**“Once” by Morris Gleitzman – Chapter Summaries**

Chapter 1

- The main character is Felix. He is Jewish and has been in an orphanage for three years and eight months.

- Life in the orphanage is very hard. There is very little food and it is a cold and old building. Despite this Felix is a positive and optimistic person who always tries to make the best of things and who thinks of others. He worries about how hungry Dodie is and wishes he could spare him some food. He believes that the nuns need more food than he does because they are holy. - Felix thinks his parents, who are booksellers, have sent him a sign through because of a carrot in his soup.

- Felix enjoys making up stories and telling them to people. He uses them to try to make the world a better place – eg) Trying to get Dodie a bath first by saying he has to be clean because he wants to be a doctor.

**Chapter 2**

• Felix is disappointed that his parents do not come for him by the next morning. • His most important possession is a notebook his parents gave him before they left him at the orphanage, he writes his stories in the notebook. Most of the stories are about his parents doing heroic things. The notebook keeps him connected to his parents through his memory and imagination.

• Felix thinks the people in the car were his parents but they were just men with armbands. • Felix helps Jankiel from the torture squad by telling them a story.

• Men in armbands arrive at the orphanage and burned books.

**Chapter 3**

• Felix finds out the men in armbands were Nazis looking for Jewish books. • Mother Minka tells Felix that Sister Elwira put the carrot in his soup, that it wasn’t a sign from his parents, and that they aren’t coming for him.

• This makes Felix feel panic for a moment, he cannot believe his parents are not coming for him and the next thing he hears from Mother Minka makes him feel his parents might be in danger. • She also tells him that the men in armbands are Nazis and that they are burning Jewish books. • Felix makes up his mind to leave the orphanage to find his parents and tell them there are thugs burning books.

• Felix leaves Dodie his favourite books. We learn that they are “Just William “ books about a boy who always tries to do the right thing and who always ends up at home with his parents. This is how William wants to be and what he wants to happen in his life. He leaves a thank you note for Mother Minka to say thank you and tell her not to worry about him. He asks that Dodie be given his soup.

• Jankiel tries to stop Felix from going because Nazis were everywhere and it was too dangerous. He tells Felix that Mother Minka made him promise he would tell no one about what he had seen. Felix feels a stab of fear but crushes it so he can go search for his parents,

**Chapter 4**

Felix worries about who will look out for and look after Dodie. When Dodie came to the orphanage and was crying for his parents Felix was the person who helped and supported him.

• Felix doesn’t eat the pig's food because there isn’t enough for the two of them. Felix thinks to himself that he can find food somewhere else but this is all the pig has.

• Felix finds a house with Jewish symbols where people must have just left, and when he heard gunshots in the distance he thinks they must be hunting rabbits. He leaves them a thank you note to say sorry for taking some of their food and clothes.

• He remembers that the road to his town went beside a river and he follows the gunshots thinking that hunters hunt close to rivers. We know that the gunfire is Nazi soldiers chasing Jews and that Felix is putting himself in danger.

• Felix sees a truck full of half-naked people packed together. He thinks they must be farmers going for a swim in the river.

• He then sees a truck full of soldiers. One shot at him but missed. Felix thinks it is an accident and that it happened because the truck hit a bump. He worries that the soldier will feel guilty for shooting him.

• Felix hears a lot of gunfire after seeing the trucks and sees that the river had turned red. He thinks it must be a trick of the light

**Chapter 5**

• Felix makes it back to his old house and remembers that the street is different to how it used to be. It is not as busy anymore.

• There are no longer books in his old house, there are clothes instead.

• Instead of finding his parents in his house, he finds the Radzyn family who tell him it is their house now. They chase after him to give him to the Nazis’

• Felix thinks his parents have sold the shop and went to America.

• Felix came across two kids who were playing a game and they told him to be sad because he was a Jew. They say that all Jewish parents have been captured by the Nazis.

• Felix finds out from Mr Kopek that it is a bad time for Jews to be around and gives him a piece of bread. He tells him all the Jews have been taken to the city. He tells Felix he should hide in the mountains. Felix does not understand why some people are mean and some people are kind.

