

Characters

Main characters Jo, the child

Jo is the narrator of *Un sac de billes*, which covers the key events of his life between 1941 and 1944 (except for a brief epilogue, which is set in 1973). The events of the story are told as they happened from Jo's perspective as a child, as well as looking back from the standpoint of the adult that he has become 30 years later.

At the beginning of the novel, Jo is ten years old. He is the youngest son of a Jewish barber and lives in the Jewish district of the Porte de Clignancourt in Paris. It is 1941 and, although France is occupied by the Germans and anti-Semitic legislation is becoming increasingly prevalent, Jo's only concern is about losing his favourite marble in the game he is playing against his brother Maurice: 'C'est celle que je préfère, je la garde toujours celle-là' (Chapter 1). At home, he shares a room with Maurice above the barber's shop. Like typical boys, the brothers often squabble and fight: 'Nous nous battons souvent. [...] En général, c'est moi qui attaque' (Chapter 2).

Jo is somewhat naive. He is at a loss to understand why the increasingly prevalent anti-Semitic propaganda in the city has anything to do with him: ' [...] Dieu merci; j'étais blondinet, moi, avec les yeux bleus et un pif comme tout le monde. Alors c'était simple: le Juif c'était pas moi' (Chapter 3). He does not understand the reasons for being beaten up by boys who showed no antagonism towards him before he had to wear the yellow star, nor why the teachers at school seem to ignore him.



Jo from the graphic novel adaptation of *Un sac de billes*, by Krys and Vincent Bailly

Key quotation

Ce qui me reste de cette matinée, plus que les coups, plus que l'indifférence des grands, c'est cette sensation d'impuissance à comprendre. J'avais la même couleur que les autres, la même tête, j'avais entendu parler de religions différentes [...], mais moi je n'avais pas de religion [...].
(Chapter 3)

During the first half of the novel, which covers the journey the two boys make to reach Menton once they have left Paris, Jo relies heavily on his brother Maurice. He is content to let Maurice make decisions for them both and he is happy to follow his brother's lead: '- Par ici, dégroutille-toi! Maurice m'attrape par la main et m'arrache à la cohue' (Chapter 4).

CHARACTERS

Despite his fears, he is often able to see the sense of adventure in the midst of danger. This is made most obvious, perhaps, when he and Maurice make their attempt to cross the demarcation line.

Key quotation

[...] il y a quelques jours encore, j'aurais été fou de joie de me trouver dans une situation semblable: tout y est; la nuit, le bruissement des feuilles, l'attente. Les indiens [...], et moi le cow-boy désarmé qui vais franchir le passage à la limite de leur camp.
(Chapter 5)

Throughout the course of the novel, however, Jo develops a practical intelligence and an increasing self-reliance, which will help him out of danger on numerous occasions. He is quick-witted enough to deceive the policemen at the *gare Saint-Charles* in Marseille with an invented story and by pretending that a complete stranger is his father. He is proud that he has learned to fend for himself and takes pleasure in the fact

Key quotation

[...] depuis notre départ de Paris, nous avions pris l'habitude de ne compter que sur nous-mêmes: nous venions de découvrir le plaisir de nous débrouiller, enfants, dans un monde d'adultes.
(Chapter 6)

He manages to secure employment at the Viale farm in Sainte-Agnès above Menton, to earn a little money which will help his older brothers out, and later, with Maurice, establishes a profitable trade with the Italian soldiers and the shopkeepers of Nice: ' [...] et depuis deux mois que ce trafic durait, nous avions Maurice et moi constitué un trésor secret qui s'arrondissait de jour en jour' (Chapter 7).

Faced with the constant need to flee to safety, however, Jo becomes weary and resigned to his fate. When he learns of the need to leave Nice to seek refuge at Moisson Nouvelle, he reflects on what seems like a journey without end

Key quotation

Lorsque j'entraï dans ma chambre, je trouvai ma musette sur le lit [...] et il me sembla en la regardant que je n'étais plus à Nice mais sur la route, marchant sans trêve vers un but que je n'apercevais pas.
(Chapter 8)

When Jo is arrested along with his brother and Ferdinand in the 'mousetrap' 'la souritière' (Chapter 8) set up by the Germans in Nice, he can only consider the injustice of the war and despair.

Activité 1

Sans regarder le texte du roman, copiez cette citation et remplissez les blancs avec les mots qui manquent.

“ Et puis, voilà que cette 1 _____, voulue, faite par des 2 _____ aux cravates toujours très strictes et aux médailles toujours plus 3 _____, aboutissait en 4 _____ de compte à me jeter moi, un 5 _____ à coups de 6 _____ dans une 7 _____ fermée, me privant du 8 _____ de la liberté, moi qui n'avais 9 _____ fait, qui ne connaissais 10 _____ Allemand [...]. ”
(Chapter 8)

pièce glorieuses adultes enfant rien guerre aucun fin grosse jour

Jo is at his physical and emotional lowest during the time he is in the Gestapo headquarters at the Excelsior Hotel. He falls ill with the onset of meningitis and remains bed-bound for several days in a semi-delirious state: 'On m'avait trouvé dans le couloir, au petit matin, inanimé [...]. c'était grave, un début de méningite' (Chapter 9).

Although they manage to secure their release from the Excelsior, Jo and Maurice cannot return to their parents. Their father has been arrested and they need to flee once more. By the time he and Maurice reach the relative safety of their sister's home and discover that they cannot, in fact, even stay there, Jo adopts a weary resignation.

Key quotation

Demain, je serai à Aix-les-Bains. Si cela ne va pas, si un obstacle quelconque surgit, nous irons ailleurs, plus loin, à l'est, à l'ouest, au sud, n'importe où. Cela m'indiffère. Je m'en fous. (Chapter 10)

Jo spends the last years of the German occupation of France in the small town of R. He is barely 12 years old but has become completely independent, self-assured and capable. He works as a delivery boy for Monsieur Mancelier, the anti-Semitic pézainiste owner of the local bookshop who has no idea that Jo is Jewish. He forges ration tickets for the local townsblic: 'Je commence à être connu dans le village' (Chapter 11). He falls in love with Mancelier's daughter Françoise, but realises the love will never be reciprocated.

Key quotation

Histoire d'amour est d'ailleurs beaucoup dire, rien ne se passa, rien n'eut lieu, ni baiser, ni serment, rien... Comment aurait-il pu d'ailleurs en être autrement, Françoise Mancelier avait un peu plus de quatorze ans et je n'arrivais pas à rattraper mes douze. (Chapter 11)

By the end of the novel, Jo is much stronger, physically, emotionally and mentally. When he learns that the Germans have left R. for good, his reaction is one of quiet contemplation rather than joy.

