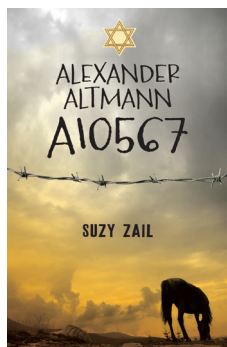




Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Alexander Altmann A10567

Suzy Zail
ISBN: 9781922179999
ARRP: \$18.95
NZRRP: \$21.99
May 2014

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Outline:

The story of a young Jewish boy who must learn to trust others to survive. Inspired by a true story.

Fourteen-year-old Alexander Altmann doesn't need to look at the number tattooed on his arm. A10567: he knows it by heart. He also knows that to survive Auschwitz, he has to toughen up. When he is given the job of breaking in the commander's new horse, their survival becomes intertwined. Alexander knows the animal is scared and damaged, but he must win its trust. If he fails, they will both be killed.

Author Information:

Suzy Zail has worked as a litigation lawyer, specialising in Family Law, but now writes full time. Among other titles, she has written her father's story, *The Tattooed Flower*, his life as a child survivor of the Holocaust. Her first novel for young adults, *The Wrong Boy*, was short-listed for the 2013 Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award in the Older Readers category. She lives in Melbourne and has three children.

How to use these notes:

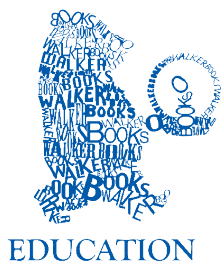
This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

<p>Mb^l ^lghmll □ Zk^qlh3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary years 7-9 • Ages 12+ 	<p>D^r[E^Zlqlg □ : k^Zl 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English • History 	<p>>qZf i e^lh_3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novel • Historical fiction 	<p>Mb^f ^l (B^ ^Zl 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • War • Holocaust • Survival • Horses • History • Friendship
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English content descriptions include:

<p>Year 7</p> <p>ACELA1529 ACELA1782 ACELT1619 ACELT1620 ACELT1621 ACELT1803 ACELT1622 ACELT1625</p>	<p>ACELY1721 ACELY1722 ACELY1723 ACELY1724 ACELY1725</p>	<p>Year 8</p> <p>ACELA1542 ACELA1547 ACELT1626 ACELT1627 ACELT1628 ACELT1807 ACELT1629 ACELT1632 ACELY1732 ACELY1733 ACELY1734</p>	<p>Year 9</p> <p>ACELA1552 ACELA1560 ACELT1633 ACELT1771 ACELT1634 ACELT1635 ACELT1636 ACELY1742 ACELY1745</p>	<p>*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.</p>
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Suzy Zail on *Alexander Altmann A10567*

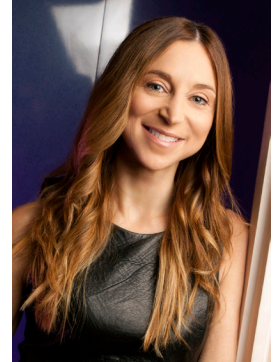
Alexander Altmann A10567 began in 2012 in a lecture hall at the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne. At the end of the lecture an old man raised his hand and asked whether the speaker had ever met a kind German. "Because I have," he whispered.

I found him after the lecture and introduced myself. I wanted to hear his story. I'd just finished writing *The Wrong Boy*, a story about a Jewish girl in Auschwitz who befriends the son of the Camp Commandant. I made the boy kind and let my characters fall in love. I knew it was unlikely that the son of a high-ranking Nazi would oppose his father in this way, but I wanted it to be possible.

"I tell my story every day at the Holocaust museum," the old man said. "Come see me tomorrow." His name was Fred. He'd grown up on a farm and spent his days riding horses, so when the Nazis asked for inmates to work in the SS stables, Fred put up his hand. He joined Auschwitz's elite Horse Commando and sometimes when he took the SS officers' children on pony rides, the officers would give him cigarettes which he could trade for food.

"Were they the kind Germans you spoke of?" I asked. He shook his head. "The commander of the platoon drove me to his house to chop wood one morning and left me in the kitchen with his wife. She poured me coffee and fed me cake." He smiled. "She asked for my name. My name," he repeated. "She used my name." The commander had beaten Fred black and blue. He'd whipped most of the men in the platoon at one time or another, but his wife had fed Fred cake and given him back his name.