**Chapter 6**

• On the way to the city Felix sees a house on fire and even though it is very dangerous he goes under the boiling garden fence and rushes to the house to see if he can help or save anyone. He sees a dead woman and man in the garden and it makes him cry.

• It is the first time Felix thinks the Nazis must have killed people because they were Jewish booksellers. He then wonders if the Jews were bullied because of something else, not just because of their books.

• Felix finds a little girl who was unconscious and he bravely saves her. Her name was Zelda and Felix did not want to tell her that her parents were dead.

**Chapter 7**

• Felix starts to look after Zelda. He finds a haystack and gets hay to cover her but not himself. He gives her more of the bread that Mr Kopek gave him and he decides not to tell her that her parents are dead until she is feeling better and he finds his own parents.

• Felix sees a crowd of people wearing armbands that have Jewish stars on them. • Zelda is found by a Nazi soldier by a haystack and Felix rushes out from the ditch where he was hiding to try and protect her. They are made to join the crowd of people. He tries to find his parents in the crowd.

• Zelda asks Felix why the people look so sad. Felix doesn’t want to tell her even though he knew they were tired and hungry. Felix is trying to shield her from the ugly reality and he gives her a piggy back until he is so exhausted that he can barely walk. He tells her stories about explorers to He tells her stories about explorers to try and keep her spirits up.

• An elderly woman collapses on the side of the road and nobody helps her, not even Felix, he wants to but is just too scared and exhausted.

• Felix starts to think that perhaps the Nazis hate all Jewish people, not just Jewish booksellers.

**Chapter 8**

• Felix tells Zelda stories for 6 hours to try to keep her spirits up. He tells her they will have fun in the city eating cake and playing in the zoo.

• A Jewish man is beaten by Nazi soldiers and Felix tries to prevent Zelda from seeing it happen, but she does anyway.

• Zelda and Felix see a group of people being forced to dig a big hole. Guns are being pointed at them – they are going to be shot. They are the old and the young, all those who are not strong enough to work.

• Felix and Zelda reach the city where the Jewish people are being separated. The young and the weak and the old are not being allowed into the Jewish ghetto, they are getting taken away in trucks, probably to be killed like the people who were digging long holes. The people of the city shout at them and call them names. Felix wants to get into the ghetto because that is where he thinks his parents are, he does not want to be taken by the soldiers. Some Jewish parents try to stop the soldiers from taking their children and a man is shot. Felix and Zelda try to escape but a soldier drags Zelda away from Felix and points a gun at her head. Felix is feeling sick and feverish now, he collapses to the ground and can barely speak.

**Chapter 9**

• Zelda is saved by a man in a leather jacket who is wearing a Jewish armband. The Nazi soldier kills a woman and Felix passes out. The man starts to take Zelda away from the soldiers, but Zelda screams at him and points at Felix. She will not go without Felix, we see they have formed a close bond and are loyal to one another.

• The man's name is Barney and he is looking after a number of young kids who have lost their parents. He is hiding them in a cellar.

• Felix was angry at Barney because he is telling the kids they will see their parents again if he just waits. Felix has been shocked by the violence and cruelty of the Nazis. He wants to go straight away to look for his parents and is angry because he thinks Barney is stopping the kids from looking for their parents. He is terrified with worry for his parents. He does not want to share his stories with the other kids even though they wanted to hear one. He thinks stories are stupid and that the story his parents told him about why he had to go to the orphanage was just a lie. He is feeling very depressed after what he has seen in the city and on the way to the city. Zelda tells a story instead.

**Chapter 10**

• Felix is in a cellar with 7 other children who tell him that Adolf Hitler is the leader of the Nazis, and that Hitler does not like Jewish people. Felix can’t think of any more stories. • Felix realises that his parents told him a story to keep him safe. He still thinks they are out there and he wants to go to save them.

**Chapter 11**

• Barney goes out every night to get food and water.

• Felix tells Barney a story which was a lie so he could come with him. Barney knew he was lying and lets him come anyway.

• In the city, everyone has to be indoors at seven pm. Dead bodies lie in the street and it is filthy and run down.

• Felix finds out from Barney that the part of the city they are in is called a ghetto and the Nazis make up the rules and all the Jews have been forced to live here together.