Key quotation

Je m'accoudais à ma fenêtre un beau matin d'été et c'était fini, j'étais libre, on ne chercherait plus à me tuer, je pourrais revenir chez moi, prendre des trains, marcher dans les rues, rire, tirer des sonnettes, jouer aux billes dans la cour de la rue Ferdinand-Flocon, cela ne m'amuserait-il plus? Non, à bien y réfléchir, cela ne m'amuserait plus. (Chapter 11)

When the villagers physically assault Mancelier with what seems like intent to kill, Jo takes his own personal revenge on the bookshop owner, ironically by protecting Mancelier. It is immensely more satisfying for Jo to let Mancelier know that his life has been saved by a Jew, a member of 'la race maudite' (Chapter 11) that he despises.

After the German surrender, it is significant that Jo is able to make the return journey to Paris alone. He has, nevertheless, been profoundly affected by the events that have occurred since he left home in 1942. He reflects upon the journey that he has made, both literally and psychologically.

Key quotation

Trois ans plus tôt j'ai pris le métro par un beau soir pour la gare d'Austerlitz, aujourd'hui je reviens. La rue est la même. Il y a toujours ce ciel métallique entre les gouttières des toits, il y a cette odeur qui flotte et qui est celle de Paris au matin lorsque le vent remue un peu les feuilles des arbres rares. J'ai toujours ma musette, je la porte avec plus de facilité qu'autrefois, j'ai grandi. (Chapter 11)

Jo, the adult

At several points in the novel, Jo's adult voice is heard reflecting upon the events that his younger self experiences. In the epilogue to *Un sac de billes*, Jo speaks directly to the reader as an adult; he is 42 years old, with three children of his own. He wonders why he wrote the novel at all. As he watches his son sleep, he allows himself some final reflections: '[...] Je ne peux que souhaiter une chose: que jamais il ne ressente le temps de la souffrance et de la peur comme je l'ai connu durant ces années' (Epilogue). Then, due undoubtedly to his experiences, he also comments that nothing is ever really certain.

Activité 2

Réfléchissez aux adjectifs variés que vous pouvez utiliser pour décrire Jo. Copiez et complétez la grille ci-dessous qui en contient quelques-uns.

Adjectif	Synonyme	Antonyme
astucieux		
débrouillard		
malin		
méfiant		
audacieux		
entrepreneur		
adroit		
assuré		
aventurieux		
résigné		
courageux		
hardi		
déterminé		

Activité 3

Examinez comment Jo change entre le début du roman quand il avait dix ans et son retour à Paris en 1944. Comment est-ce que ses 'aventures' ont influencé l'homme qu'il est devenu à 42 ans? Écrivez entre 150 et 200 mots.

Maurice

Maurice is two years older than his brother Jo. Before the two boys leave Paris, we learn that Maurice can be impatient with Jo, saying things like: '- Alors, merde, tu te décides?', '- Mais, Bon Dieu, qu'est-ce que tu fous?', '- Je vais pas rester le cul par terre jusqu'à demain...'. - Arrête de chialer [...] (Chapter 1), but Maurice has a profound love and sense of protection for his younger brother, all the same. He is more impulsive than Jo and, at the outset at least, more of a fighter. When the boys go to school wearing their yellow star badges, Maurice already seems prepared for trouble before the school bell rings: '[...] il avait sa tête des mauvais jours. J'ai eu l'impression qu'il était temps que ça sonne parce que la bagarre n'aurait pas tardé' (Chapter 3).



Maurice, the priest and Jo on the train to Dax, from the 2017 film adaptation

He quickly establishes himself as Jo's protector and it is Maurice who takes the lead during their initial flight from Paris to Menton. It is Maurice who manages to jump the queue so that they get their rail tickets for Dax ('- Monsieur, c'est pour mon petit frère, il a mal aux pieds... On vient de loin [...] (Chapter 4) and who secures them places on the train. It is Maurice who fabricates the first of their stories which hide their true purpose and identity while they are en route.

Maurice is much more fearless than Jo. He is not intimidated by Raymond, the delivery boy in Hagetmau: 'Maurice le regarde fixement. Il ne se laisse jamais impressionner par les grands' (Chapter 5). In fact, he is quick to see opportunity in Raymond's role as passeur and takes on the role himself once he and Jo have crossed the demarcation line into the free zone.

Key quotation

Ce qu'il avait fait était très simple, il me l'a narré tout content de lui, avec des rires étouffés [...]: il avait refait le trajet en sens inverse, repassé huit fois la ligne, ramené quarante personnes et gagné vingt mille francs. (Chapter 5)

Once the boys reach Menton, Maurice is the first to find himself a job to help his older brothers out, now that there are four mouths to feed: 'Cet animal m'avait grillé sur le poteau et travaillait déjà chez le boulanger du bas de la rue'; 'Il était en passe de ravitailler la famille en pain, farine et gâteaux' (Chapter 6). He is quick to assume responsibility, Maurice is emblematic of the will to survive in war; of individuals who thrive when they need to live on their wits, who grasp opportunity and use it to their advantage. Maurice is unafraid to break the laws against the black market, because it is a question of survival.

At school in Menton, Maurice is more interested in disrupting the class than he is in learning.

Key quotation

[...] Il participait à la mée, il fabriquait des avions compliqués, des cocottes, recommençait à truster les billes et n'apprenait strictement rien. (Chapter 6)

In Nice, Maurice works the trading schemes between the Italians and the shopkeepers with Jo. He knows where to get his hands on whatever people might want.

Key quotation

Il est devenu un dictionnaire vivant, il sait où l'on peut trouver en pleine période de restriction du beurre, des œufs, des cravates [...] (Chapter 7)

At Moisson Nouvelle, Maurice has his ear to the ground and keeps abreast of developments in the world outside. Overhearing conversations about the increased number of round-ups of Jews in Nice, he puts forward to his brother the plan he has been concocting: that if the Germans should arrive at Moisson Nouvelle, 'il faut s'inventer complètement autre chose, une autre vie' (Chapter 8). He convinces Jo that the solution is to fabricate a background for themselves which combines as much of the truth as is safe, with facts taken from the life of Ange Testi, their friend at the youth camp, and he rehearses with Jo the responses they should make if ever they are interrogated. During their actual arrest at the Excelsior Hotel, Maurice remains strong to support Jo.