Alexander Altmann A10567 is inspired by the story Fred Steiner told me in the months that followed. Much of what happened to Alexander, happened to Fred. Some of it I made up. Fred has no scars on his palms. He didn't close himself off from the other men in the platoon and he never lost hope. He was one of the lucky ones. He survived the war and made a new life in Australia. He married a French woman and had three children. He was finally safe, but he didn't sleep well.



Also by Suzy Zail



The Wrong Boy

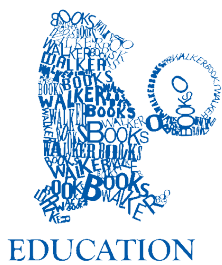
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Classroom ideas available

In 1997, Fred returned to Auschwitz. Beside his name in the visitor's book, he wrote: *I was here as a slave. Today I'm here with my family. I have won.* Fred is still telling people about his time in Auschwitz. He continues to work as a guide at the Holocaust museum because it keeps the nightmares away and because he knows that talking about the Holocaust is the best way to stop it from happening again. Having you read this book and learn something of his life, and the Holocaust, is another small win.

Discussion Questions and Activities

Setting and Context: Life in Auschwitz

- Trace Alexander's journey from Košice, Slovakia to Auschwitz-Birkenau on a globe or map
- What does the novel teach us about the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp? Consider the organisation of the camp, the different types of prisoners, systems and daily routines, the chain of command, living conditions, atrocities, the liberation of the camp and any other information you can extract from the novel.
- Research Auschwitz on the internet. (A useful starting point is the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website: <http://www.auschwitz.org/>) How did it make you feel to be confronted with photographs and other primary sources? Did you learn anything new from this research? Discuss your reactions as a class.
- Discuss the effect of including German words in the novel as dialogue from the guards. How would the novel be different without it? How would it be different if there was more German used as dialogue?



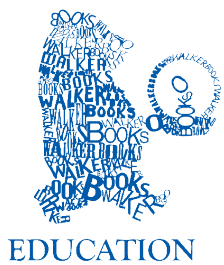
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- While *Alexander Altmann A10567* is set during an actual historical event and inspired by the experiences of a real person, it is primarily a work of fiction. Identify the elements of the text which can be viewed as historically accurate and those where the author has used creative licence to invent or embellish. How reliable do you think this novel is in presenting a realistic portrait of life in Auschwitz?
- Did your response to the book change after you read the author's note and discovered that Zail based this novel on the experiences of a real person? Why or why not? To what extent do you think Fred's experiences may have influenced Zail in writing the novel?
- Compare Zail's fictional account of life in Auschwitz with that presented in a range of different texts such as:
 - » Elie Wiesel's memoir, *Night*
 - » Primo Levi's memoir, *If This is a Man*
 - » Suzy Zail's biography of her father, *The Tattooed Flower*
 - » Margaret Wild and Julie Vivas's picture book, *Let the Celebrations Begin!*
 - » Doreen Rappaport's non-fiction book, *Beyond Courage*
- What similarities and differences are there between the texts in terms of the experiences and attitudes of the protagonists/subjects, authorial intent/purpose, tone, style and structure, and the central themes and messages? Present these differences and similarities as a Venn diagram. Discuss the importance of context, with *Alexander Altmann A10567* being a fictional work and the other accounts being autobiographical or biographical. How did the two texts work together to give you a richer understanding of survival in Auschwitz?
- What are the dangers of fictionalising historic events? What can fiction add to history?
- Find four websites that can be used to learn more about the book's setting or time period. Assess the websites to see if the information on them is trustworthy. Identify the purpose of the websites and compare it to the purpose of *Alexander Altmann A10567*. What techniques have the authors used to achieve their purposes?

- Write two news articles about an important event from the book, one from the perspective of the Nazi newspaper and one from the perspective of a Jewish newspaper.