• Barney tells Felix that he might not find his parents again.

• Barney is a dentist and Felix helps him fix the tooth of an ordinary citizen and a Nazi officer by telling them stories to distract them from the pain. Felix realises that Barney gets food from the Nazis in return for helping soldiers with tooth problems. Felix wants to ask the officer where his mum and dad are. He begins to see that his stories give him strength and some power and he begins to feel hope again.

**Chapter 12**

• Barney stops Felix from asking the Nazi soldier where his parents were because it was too dangerous. The soldier asks Felix to write the story down because it was so good. • Felix and the other kids try to see if they can spot their parents through the crack in the wall. • Felix thinks that Zelda should know her parents are dead to stop her from torturing herself by having her hopes disappointed all the time. He asks Barney to tell her but Barney says that since Zelda trusts Felix so much that it would be best if she heard the news from him. Felix decides to tell Zelda that her parents are dead.

• All the other kids start crying for their dead families. Felix feels lucky because he thinks his parents are still alive. We see the pain and suffering that the Nazi hatred has caused innocent families and children.

**Chapter 13**

• Felix lay with Zelda for hours after telling her that her parents were dead. • Barney gave Felix almost new boots because 'everybody deserves to have something good in their life at least once.'

• Felix goes to the ghetto again with Barney to get water. He hears a soldier telling a Jewish person that the Jewish people are being taken to the countryside and he wants to go to see if his family are there.

• In a Kitchen Felix sees a little kid who has been shot dead. He screams in a panic and Barney rushes in to try to comfort him. Felix asks why parents can’t stop such things from happening. Barney says that all parents just like Felix’s parents tried their best. Felix realises that Barney is

talking about his parents as if they are dead and says to Barney that he will find them in the countryside.

• Barney tells him that the Jews are being taken away to be killed. Felix tries to run away from Barney and says it isn’t true but Barney holds on to him and says that a man escaped from the death camps and then Felix can see in his face that it is true and that his parents are dead. After a while Felix believes him even though he does not want to.

• Felix wants to go into a deep sleep and never wake up and feel as bad as he does. He does not want to go on in such a cruel and heartless world.

**Chapter 14**

• Felix never wants to hear or tell another story again. ( lost hope )

• Zelda gives Felix her necklace even though she is sick. ( has a heart on it – symbolises the power of love and the comfort it can bring, shows us that there is still love in this cruel world ) • Felix goes out alone to find aspirin for Zelda and a carrot.

• Felix falls asleep while reading *Just William* and soldiers enter the apartment. He hides under a pile of books and manages to escape.

• Felix finds out that Zelda's father was a Nazi soldier because he saw the photo in her necklace. Felix does not care if Zelda's dad was a Nazi, he still wants to save her.

• Felix makes it back to the cellar but finds a Nazi truck there. He runs towards the cellar anyway.

**Chapter 15**

• Barney and the rest of the kids are taken away by the Nazi soldiers. Felix realises the soldiers want the Jewish people to feel hopeless.

• The kids and Barney witness a woman being killed by a Nazi soldier.

• Felix gives Zelda back her necklace so she wouldn’t have to go on the train. He gets the attention of the Nazi officer who had the sore tooth and tells him he has finished the story for him. He gives him some pages from his notebook and also points at the necklace that shows a picture of Zelda’s Nazi parents with her. Zelda and Barney could have stayed behind but they both decide not to leave the other children and go on the train where the doors are nailed shut.

**Chapter 16**

• The train is packed and people have little room. Felix rips pages out of his notebook, including stories about his parents to give to people to use as toilet paper. When he tries to stick the pages onto a metal bolt, on the train wall, it comes away.

• Barney and other men kick the plank out and make a hole. People jump out but there are machine guns on the roofs of the train to kill people who try to escape.

• Barney and some of the other kids do not want to risk jumping off the train. Felix, Zelda and Chaya do and jump off the train.

**Chapter 17**

• Felix and Zelda survive but Chaya was shot and did not.

• Felix remembers the metal syringes in Barney's pocket and knows he will not let the kids suffer. • Felix will never forget how lucky he is.