Key quotations

Maurice me regarde, il parle avec des mâchoires qui ont de la peine à se desserrer.
- Ça ira, Joseph?
- Ça ira. (Chapter 9)
Maurice prend de l'assurance, je sens qu'il est parfaitement maître de lui, il commence à leur servir l'histoire toute chaude [...]. (Chapter 9)

When he is sent to fetch baptism certificates to prove that he and Jo are not Jewish, Jo tells him not to come back unless there is a real chance of rescue from the situation; but Maurice stands firm in his loyalty, love and protection towards his younger brother: '- Te casse pas la tête. Dans deux jours, je serai là. Salut' (Chapter 9).

Maurice's presence in the narrative gradually fades once they leave Nice and Jo becomes more self-assured and independent; but he does not disappear entirely. He finds employment at the local hotel in R. and regularly meets up with his brother: ' [...] les poches bourrées de tout ce qu'il avait pu dérober aux cuisines' (Chapter 11). He provides updates on war events to keep Jo, as well as the reader, informed: ' [...] Il travaillait avec un chef de rang qui était de la résistance et écoutait la radio de Londres, les nouvelles étaient bonnes et les Allemands reculaient toujours' (Chapter 11).

It is Maurice who brings Jo the news that the Germans have finally gone: 'Maurice me regarde et sourit. - Ils sont partis' (Chapter 11).

At the very end of the novel, Maurice does not travel back to Paris with Jo. Entering to the end, he manages to manoeuvre his way home by road by exchanging one bottle of cognac and 19 others filled with weak tea for five jerry cans of fuel. At the same time, he makes a tidy sum for himself out of a large quantity of reblochon cheese that he promised his boss he would sell in Paris before sending back the money, which he never did: 'Ce qui ne fut que justice' (Chapter 17).

Activité 4

Montrez comment Joffo présente la débrouillardise de Maurice pendant le roman. Aidez-vous pu en faire autant dans la même situation? Écrivez une réponse d'entre 150 et 200 mots.

Activité 5

Considérez les personnages de Maurice et Jo. Quelles sont leurs similarités et leurs différences? Écrivez une réponse d'entre 150 et 200 mots.

Other family members

Monsieur Joffo (le père)

Monsieur Joffo, le père, ('Papa aux belles histoires, le roi de la rue, papa du crématoire' (Chapter 1)) owns a barber's shop in the Jewish district of the Porte de Clignancourt in Paris. He is an exile, a 'fuyard' (Chapter 2), who fled from Tsarist Russia at the age of seven.

Key quotation

- J'ai gagné ma vie, tout en échappant aux Russes, et croyez-moi, ce ne fut pas toujours facile. J'ai fait tous les métiers [...]. J'ai rencontré de braves gens qui m'ont aidé et d'autres qui étaient de mauvaises gens. J'ai appris à me servir de ciseaux et je suis devenu coiffeur [...]. (Chapter 3)

His own father, Jacob Joffo, had previously fled from Bessarabie russe to escape the persecution of the anti-Jewish pogroms, a story which le père Joffo often tells his children. The history of the Joffo family up to 1941 thus parallels and foreshadows the plight in which its younger members will soon find themselves.

Initially optimistic that his family are safe in France, Monsieur Joffo is faced with increasing anti-Semitic legislation and decides to send his children away for their own safety. The first to leave are Henri and Albert, his older sons. When Jo and Maurice return home bruised and beaten at lunchtime on the first day that they have been ordered by law to wear the yellow star, Monsieur Joffo declares, '- Pas d'école cet après-midi' (Chapter 3).

He tells Jo and Maurice that they must leave for the free zone that very night and when his sons become worried about what will happen to their parents, he comforts them that they will survive.

Key quotation

- [...] Votre mère et moi régions quelques affaires et nous partons à notre tour.
Il eut un rire léger et se pencha pour poser une main sur chacune de nos épaules.
- Ne vous en faites pas, les Russes ne m'ont pas eu à sept ans, ce n'est pas les nazis qui m'épingleront à cinquante berges. (Chapter 3)

He tries to explain to his sons why they must leave: 'C'est la chasse qui est revenue, alors il faut repartir et se cacher, en attendant que le chasseur se fatigue' (Chapter 3). He makes Jo and Maurice promise that they will never admit to being Jewish: 'Vous êtes juifs mais ne l'avouez jamais. Vous entendez JAMAIS' (Chapter 3).

A few months later, arrested while fleeing from 'une rafle monstre dans le quartier, un soir' (Chapter 6) (which is quite likely the round-up of Operation Vent Primantier and the Vél d'Hiv, although we are not explicitly told so), Monsieur Joffo and his wife are interned in a transit camp in Pau. Fortunately, he manages to get a letter out to his sons.

Henri travels to Pau and eventually secures the release of his mother and father and they travel to Nice, where they set up home and are eventually reunited with all their sons. Monsieur Joffo is proud of Jo and Maurice's trading skills, although he is often worried about them.

Key quotation

J'ai pensé plus tard qu'il était inquiet parfois, qu'il regardait souvent sa montre lorsque nous avions du retard, mais il avait compris que l'apprentissage de la vie que nous avions là était une expérience unique qu'il ne fallait pas gâcher, que nous apprendrions [...] plus de choses sur la vie que nous en recevions sur le banc d'une école [...]. (Chapter 7)

Le père Joffo keeps abreast of the events occurring in the war by listening to English radio: 'L'... depuis que nous étions à Nice, il n'avait pas manqué une seule soirée' (Chapter 7). With his sons, he marks the progress of the Allies and the German armies with flags on a map on the wall of their apartment, 'une cérémonie que, je le suppose, la plupart des familles françaises de cette époque ont bien connue' (Chapter 7).

When the German soldiers, members of the SS and the Gestapo arrive in Nice, le père Joffo makes the decision for them all: '- Mes enfants, dit-il [...], il va falloir de nouveau nous séparer' (Chapter 8).

Once again he tells Jo and Maurice not to worry: '- Ne vous en faites pas pour nous, ce n'est pas à un vieux singe que l'on apprend à faire des grimaces' (Chapter 8). The last contact Monsieur Joffo has with Maurice is when Maurice is allowed to leave the Excelsior Hotel to fetch baptism certificates for himself and Jo. His last contact with Jo is via a phone call after the two boys have been released from the Excelsior and are once again at Moisson Nouvelle: 'Embrasse Maurice et je t'embrasse aussi, bien fort. On va se revoir bientôt à présent' (Chapter 9).

