

**Candidate 5**

The Second World War changed the world and the course of history, affecting millions and millions of people. One of the most heavily affected countries was France, as it became unwillingly occupied by the German Nazis. French Jews were forced to flee or go deep into hiding, millions displaced and relying on the goodness on others for survival. Children had to grow up quickly and keep their wits about them to escape persecution. These themes of compassion from strangers and a loss of childhood innocence are explored in two impactful and true stories of children during the occupation of France. *Au Revoir Les Enfants* is a book about a young catholic boy who befriends a Jewish boy hiding at his school and how the friendship grows between the two of them. *Un Sac De Billes* is a movie about two young Jewish boys fleeing their home in Paris and trying to survive under the radar, masquerading as Catholics. In each story, the fraternal relationship between two boys is at the centre of the story and how they rely on each other.

In both stories, there are several times when the goodwill of a catholic comes to the rescue of the Jewish boys, showing the way compassion and kindness transcends trivial barriers such as religion, even in a time of severe religious persecution. In *Au Revoir Les Enfants*, Pere Jean is risking his life by hiding the three Jewish boys. However, he is willing to do it for what he believes is the right thing to do. He puts kindness towards others and his own moral ideology above his own life, as in shown in his sermons. He ends one by saying "Nous allons prier pour les victimes et aussi pour les bourreaux" (108). Julien, the main character in the story, also exhibits this kindness when he discovers Jean Bonnet's greatest secret, that he is Jewish. This secret is enough to get him killed, and Julien keeps it completely to himself, protecting Jean in doing so. Julien doesn't completely understand what being a jew means, asking his brother, "c'est quoi, exactement?" (56), but protects Jean nonetheless. In *Un Sac De Billes*, a catholic priest vouches for the two young Jewish boys, promising that they are catholic. The boys are tested, and if they failed it would've been the priest's life on the line as well. Luckily, they all survive, only thanks to the bravery and compassion of the priest. There is an instance in this film as well when the kindness goes the other way. Jo protects an

anti-Semitic family who are being beaten after France is liberated by exposing himself as Jewish. Despite the retreat of the Nazis, this was still a very risky move that could've put a target on his back, but still he chose to protect the family despite their unkind views because he didn't believe that anyone deserved to be abused. The way the stories show kindness and self-sacrifice crossing boundaries in a time of such turmoil shows that there is never a good enough reason not to do the right thing, and giving in to the fear will never help anyone.

In both stories, characters experience a loss of innocence as their childhood is invaded by fear and death. In *Au Revoir Les Enfants*, there is a stark contrast between the Julien at the beginning and the Julien at the end. At the start, Julien cries over missing his mother and is desperately homesick, asking if he can stay in Paris rather than returning to the school. Later in the book, he and Jean are seen staring at the Statue of Liberty in awe, dreaming of a faraway place like New York where they would be able to escape to. This indicates the beginning of Julien's transition out of childhood as he is wanting to leave home. At the end of the book, he is stoically watching his friend and father-figure being led to the concentration camps and he can do nothing to help, he can only say goodbye, but a much more final one this time. He is a long way away from the young boy who cried on the train at the beginning of the movie. It is a similar story with Jo in *Un Sac De Billes*. At the start, Jo is just a young school boy who does typical school boy things, such as trading his identifying yellow star for a bag of marbles. Throughout the film, his favourite marble makes occasional reappearances. When being kept by the Nazis while his religion was under suspicion, Jo tells the doctor that the marble is all he has left of the time before, showing how the marble is a symbol of his innocence and his childhood, before the war turned his world upside down. At the end of the film, Jo returns to Paris to find all his family waiting for him except his father, who never returned from the concentration camp. When he hears the news of his father's death, Jo drops the marble and it rolls away from him down the street, symbolizing the last bit of his childhood innocence being taken by the war, just like his father. The children in both stories have been forced to grow up much faster than normal children, and are aged beyond their years due to the war they've lived through and the atrocities they've witnessed.

Each story is focused upon two young boys and the relationship they have. In *Un Sac De Billes* they are actually brothers, but in *Au Revoir Les Enfants* they become close enough that they could be family, which helps sustain them throughout their respective hardships. Jean and Julien in *Au Revoir Les Enfants* start on rocky footing. They do not get along, as Julien feels threatened by Jean's prowess in school subjects as well as on the piano. However, they discover a mutual love of reading and have something very concrete binding them together after Julien discovers that Jean is Jewish. After spending more and more time together, the two become inseparable. It is shown that their relationship is closer to that of brothers than friends when Julien sees that Jean has no family coming to visit, and so invites him to lunch with his family. Jean is accepted easily by the Quentins, fitting into the family like he is one of them. This relationship gives the two strength throughout the war. Instead of hiding in the bunker when a bomb siren goes off, Jean and Julien sneak away to play piano together, laughing and messing about as bomber planes fly overhead. Being with each other helps them replace fear with happiness. In *Un Sac De Billes*, Jo is the younger of the two brothers, and his brother Maurice often attempts to shield him and takes much of the responsibility. Maurice carries Jo when he injures himself, but continues to walk and push on without assistance when he himself is injured. When Jo falls ill with pneumonia, Maurice goes off and finds the priest who will help them avoid being sent to a camp by the Nazis. In this way, Maurice helps Jo by taking most of the weight of responsibility and supporting his brother. The two rely heavily on each other, and at the end of the film, just before Paris is liberated, are both seen to be employed, working to support each other.

In both stories, there are many themes present that come together to make them important, impactful accounts. The idea of compassion for others and putting them before your own needs is perceived strongly in both tellings and works in conjunction with the brotherly relationships in each film where the boys work together and put each other before themselves. Despite these displays of bravery and kindness from friends and strangers, the cruelty and hatred of the war rages on, resulting in a loss of innocence for all the boys involved in the stories, showing the destruction war rages, even on those who survive.

**To be completed by the candidate**

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<b>Portfolio option (please tick (✓) <u>one</u> option only)</b>		
Literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Media	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Language in Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Portfolio title</b>	A Comparison of Au Devoir Les Enfants and Un Sac de Billes	
<b>Bibliography enclosed (please tick) (✓)</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Word count (excluding quotations and bibliography)</b>	1339	

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