

*'The Long Night' by Ernst Bornstein*

## What's your story? **4. Staying human**

How can we use language to describe our experiences?

An online self-study course about the Holocaust for secondary school students studying English in KS3 and 4.

# Short lesson 4: Welcome!

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It's great to see you again!

Do you want to find out what happens next to Ernst in his story?

Click on the photo and I'll explain what's going to happen in this next 30-minute short lesson.

# Overview



This is the third in a series of short, 30-minute lessons that I've put together for you to help think about how language can be used to tell the stories of our lives.

**In this 30 minute lesson you are going to;**

- a) Think about how we need to understand the context in which language is used. (15 mins.)
- b) Watch the next clip of animation of Ernst's story (5 mins.)
- c) Reflect on how Ernst's language needs context to understand it (5 mins.)
- d) Reflect back on why Ernst wrote his story (5 mins.)



# Word connotations



Before you watch the next animation, have a go at this warm-up task. For this task you will have some sort of timer.

The next 3 slides have just one word each on them. For each one write down the word, and in no more than 60 seconds write down all the other words that come to your mind when you think of this word. These are called **word connotations**. Don't think too long about it – just write down whatever pops into your head. There are no right or wrong answers!

On the next slide I'll show you an example.



# Example

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## Bread

*sandwich*

*butter*

*food*

*ducks*

*soup*

*crumbs*

*jam*

*Jesus*

*daily*

*crusts*

*yummy*

*loaf*

*home*

*white*

*brown*



# Word connotations



I hope that helps and you can see what to do now.

Is your timer ready for your 60 seconds?

When you are ready go to the first slide and do the same. Repeat this for each of the 3 words that are coming up.

# Word 1



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**dogs**

## Word 2



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**shoes**

## Word 3



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# doctors



# Word connotations



Great – well done.

The next slide will show you some that I did with other students, and the sorts of things they wrote. Don't worry if you've got different words – as I said, there are no right or wrong answers – but it will give you an idea of the kinds of word associations other people make.



# Word connotations

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## dogs

*walk*  
*hilarious*  
*friendly*  
*happy*  
*fluffy*  
*pup*  
*cute*  
*loyal*  
*amazing*  
*biscuits*  
*pet*

## shoes

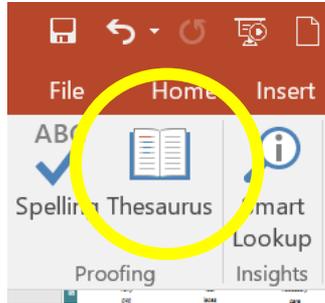
*walking*  
*journey*  
*leather*  
*high heels*  
*feet*  
*laces*  
*slippers*  
*flip flops*  
*comfortable*  
*Nike*  
*trainers*

## doctors

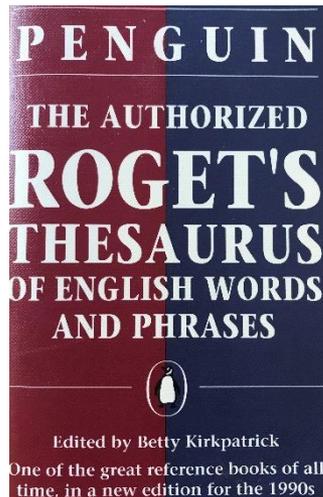
*life-saver*  
*health*  
*ill*  
*professional*  
*necessary*  
*care*  
*GPs*  
*sick*  
*kind*  
*hospital*  
*hygiene*

# Optional extra challenge

 extra 5 mins.



You can use the Thesaurus in the **Review** toolbar in Word



Or you might use one in book form. This is mine on my shelf.

If you want a challenge that will take a bit longer, then try changing some of the words in your list for more advanced ones. **Synonyms** are words with the same or very similar meaning. You can use the **Thesaurus** on your computer to help, or you might have access to a Thesaurus in book form. A Thesaurus gives a list of **synonyms** (words that are the same) and **antonyms** (words that are the opposite) of any word.

For example; synonyms of 'happy' include 'glad' and 'delighted'

How many synonyms from your list can you find in 5 minutes?

# Extracts from *The Long Night*



So now I'm going to show you three extracts from the book 'The Long Night'. Each of them will focus on one of these words. Read each one and think about

- how similar or different are the understandings of the words dog, shoe and doctor that Ernst describes compared with the ideas you and other students have come up with?
- Why do you think this might be.

Make a note of your answers as at the end.



You can also listen to these three extracts by playing the sound files that go with this course.

# Extracts from *The Long Night*



Before you read the next three extracts, just be aware that some of the things Ernst describes you might find quite sad or distressing.

At any point if you want to stop reading then you can skip straight to slide 19 which introduces the film.