Within a few days, le père Joffo has been arrested and taken to the Excelsior and is 'aux mains des nazis' (Chapter 10). At the very end of the novel, we learn that he has not escaped the fate that so many Jews faced during the years of the Holocaust.

Key quotation

Finalelement, Hitler aura été plus cruel que le tsar. (Chapter 11)

Activité 6

Mettez-vous à la place du père Joffo:

- la nuit du départ de Paris de Jo et Maurice
 - le jour de son arrestation avec Madame Joffo à Pau
 - le jour de la réunion avec ses quatre fils à Nice
 - pendant son arrestation à l'hôtel Excelsior.
- Imaginez ce qu'il écrirait dans un journal personnel. Écrivez (à la première personne) entre 50 et 60 mots pour chaque situation.

Madame Joffo (la mère)

Madame Joffo (la mère) is never named in the novel and, like her husband, she is also an exile: 'Votre mère a eu un peu la même histoire que moi' (Chapter 3).

She displays a typically maternal affection and care for her sons: 'Comme chaque soir elle est venue vérifier nos dents, nos oreilles, nos ongles. Une tape sur l'oreiller, elle nous a bordés, embrassés et a quitté la pièce [...]' (Chapter 2).

She is the first to become concerned for her family by the increased German presence in Paris: '- Tu ne crois pas qu'on va avoir des ennuis maintenant qu'ils sont là?' (Chapter 2).

She sews the yellow badges onto her children's clothes with trembling hands, attempting to hide her fears. 'Elle sourit avec les lèvres seulement' (Chapter 3). She is unable to hide her emotions when Jo and Maurice leave.

Key quotation

Elle nous a aidés à enfiler les manches de nos manteaux, à nouer nos cache-nez. Elle a tiré nos chaussettes. Sans discontinuer, elle souriait et sans discontinuer ses larmes coulaient, je sentis ses joues mouillées contre mon front, ses lèvres aussi, humides et salées. (Chapter 3)

She adds only a few words to the letter her husband sends to their sons from the transit camp in Pau: '...j' maman avait ajouté simplement une ligne après la signature de mon père: « Je vous embrasse tous. Courage » (Chapter 6).

Reunited with her family in Nice, she can celebrate her birthday, which coincides with the Allied landings in North Africa on 8 November, 1942. Maurice and Jo use some of the money from their trading activities to buy her 'une broche dorée [...] qui représente un hippocampe avec des pierres rouges dans les yeux' (Chapter 7). Her husband and older sons have managed to get her a Singer sewing machine, 'qui était pour l'époque quelque chose d'inappréciable' (Chapter 7).

When Monsieur Joffo is arrested and taken to the Excelsior Hotel, Madame Joffo manages to escape. Subinagui informs Jo and Maurice, ' - Elle a été prévenue à temps, elle est déjà partie, je ne saurais vous dire où mais vous pouvez être rassurés, vos parents ont dû prévoir un endroit pour se cacher' (Chapter 10). Unlike her husband, Madame Joffo manages to survive the rest of the war and is there to welcome Jo when he returns to Paris in 1944.

Activité 7

Comment est-ce que Joffo évéille notre sympathie pour Madame Joffo pendant le roman? Ecrivez une réponse d'environ 100 mots.

Henri and Albert

Henri and Albert are the older brothers of Jo and Maurice. At the beginning of the novel, both of them work at the barber's shop in the Porte de Clignancourt with their father. When the German presence in Paris increases, Henri and Albert are the first members of the family to flee to safety in the free zone.

The two older Joffo boys find work at Madame Henriette's hairdressing salon in Menton in the south of France, near the Italian border. Jo and Maurice are sent to join their brothers when their father decides that they need to leave.

Henri is the eldest Joffo brother. He and Albert have made something of a reputation for themselves in Menton. At the mention of their brothers' names, Jo and Maurice find they can get almost anything they need in the town.

Key quotation

Les difficultés s'aplanissaient aussitôt, tout le monde semblait les connaître et le boucher nous délivra sans le moindre ticket une entrecôte monstrueuse, l'épicier nous donna quatre kilos de pommes de terre, six œufs, une salade et cent grammes de farine tamisée. (Chapter 6)

When their parents are interned in the transit camp, it is Henri who decides to go to Pau to seek their release. In the meantime, Albert will carry on working at the salon and see to it that Jo and Maurice are enrolled at the local school.

Despite their fears for their parents' lives, Albert remains optimistic ('...il y a toujours quelque chose à tenter' (Chapter 6)) but when Henri has failed to return several days later, he begins to doubt.

Key quotation

Fort de son principe qui était qu'il y a toujours quelque chose à essayer alors qu'il semble qu'il n'y ait plus rien à faire, il nous annonça un soir que si nous n'avions pas de nouvelles avant la fin de la semaine [...], il partirait à son tour lundi matin... (Chapter 6)

In Pau, Henri proves that he shares what seems to be the family trait for resourcefulness (*la débrouillardise*). He manages to set up a deal with a German sergeant, by trading him a haircut for the chance to secure an interview with the camp commandant.

Like Jo and Maurice, Henri invents a plausible background story for his parents, who he claims have been arrested by accident. He claims that his mother is a descendant of the Imperial Russian Romanov family and therefore cannot possibly be Jewish. He also claims that his father has official French nationality and, thus, cannot be a Jew either. He even suggests, rather dangerously, that the commandant can check the information with the *service de recherches d'identité* at the *Préfecture de Paris*. Henri's ruses pay off: 'votre père n'a en effet pas été déchu de la nationalité française. Je vais donner des ordres pour qu'il soit libéré, ainsi que votre mère' (Chapter 6).

When orders come through to conscript Henri and Albert into the STO, the Joffo brothers quickly decide to leave Menton and relocate to Nice, where their parents are. In Nice, Henri and Albert set up their own hairdressing salon.

Key quotation

Ils ne travaillent plus chez un petit coiffeur, ça n'a plus rien à voir avec la rue de Clignancourt ou la rue de Paris à Menton, c'est un lieu de haut luxe [...]. (Chapter 7)

When Nice becomes a dangerous place to live, Henri and Albert are the first to leave once more and head towards Aix-les-Bains, where their father knows someone who will help them out: **'là j'ai une adresse pour vous, quelqu'un vous cachera'** (Chapter 8).

