about Nazi's attitude to human life?
- Do children ever 'deserve to die'?



- Wassim says *It's not even treasure really. Because who'd want to take it. Who'd want to be rich if you had to push aside the bones of murdered children to get your hands on it* (p274).
Do you think the gruesome and upsetting discovery would stop people from stealing the treasure?

Love

- Why did Amon Kurtz and Felix become friends? What creates the initial bond between them?
- What evidence is there that Amon loves his grandson?
- What does this suggest about how he would have felt as a member of the Hitler Youth?
- Why does he tell Wassim to find Felix if he is ever in trouble?
- Love – how can it be seen to be both a positive and a negative motivator?
- Why does Uncle Otto take Wassim to Australia and leave him with Felix? Would you have made the same decision?
- Felix says: *Sometimes, to protect an innocent boy and his devoted uncle, you can't be kind, you have to be ruthless* (p183). What does he mean by this?
- Why does Wassim give Daouda Ndione an apple? How does this act of love change the crowd?
- Why does Cyryl Szynsky threaten to hurt Wassim rather than Felix? (p222). Which do you think would have had the greater impact on Felix?
- Cyryl says that he doesn't seek out Felix for revenge, but out of love for his son. What does he mean by this? How could love motivate someone to behave in this way?
- Felix claims that he is always too late to save people (p279). Is this true? Why is he so hard on himself? Why did so many people experience survivor guilt?
- Why does Felix want to know where Zelda is buried? Why is it easier to grieve our lost ones when we know where they are? Why would he feel better after he and Wassim dig a grave for Zelda?
- Why does Wassim put bones in the bag labelled Zelda? How is this his gift to Felix? (p289)
In his final thoughts, Felix says that the people in his life will always stay alive in his heart. In what way do the people in our lives stay with us always? (p301)

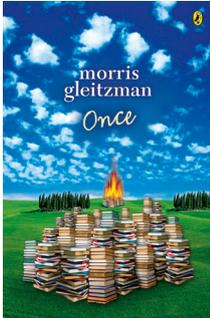
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Make a list of the mottos Wassim and Felix reveal throughout the novel. What characteristics do they encourage?
- Create 5 'Always' mottos of your own that will help people live their best lives.

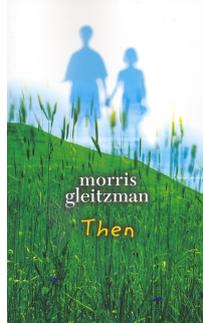


FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

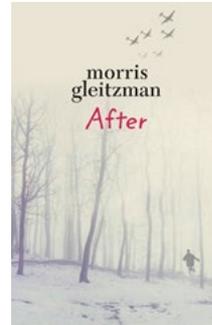
You can read more powerful episodes in the life of Felix in the other books of this series (details in order form below):



Once
by Morris Gleitzman



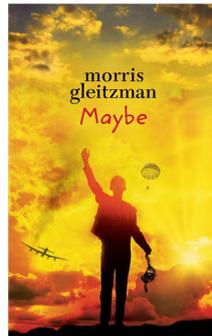
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