# Key terms for this lesson

You may find some of these words useful for these extracts

Key term	Meaning
Appell(platz)	roll call (the place where roll call is held)
humiliating	making someone feel very ashamed
indistinguishable	being unable to make out individual people
jubilation	great joy and happiness
kapo	a prisoner in the camp assigned by the SS guards to supervise labour or carry out administrative tasks
quarry	something or someone that is being hunted and chased
SS	elite Nazis who ran the concentration camps
superficially	not in any depth or detail

‘Suddenly the dogs began barking and used their paws as they first began to scratch and then tried to push aside a manhole cover. Inmates were forced to uncover the opening. Then the SS shone a torch into the hole. They sniffed out their intended quarry after a brief search. They screamed in jubilation, “We’ve got them! We’ve caught some of the pigs!” The Kapos stepped forward and insisted that all those in hiding reveal themselves. At first they were indistinguishable figures, but as they emerged from darkness into the daylight I recognised among them the friends for whom I had been searching. For a moment, I felt as if I had been enveloped in darkness... As soon as they emerged from the hole, which had become their trap, first they were beaten by the Kapos and then the SS set the hounds on them. These howling dogs leapt upon the victims and tore them from limb to limb.’

‘Nearly every morning someone would shout out that their shoes had been stolen. Good shoes were a desirable commodity. Those who had bad shoes would wait for the opportunity to take a better pair from their comrades. Those whose shoes were stolen had to make do with whatever pair was left in the block. Often they were either too big or too small. There was no opportunity to exchange them during the early morning before Appell.... Our shoes were so important to us. We were especially afraid the torture of having to work all day in shoes that did not fit us. If our heels rubbed raw or we got blisters on our feet it became impossible for us to march in step and remain at the required distance from one another. The slightest deviation from perfect order was sufficient to attract the attention of the Kapo. The smallest injury could easily become infected. Since we were on our feet from early morning till late at night and we had to rush about all the time, a small poor-healing wound could soon become a major problem. So we all knew how important it was to guard our shoes like treasure and ensure that we did not injure our feet. Sometimes it was possible to take a dying person’s shoes and later swap them for an extra ration of soup or bread.’

‘After we had been chased around the Appellplatz until midday we were told: “Take everything off, fold your clothes and put them in a pile”. We were only allowed to keep our shoes and belts. We stood naked on the Appellplatz on this cold December day. There was a table around which a white circle had been drawn in chalk, and we had to march past it in single file. Here we had to give up our things and afterwards we were subjected to a humiliating body search. Then we were marched in double-quick time to the next table where a commission of SS men were seated. Among them was a doctor who inspected each and every one of us, but only superficially. We had to stand still for a few moments before walking to the next table where the decision who was and who was not fit for further work was made. All those whose final reserves of strength had been lost in the cement works in Märkstadt looked as if they no longer had a single drop of blood, and there was no room for them in Fünfteichen. Several hundred of these unfortunates were written off and taken to a special block’

(\* being taken to a ‘special block’ here sadly means that they would be killed)

# Extracts from *The Long Night*



So what did you notice? The differences in how the same words are understood is quite enormous, isn't it?

- We might think of dogs as being cute, fluffy and friendly, but in the camps Ernst saw how they were used to hunt and then viciously attack prisoners.
- We might think of comfortable Nike trainers when we think of shoes, but in the camps the way they fitted could be a matter of life and death.
- And we might think of doctors as being kind and helpful, saving lives. Yet the doctor Ernst describes is sending inmates to their deaths.

This shows that that we need to be aware survivors like Ernst might use ordinary words in quite extraordinary ways to describe their experiences.

# Thinking about animation



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In a moment you can watch the animation from the next slide, but before you do, I'd like to remind you again of two things;

- Cartoon animations can make something seem to be not real, that it's a kind of made-up fantasy, but remember this is just that artists' way of showing a story. In this case, it is part of Ernst's story, a story which is based on historical fact.
- The animation will depict moments which some viewers may possibly find a bit worrying. Nothing graphic is shown, but there are references to people who act in unpleasant and at times violent ways towards others. If what you see concerns you after, do talk to an adult or your teacher about it.

# Language in context



You are now going to watch the next animation of *The Long Night*.

As you watch, think of the word '**work**'.

- What first comes to mind when you think of the sorts of jobs people do everyday?
- Look out for how Ernst describes work in the Nazi camps.

# Staying human animation

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Click on this image to start the film.



# Reflections



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So what did you notice about the way we might understand what work is today, and the sort of work Ernst did and witnessed in the war?

Hopefully you can see how important it is to understand what words can be understood to mean in different contexts – be it in England today or in a Nazi camp in occupied-Poland in the 1940s. We need to be sensitive to the survivor’s use of familiar words like ‘work’ and not to allow such ordinary words to distort the meaning they are trying to convey.

# Reflections: compare and contrast



In the film we also came across two fellow prisoners that Ernst met, **Mydlarz** and **Heiduck**.