At the end of the novel, Henri and Albert have returned to the barber's shop in Paris. When Jo returns, he sees them at work inside the shop.

KEY QUOTATION

Derrière la vitrine, malgré les reflets, j'aperçois Albert, il coiffe. Derrière lui, Henri manie le balai. (Chapter 11)

Rosette

Rosette is the sister of Henri, Albert, Maurice and Jo. She lives with her husband Paul in a house near the church in Ainay-le-Vieil. When Jo and Maurice arrive at their sister's house, she seems troubled.

KEY QUOTATION

Depuis notre arrivée, je sentais chez Rosette, malgré son évidente joie à retrouver ses petits frères, une inquiétude, une crainte que je ne lui connaissais pas. (Chapter 10)

Rosette tells her brothers that they cannot stay. There is an informant in the village and it is no longer safe for them. When Jo asks his sister if it is even safe for her and her husband, she tells him, **'je suis ici depuis assez longtemps maintenant, et j'espère que mes papiers tiendront le coup. Mais j'ai quand même une cachette que Paul a trouvée en cas de perquisition'** (Chapter 10).

Rosette packs food and extra socks for Jo and Maurice before they set off once again. This demonstrates her maternal nature and reinforces the fact that the boys are still children after all and might not think about the practicality of extra socks.

ACTIVITÉ 8

Jo et Maurice sont évidemment les personnages principaux du roman, mais quelle est l'importance du rôle joué par les autres membres de la famille Joffroy? Écrivez une réponse d'environ 200 mots.

Part of the function of the siblings in *Un sac de billes* is to reinforce the importance of resourcefulness. Although they all often receive help, they also try to help themselves, which Joffroy makes clear to the reader.

Other characters
Raymond

Raymond is a delivery boy in Hagetmau. He gives Jo and Maurice the information they ask for about the *passseur* ('Il a des joues pleines et dures, des mains rouges couvertes de duvet blond et des ongles crasseux. [...] Il a de splendides caries à la plupart des dents' (Chapter 5)) and then offers to get them across the demarcation line himself for a fraction of the normal cost, as long as they finish off his deliveries for him.

He is amused by the precautions Jo and Maurice take to remain silent so that they can cross the line without being caught.

KEY QUOTATION

- T'en fais pas, mon p'tit pote, c'est pas la peine de faire le Sloux, tu marches derrière moi, tu fais ce que je fais et tu t'occupes pas du reste. (Chapter 5)

He explains later that crossing the line in Hagetmau is rarely difficult, and it is likely that this inspires Maurice to act as a *passseur* himself, later that night.

KEY QUOTATION

- En général, ça se passe bien. Là on a de la chance. Les postes sont éloignés et surtout il y a des angles morts [...]. Le danger ce serait qu'ils envoient des patruilles, mais s'ils le font, ils sont obligés de passer [...] près de la ferme Badin [...], mais dès que Badin les voit, il expédie son fils qui connaît les raccourcis et vient nous avertir. (Chapter 5)

ACTIVITÉ 9

Sans Raymond est-ce que Jo et Maurice auraient pu passer la ligne de démarcation? Justifiez votre réponse. Écrivez environ 100 mots.

Monsieur and Madame Viale

Monsieur and Madame Viale live on a farm above Sainte-Agnès in the mountains near Menton. Jo goes to find work at their farm so that he can help support his brothers.

Jo is struck by the unlikelihood of finding someone like Madame Viale living on a farm in the mountains: 'Bien que je fusse très jeune, ce nouveau personnage me frappa tout de suite par son incongruité' (Chapter 6). He learns that she was once a member of Parisian high society.

Sent to Menton to recover from tuberculosis, she twisted her ankle while out walking one day and was rescued by Monsieur Viale: 'Il avait une trentaine d'années, une moustache à la Clark Gable' (Chapter 6). They married three months later ('Ce fut un scandale affreux' (Chapter 6)) and they have lived together at the farm ever since.

Madame Viale tells Jo the story of her meeting with Monsieur Viale at least four times during his first week at the farm and he discovers that his job will generally be no more onerous than listening to Madame Viale reminisce while they sip tea and listen to classical music together, more like friends than employer and employee.

Reflecting on his employment at the Viale farm in later life, Jo comes to the conclusion, '(...) Je pense aujourd'hui que c'était davantage pour faire plaisir à sa femme que pour l'aider aux travaux des champs' (Chapter 6).

Activité 10

Du point de vue de Monsieur Viale, expliquez pourquoi vous avez décidé de prendre Jo à votre service. Écrivez une réponse à la première personne d'environ 60 mots.

Marcello (and the other Italian soldiers in Nice)

Marcello is a soldier in the Italian regiment which is occupying Nice when Jo and Maurice are reunited with their parents there. He has 'un splendide nez cassé et des cheveux frisés luisants de brillantine (...). Il parle bien français, presque correctement, mais son accent est catastrophique. Il rit presque toujours' (Chapter 7).

Jo and Maurice become good friends with Marcello and trade with him and the other Italian soldiers at the bistro *Chez Tite* where they all meet. The 'postman' (*le facteur*) plays draughts with Jo. All the soldiers seem relaxed. They buy grenade for Jo and Maurice to drink.

KEY QUOTATION

Les amis de Marcello sont là, trois militaires qui nous accueillent à bras ouverts. Je les connais tous, il y a un grand étudiant romain à lunettes qui ressemble à un Anglais (...), un charpentier parmesan (...) et un caporal vénitien plus âgé qui était employé de postes avant la guerre et que ses camarades appellent le facteur. (Chapter 7)

Marcello is a likeable and easy-going character, who represents the stark contrast between the German and Italian forces. By September 1943, most of the Italians have left Nice but Marcello is described as still seeking a good time: 'Il était devenu barman du mess et semblait déterminé à finir les hostilités en préparant des cocktails sur la Côte d'Azur' (Chapter 7).

Activité 11

Examinez comment l'officier contraste le comportement des soldats italiens et des soldats et des officiers allemands dans *Un sac de billes*. Écrivez une réponse de 150 mots.

Monsieur Subinagui and Ferdinand

Monsieur Subinagui runs the youth camp of Moisson Nouvelle. He offers Jo and Maurice a place at the camp despite the fact that they are under age: 'Je crois qu'ici, vous serez bien, et... en sûreté' (Chapter 8). He is clearly aware of their situation.

