

SUBJECT: English

UNIT: Once



Social and Historical Context

- **World War II:** World War II (1939-1945) was a global conflict that involved many countries, including Germany, Italy, Japan, and the Allied powers (led by the United States, United Kingdom, and Soviet Union). The war began with Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 and escalated into a widespread conflict. It was characterized by large-scale military operations, the Holocaust, and numerous atrocities.
- **The Holocaust:** The Holocaust was the systematic genocide of six million Jews, along with millions of other minority groups, by Nazi Germany during World War II. Adolf Hitler's regime implemented a state-sponsored persecution and extermination program, aiming to eliminate Jews from Europe. This horrific event had a profound impact on Jewish communities and continues to be a significant part of their collective memory.
- **Nazi Occupation and Jewish Persecution:** During World War II, many European countries were occupied by Nazi Germany. The Nazis implemented harsh policies and practices to subjugate and marginalize Jewish populations. Jews were subjected to discriminatory laws, forced labour, ghettos, and ultimately, mass deportations to concentration camps.
- **Kindertransport:** The Kindertransport was a rescue effort that allowed nearly 10,000 predominantly Jewish children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland to escape the threat of Nazi persecution by relocating to the United Kingdom. This program, organized by humanitarian groups, sought to protect children by finding them foster families in Britain.
- **Anti-Semitism and Prejudice:** Anti-Semitism, the prejudice and discrimination against Jews, was deeply ingrained in European society at the time. Jews faced widespread hatred and were scapegoated for societal problems. This atmosphere of prejudice contributed to the marginalization and persecution of Jewish communities.

Key Themes

- **Storytelling:** In *Once*, storytelling blinds people to danger—but it also protects them, helps them endure pain, and gives them courage, which ultimately makes it a force for good.
- **Innocence and Ignorance:** In the story, adults try to preserve children's innocence by hiding terrible truths from them. Yet in doing so, they also make children ignorant, which exposes them to danger. The novel's protagonist, Felix, is a Jewish boy living in Nazi-occupied Poland during the Holocaust. When his parents hide him from the Nazis in a Catholic orphanage, they lie to him about why.
- **Antisemitism vs. Human Dignity:** In *Once*, antisemitism is a dehumanising force, against which people assert their human dignity by exercising moral choice. The novel's protagonist, Felix, is a nonreligious Jewish boy living in a Catholic orphanage.
- **Family:** *Once* illustrates how chosen family can be as important as birth family through the story of Felix. After living at the orphanage for almost four years, Felix develops great affection for the nuns who run the place and for Dodie, a friend he makes there.
- **Morality, Violence, and Complicity:** The novel presents the idea that people who commit individual violent acts don't always intend harm, while people who avoid violence and commit seemingly kind acts are sometimes complicit in systematic evil. Because of this, the novel suggests, it's important to understand people's contexts and motivations before judging their actions.

Language Devices

- **Simile:** A figure of speech where one thing is said to be similar to another thing, usually for the purposes of emphasis or exaggeration.
- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech where one thing is said to be another thing, usually for the purposes of emphasis or exaggeration.
- **Personification:** Giving personal human characteristics or abilities to something non-human.
- **Repetition:** The deliberate use of a particular word or phrase repeatedly throughout a verse or poem.

Dramatic Devices

- **Dramatic Irony:** When a character's words or acts carry a larger meaning than what the character perceives. The audience is aware of this, but the character is not.
- **Foreshadowing:** An author's use of 'hints' which prepare the reader for future events.
- **Pathetic fallacy:** The projection of human emotions onto non-human objects found in nature.