**Mydlarz**

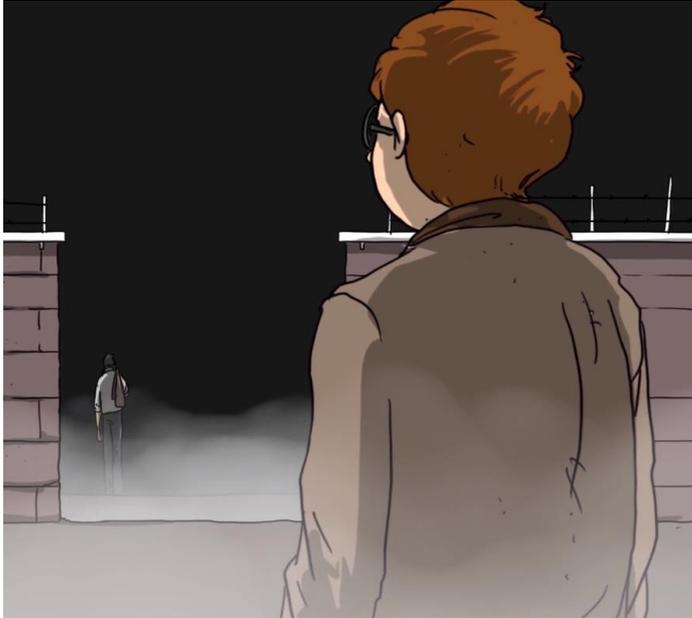


**Heiduck**

- How did they react when forced to work for the Nazis?
- What did Ernst notice about what happened to them as a result?

It is hard to imagine what conditions must have been like, but this contrast shows some of the moral decisions that prisoners in camps had to face. Remember, too, that as Greguletz, the camp guard, humiliated the prisoners, he lost his own humanity.

# Why did Ernst write his story?



There is another moral decision at the end of the animation.

In lesson 2 we reflected on the purpose of autobiographies. We thought about Ernst's book as a testimony – an eyewitness record of his experiences for others to read.

In this scene, he is showing another reason he wrote his story. Read the dialogue on the next slide that shows what his father said to him and think about what that might be.

# Why did Ernst write his story?



Then, his words stuck in his throat.  
‘Promise me.’ He begged me ‘Promise me you remain a good Jew.’

With that, he turned away.

So I saw him for the last time – for the very last time.

- Why do you think this might be a significant moment in the story?

# Why did Ernst write his story?



The last moment he sees his father is significant in itself. But did you notice what his father tells him? It's not to stay alive, or to try to run away, but to remain 'a good Jew.' He wants Ernst to keep true to his identity, and to act in a moral way – to always try to do the 'right' thing.

Ernst is passing on a message here about the choices people can make to keep their humanity in such difficult circumstances.

# The Holocaust

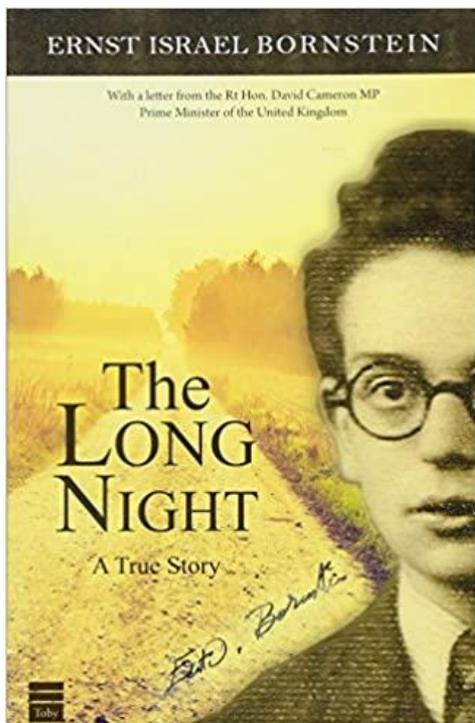
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In the Holocaust, six million Jewish people lost their lives as part of a deliberate plan by the Nazis and their collaborators (those who helped make it happen), from 1941-1945, to murder all the Jewish people in the world.

Ernst's story is just one of those who were lucky enough to survive.

# Want to know more about Ernst's story?



To find out more about Ernst's story you can read *The Long Night* and chat to your teacher about it.

You can also visit

<https://www.holocaustmatters.org/>

Ernst Israel Bornstein was born in Zawiercie, Poland in 1922. He was the oldest of four children. He was educated in Jewish schools was a talented student who spoke German, Yiddish (a Jewish language) and Polish. He was incarcerated (imprisoned) in seven concentration camps until finally liberated by American soldiers on 30 April 1945.

His parents and two younger sisters perished at Auschwitz. Of an extended family numbering 72 at the start of the war, by its end only six had survived including Ernst and his sister Regina.

# End of short lesson 4

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## Well done!

You have now completed the last lesson of 'What's your story?' You have thought about how language can have very different meanings depending on the context it is used in, and how hard it can be to describe experiences that readers may find hard to imagine.

This is something that you might think about when you next pick up a book, or have a go at writing some more of your own life story.

I wonder what yours will be?

# A Summary of some features of autobiographical writing covered in this course



This is just for your reference, to give you a reminder of some of the key features we've covered. You may like to bear these in mind in your own future reading and writing;

- **verb tense**
- **characterisation**
- **mystery**
- **objective and subjective details**
- **dialogue**
- **Imager, such as similes**
- **first person point of view**
- **inference**
- ***in media res***
- **paradox**
- **purpose**
- **word connotations**
- **synonyms / antonyms**

*'What's your story?'*

## 4. Staying human



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