KEY QUOTATION

C'était un homme très brun, au front dégarni et dans les yeux une expression indéfinissable, j'avais l'impression que cet homme savait tout de moi avant que je lui aie appris quelque chose. Son allure me fascinait (...). (Chapter 8)

When he and Joseph have been at Moisson Nouvelle for a while, Maurice suspects that Subinagui is harbouring and protecting more Jewish boys: 'Tu sais, je crois qu'on n'est pas les seuls dans notre cas ici' (Chapter 8). Subinagui is taking a huge personal risk in these actions; he is an example of the selfless individuals who fought against the anti-Semitic policies of German-occupied France.

When they are released from the Excelsior Hotel, it is Subinagui who takes Jo and Maurice back in. It is also Subinagui who informs them of their father's arrest and of the need to flee once more: 'Vous partez tout de suite, j'ai mis tout ce qu'il vous fallait dans vos musettes, deux chemises, du linge, des chaussettes et un casse-croûte' (Chapter 10).

Ferdinand is Subinagui's second-in-command.

KEY QUOTATION

Ferdinand a vingt-quatre ans, une tuberculose a entraîné quatre ans de sana et l'a fait réformer. Il est l'intendant du centre, le bras droit de Subinagui. Il va régler ces problèmes. (Chapter 8)

He offers Jo and Maurice a lift into the centre of Nice one afternoon. Ferdinand is desperate and naive: he does not realise is that he is leading them into a trap set by the Germans to capture Jews. In Nice, he is locked into a room with the two boys and two young women. Ferdinand is Jewish and was hoping to acquire false papers from a Resistance cell.

Key quotation

— C'est ma faute [...], on est tombés dans une souricière. Il y avait ici un centre de résistance qui fournissait des faux papiers et une filière pour passer en Espagne. (Chapter 2)

At the Excelsior Hotel, Ferdinand is interrogated. Jo and Maurice watch as he continues to deny that he is a Jew until an SS officer strikes him. Under the violence of the interrogation, he crumbles.

Key quotation

A la volée, sa main claque sur la joue terreuse de Ferdinand, la tête ballotte et, à la deuxième gifle, il chancelle et recule de deux pas. Les larmes coulent. (Chapter 2)

Ferdinand admits that he is Jewish and that he left Poland in 1940 when his parents were arrested. The SS officer gives him a green ticket. It is a ticket for the convoy which will transport him to an extermination camp.

Activité 12

Expliquez comment et pourquoi Monsieur Subinagui aide Jo et Maurice. Écrivez une réponse de 100 mots.

Activité 13

Dans quelle mesure peut-on considérer Ferdinand comme responsable de l'arrestation de Jo et Maurice à Nice? Écrivez une réponse de 100 mots.

Zérati, Virgilio, Ange Testi and Jean Masso

The friends whom Jo has or makes during the novel act to both support and inspire him.

Zérati is Jo's closest friend at school in Paris: 'C'est mon copain depuis le préparatoire' (Chapter 3). He is a little overawed by Jo and proud to be his friend. He is very impressed by the yellow star badge that Jo has to wear: ' [...] t'es vachement du pot, ça fait chouette' (Chapter 3).

Key quotation

[...] Il voulait m'exhiber un peu, Zérati, me faire briller aux yeux des copains. (Chapter 3)

Despite his size and build ('Il ne doit pas dépasser trente-cinq kilos et au concours de biceps c'est toujours le dernier' (Chapter 3)), he is not afraid to step forward to assist Jo when the fighting starts in the school playground. Although Jo and Maurice do not see Zérati again once they leave Paris, the memory of him helps them out when they are interrogated at the Excelsior Hotel.

Key quotation

— [...] Moi mon meilleur copain c'était Zérati, un jour... Dans deux heures, je saurai que Maurice aussi a parlé de Zérati. Le nom a dû leur paraître suffisamment algérien pour qu'ils nous laissent en paix le restant de la journée. (Chapter 9)

Virgilio lives in Menton. He is the same age as Jo. It is thanks to Virgilio that Jo finds employment with Monsieur and Madame Viale.

Key quotation

Après quelques parties d'osselets devant sa porte, il me confia que pendant les vacances il allait garder les vaches dans une ferme de la montagne au-dessus de Sainte-Agnès. Ce n'était pas trop mal payé [...], mais il ne pouvait faire ce travail que lorsqu'il n'allait pas à l'école. (Chapter 6)

Jo meets Virgilio again when he and Maurice are enrolled at the school in Menton, and they become the firmest of friends: ' [...] nous nous arrêtons toujours devant chez lui après la classe et poursuivions jusqu'à la nuit de très longues parties d'osselets [...]' (Chapter 6).

Ange Testi and Jean Masso are both members of the Moisson Nouvelle youth camp at Golfe-Juan, who quickly become firm friends with Jo and Maurice.

Key quotation

Une tête apparut, une tignasse raide, deux yeux en grain de café et un nez en pied de marmite, je venais de faire connaissance avec Ange Testi. (Chapter 8)

Ange is an idle layabout (*fainéant*) who can find any excuse to avoid work at the camp: 'Je n'ai jamais vu beaucoup Ange à l'état vertical, il avait une propension très nette à s'allonger, quelle que soit l'heure, dès qu'il pouvait' (Chapter 8). He is originally from Algiers and has been unable to return there since the Allied landings in North Africa. He has ended up at Moisson Nouvelle quite by chance. Since his arrival he has spent some time in the kitchens or cleaning the camp, but mostly having 'énormes siestes' (Chapter 8). He is a carefree innocent of good temper: 'il croisa ses mains sous la tête et jeta autour de lui un regard de bouddha heureux' (Chapter 8).

Jean Masso is originally from Grasse. Jo says that '[...] avec lui aussi je sentais que nous pourrions devenir amis' (Chapter 8). Ange, Jo and Jean play dominoes together in the evenings at the camp. Working alongside Maurice in the camp kitchens, Jo, Ange and Jean become 'un trio inséparable' (Chapter 8).

One morning after their arrest in Nice and while they are on the way to do their chores in the kitchens at the Excelsior Hotel, Jo and Maurice see Jean in the hotel lobby. He has been rounded up with others from Moisson Nouvelle. Jean remains optimistic.

Key quotation

Je regarde Masso. Il sourit de toutes ses dents et me frappe sur l'épaule.
- Je vais te dire une bonne chose, Joffo, nous on s'en fout de ces histolres, on ne partira pas, on n'est pas juifs. (Chapter 9)

However, in a tragically ironic twist of fate, Jean, who has been circumcised for medical reasons ('[...] moi c'est parce que j'ai eu une opération quand j'avais six ans [...]') (Chapter 9), as Jo and Maurice pretend, is sent to an extermination camp nevertheless.