Exploring Character

- Write a character assessment for Alexander, Isidor, the kapo and Father Joblonski. What are the key traits for each character? What purpose does each one serve in the story?
- How does Alexander develop as a character over the course of the novel? Identify specific points in the book which signal growth or change, then present these on a timeline.
- "He'd seen men in Birkenau run at the electrified fences and thought them weak. Now he wondered if perhaps suicide wasn't an act of courage." (Page 91) Why does Alexander change his mind about suicide being an act of weakness? How does this line give the reader an insight into how being held in Auschwitz is affecting Alexander?
- Why does Alexander avoid getting close to any of the other prisoners? What happens with Father Jablonski in Chapter 8 that tests Alexander's resolve? How does this affect him?
- "He'd sold nicotine to a dying man and taken his food, and it lay in his stomach like a brick." (Page 100) At first Alexander does not want to get involved in trading cigarettes for food and goods, however he eventually ends up becoming involved in the trade between prisoners. How does this make him feel? Do you think it was necessary for him to do this? What would have happened if he did not get involved?
- How do Alexander's prospects in Auschwitz change when he discovers the kapo is on his side?
- When Alexander is first trying to gain Midnight's confidence, he has a realisation that distancing himself from others hasn't made him stronger, it has made him empty. Why did getting familiar with Midnight inspire this epiphany in Alexander? What parallels can be drawn between Alexander and Midnight?
- Choose three child characters from the book and invite students to play the role of these characters in an interview. The class can take turns asking these characters questions.



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- Write a letter from Alexander to his parents from a key point in the novel. Would Alexander be honest with his parents about how he is feeling and what is happening?
 - Rewrite a scene from Midnight's perspective. How would he feel about Alexander and the commander? Would he understand what is happening around him?
 - Write a diary entry for a particular day (e.g. the day Serafin was shot) from the perspectives of the commander, Alexander, Isidor and the kapo.
 - Choose a character and create sentences based on the alphabet that reflect your character's personality or the role they played in the book, e.g. A is for the abuse Alexander received at the hands of the Nazis, B is for his belief that he had to be tough to survive.
 - Pick three characters from the story and list reasons why you would or would not choose to befriend them.
 - Create a Venn diagram to illustrate the similarities and differences between two main characters or between the student and one of the book's main characters.
 - Create a character trait chart with three columns, each headed with the name of one of the book's main characters. List the traits each of the characters possess and include an incident that supports each trait.
 - Write an acrostic poem about one of the characters in the book using the letters in their name.
 - What inspires the breakthrough in Alexander and Isidor's relationship at the end of Chapter 19?
- Isidor lies about his experience with horses. Can these characters be seen as dishonest to varying degrees, or does the novel instead encourage the reader to empathise with them, seeing them as ordinary people simply trying to survive in horrific circumstances? Imagine that you were in a concentration camp. Do you think that you would make similar compromises in order to get by?
- Concentration camp prisoners would have their belongings removed, their heads shaved and their name replaced with a number. Why did the Nazis do this to the prisoners? Discuss the importance of names and the effect of taking a person's name away from them. Discuss the significance of Anna Ziegler using Alexander's name when he is at her house rather than using his number or not talking to him at all. Also, discuss the significance of the title of the book including both Alexander's full name and his number given to him by the Nazis.
 - Imagine you are Alexander after he has returned home at the end of the novel. Write a letter to Anna Ziegler explaining how your meeting with her affected your time in the camp.
 - Create a word cloud based on the book's themes.
 - Discuss a particular episode in the story that you remember most. What themes does it touch on? Why do you think it remains so clear to you?
 - Write a letter/email to the author explaining what you learnt/felt while reading the book. Send it to: Suzy Zail, c/o Walker Books Australia, Locked Bag 22, Newtown NSW 2014 or educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au
 - Design a new book cover/or pick a new name for the book.

Themes

- What are the themes of this novel? Write a statement of belief for each theme, then assess how *Alexander Altmann A10567*'s treatment of these themes makes you feel.
- Alexander lies about his age to enter Birkenau and
- Did you find the ending satisfying? Why/why not? Write an alternative ending.
- Write a book report on *Alexander Altmann A10567*. Write about how much you enjoyed the book, using evidence from the text to support your evaluation. Make a recommendation about who would be interested in this book and draw connections to similar or related books.