Key quotation

Arrivé le vendredi matin, les Allemands n'eurent pas le temps d'examiner son cas. La Gestapo de Nice devait fournir pour chaque convoi un contingent de mille deux cents personnes. A dix-huit heures, stupéfié, il entendit son nom sur la liste et monta dans le train de la mort. Il avait fait l'appoint. Grâce à lui, les statistiques de Juifs arrêtés furent exactes cette semaine-là. (Chapter 9)

Activité 14

Considérez les journées amis de Jo et Maurice dans le roman. Quelle est leur importance dans le récit? Ecrivez une réponse de 150 à 200 mots.

Doctor Rosen

Doctor Rosen is the medical examiner for the Germans at the Excelsior Hotel and is described as having 'des yeux très perçants, presque noirs' (Chapter 9). Jo and Maurice are sent to him so that he can verify whether or not they are circumcised. When he has confirmed this, he tries to reason with the boys.

Key quotation

Il soupire et, sans regarder le soldat qui attend toujours, il dit:
- Ne faites pas attention à lui, il ne comprend pas le français. Nous sommes seuls ici, vous pouvez me dire la vérité, ça ne sortira pas du bureau. Vous êtes juifs. (Chapter 9)

When Jo and Maurice stick firmly to their story, the doctor sends the German soldier out of the room. He tells the boys that he is called Rosen and that 'ça signifie tout simplement que je suis juif' (Chapter 9). When the boys still hold fast to their convictions, he realises they are not going to give up.

Key quotation

Le médecin ne répond pas. Il marche vers le portemanteau, fouille dans sa veste, tire une cigarette et l'allume. A travers la fumée il nous examine encore. Impossible de savoir ce qui se passe dans la tête de cet homme. Tout à coup il murmure comme pour lui-même: « Chapeau. » (Chapter 9)

When the soldier returns to the room, all the doctor has to say is that the circumcision has been done for medical reasons: '« Das ist chirurgikal gemacht »' (Chapter 9). Convinced that they are Jews, the doctor nevertheless saves the boys' lives. For the rest of his life, Jo wonders why: whether it was because they were children or because Rosen really was Jewish too.

Mademoiselle Hauser

Mademoiselle Hauser is a young Jewish girl who acts as a nurse for Joseph when he is seriously ill at the Excelsior Hotel: '[...] elle me parut très belle, son sourire était doux et ses dents brillaient' (Chapter 9). She explains to Jo, without his having to ask, how he was found unconscious in the hotel corridor and that the doctors have diagnosed the onset of meningitis: 'Elle comprit que je n'avais pas la force d'ouvrir la bouche et elle répondit à toutes les questions comme si elle les avait vues dans mes yeux' (Chapter 9).

In his moments of delirium, Mademoiselle Hauser is there to comfort Jo: 'Elle resta avec moi une bonne partie de la nuit, chaque fois que je m'éveillais, je discernais sa présence assise sur le fauteuil et cela m'apaisait' (Chapter 9). As he begins to recover, Jo asks Mademoiselle Hauser why she is not wearing a nurse's uniform. She simply replies: 'Je suis juive' (Chapter 9). Jo kisses her: 'Je ne répondis pas mais attrapai son cou au passage et l'embrassai. Elle me rendit mon baiser, effleura ma joue de ses doigts et sortit' (Chapter 9).

Mademoiselle Hauser brings Jo books to read but once he has recovered, his interrogators restart and they never meet again.

Key quotation

Où vous en êtes-vous allée, mademoiselle Hauser? Dans quel camp avez-vous débarqué, l'un de ces matins brouillardieux et froids de Pologne ou d'Allemagne orientale? (Chapter 9)

ACTIVITÉ 15

Quelle est l'importance du Docteur Rosen et de Mademoiselle Hauser dans le roman? Justifiez votre réponse. Écrivez environ 100 mots.

Ambroise, Raoul and Françoise Mancelier

Ambroise Mancelier is the owner of a *librairie-papeterie* at the centre of the town of R. Jo works for him as a delivery boy and lives with him and his family. He is in his fifties and walks with a cane. He is married to Marcelle, of whom Jo says, 'Il suffit de la regarder pour ne pas avoir envie de la décrire' (Chapter 11). Ambroise wears two medals, 'de la grande première 14-18' (Chapter 11). He is an avid *pétainiste* and has photos of Pétain, 'qui est toujours et chaque jour davantage l'idole n°1' (Chapter 11).

Mancelier represents the collaborators of France, those who spied and informed on their neighbours.

Key quotation

Détail important, mon vénéré patron a des ennemis personnels: les Juifs. Il dit n'en pouvoir supporter aucun. (Chapter 11)

When it becomes clear that the war is ending and that it is not in favour of the Germans, Mancelier becomes worried: 'sa comme martelait les couloirs et sa femme ne descendit plus au magasin. Il y avait eu quelques algèbres avec des clients qui individuellement nettement que la température avait changé' (Chapter 11). Eventually, Jo is running the bookshop almost entirely alone. When the Germans have left R. for good, a crowd of townsfolk arrive at the bookshop and Mancelier is physically attacked: 'La première gifle a cliqué comme un coup de 6,35' (Chapter 11). At this point, Jo steps in and saves Mancelier by telling the townsfolk that Ambroise knew he was harbouring, and thus protecting, a Jew. For Jo, this is sweet revenge against 'le vieux cor' (Chapter 11).

Key quotations

Je me retourne vers le vieux dont les yeux s'affolent. Je sais ce que tu penses va, j'entends encore toutes tes paroles: « les salauds de youidis », « la racaille youpine » [...].

En bien tu vois, t'en avais un chez toi de youpin, et un authentique encore, et le plus fort de tout, c'est que c'est un youpin qui va sauver ta peau. (Chapter 11)

Devoir sa peau à un Juif [...], c'est le genre de choses qu'il ne pouvait pas avaler. (Chapter 11)

Raoul is the son of Ambroise and Marcelle, 'fixé dans un quartier assez éloigné où il pratique le beau métier de clerc de notaire' (Chapter 11). He is also a follower of Pétain and has strong pro-German ideas.

Françoise 'la très belle Française aux belles joues' (Chapter 11) is the daughter of Ambroise and Marcelle and the sister of Raoul. She is 14 years old. Jo is madly in love with her, but the love is entirely one-sided.

ACTIVITÉ 16

- Quelle est l'importance de la famille Mancelier dans le roman?
- Quel est l'impact de Françoise Mancelier sur Jo?
- Comment expliquez-vous les actions de Jo quand les villageois attaquent Ambroise?

Écrivez une réponse d'environ 150 mots.

Les sauveurs inattendus

There are several characters in *Un sac de billes* to whom Joseph Joffo has, in the years since he completed the novel, referred as 'les sauveurs inattendus' (*Dialogue avec mes lecteurs*). These are the strangers whom Jo and Maurice meet on their travels and who offer very welcome and sometimes vital, but entirely unexpected, assistance.

La grand-mère lionnarde is the first of these strangers who offers kind words and a smiling face to Jo and Maurice when they come across her on the train to Dax: ' [...] elle a l'air gentille, elle ressemble aux grand-mères des illustrations de mon livre de lecture, tout y est [...] ' (Chapter 4). She offers them lionnarde to quench their thirst. She is the first person with whom the boys share their invented background. The last they see of her is when she is taken away by the Germans in Dax when her identity card does not seem to provide sufficient administrative proof.

Le comte de V. offers Jo and Maurice a lift in his horse-drawn carriage in exchange for the chance to tell them his views on French history (although the boys do not really listen to him). He saves them the long walk to Aire-sur-Adour. He is a man living out of his time, detached from the world and from the situation Jo and Maurice are in.

Jo describes him as having 'une distinction d'un autre âge, si je savais faire la révérence, je m'y essaierais' (Chapter 5) but he comes to their assistance when they need it, all the same.

The priest on the train to Dax saves Jo and Maurice by protecting them from the German police when the papers are being checked. They sit with him while he speaks pleasantly and jokes with the Germans. He simply tells them, 'Les enfants sont avec moi' (Chapter 4) and this suffices. Once they get off the train, he takes them to the station buffet. He gives the boys his address so that they can contact him if they need help again: 'Si un jour vous avez besoin de moi' (Chapter 4). When Maurice asks why he lied to save them, he replies:

Key quotation

– Je n'ai pas menti [...] vous étiez avec moi comme tous les enfants du monde le sont également. C'est même l'une des raisons pour lesquelles je suis prêtre, pour être avec eux. (Chapter 4)

Activité 17

Quel est le rôle joué par ces trois personnages secondaires? Est-ce que Jo et Maurice auraient pu continuer leur voyage sans eux? Justifiez votre réponse. Écrivez environ 150 mots.

Le curé from la Buffa

The priest (le curé) from la Buffa in Nice provides false baptism certificates for Maurice and Jo when they are arrested at the Excelsior Hotel: 'Ne t'inquiète pas, je vais te faire les certificats de communion que je vais te remettre tout de suite' (Chapter 9). He turns up at the hotel day after day for several days until he is finally admitted to speak to the Gestapo chief.

Key quotations

[...] Il était facile de comprendre, rien qu'à le voir, qu'il serait plus facile de changer le mont Blanc de place que d'essayer seulement d'emvisager que cet homme puisse dévier d'un millimètre de la tâche qu'il s'était fixée. (Chapter 9)
[...] le curé le plus têtu, le plus humoriste et le plus acharné à arracher des Juifs des griffes des Allemands qu'il y avait dans le département des Alpes-Maritimes. (Chapter 9)

He brings with him a letter of authentication from the archbishop, and even goes so far as to make a veiled threat that the Church in France may have to intervene at a higher level. This is finally enough to secure the release of Jo and Maurice. His motivation is never explained in the novel.

Activité 18

Que fait le curé de la Buffa pour aider Jo et Maurice? Quelle pourrait être sa motivation? Écrivez une réponse d'environ 150 mots.

The commandant of the transit camp in Pau

Colonel T. is the commandant of the transit camp in Pau where Monsieur and Madame Joffo are interned for a short time, until Henri manages to obtain their release. He is a hard man, as his sergeant is quick to point out.

Key quotation

– Il veut bien vous recevoir mais faites gaffe, il n'est pas à prendre avec des pincettes. Il est toujours un peu comme ça, mais aujourd'hui, c'est pire. (Chapter 6)

The camp commandant points out that Henri is, in fact, in danger himself.

Key quotation

– Henri Joffo, soyez très bref et n'oubliez pas qu'en entrant ici vous risquez votre liberté sans pour autant obtenir celle de vos parents. Vous n'êtes pas sans savoir que nous avons ordre de remettre tous les Juifs étrangers aux autorités d'occupation. (Chapter 6)

When Henri tells him the story that he has invented for his parents, the commandant wants proof that Monsieur Joffo has French nationality status (forfeited under Nazi legislation by Jews in France) and puts a telephone call through to the *Préfecture de Paris* so that he can confirm the details. Henri knows that these details do not exist but, nevertheless, the commandant seems satisfied with the information that he is given and he releases Henri's parents. Did the official in Paris lie? Did the official in Paris make up an answer because he couldn't find the papers? Had the papers in Paris not been updated?

When Jo hears the story from Henri, he has his own ideas: 'Peut-être que c'est le colonel' (Chapter 6). Did the camp commandant make his own decision to release Monsieur and Madame Joffo despite proof that they were Jews? And if so, why?



Colonel T., the commandant of the transit camp, from the graphic novel adaptation of *Un sac de billes*.

Upgrade

Tips for assessment

The motivation of many characters for helping the brothers does not always seem clear. If you need to consider this in your answer to an exam question, use the context of the novel and clues in the text to help you propose ideas that you can substantiate. For example, France was an occupied country: the anti-Semitic ideas were imposed by the Nazi regime and the pockets of resistance demonstrate that not everyone supported them.

Activité 19

On n'apprend pas les raisons exactes pour lesquelles le colonel libère Monsieur et Madame Joffo du camp de transit à Pau. À votre avis, pourquoi a-t-il fait ça? Écrivez une réponse d'environ 100 mots.

Upgrade

Tips for assessment

Quotations can be used to reinforce the points you are trying to make. Support the comments you make about characters in *Un sac de billes* with short quotations that you have memorised.

Activité 20

Choisissez un des personnages secondaires du roman. Racontez un événement clef du point de vue de ce personnage. Écrivez environ 150 mots.

Upgrade

Writing about characters

An understanding of the characters of *Un sac de billes* is essential. Exam questions often focus on specific characters or groups of characters and their role in the novel. Essay questions may expect you to focus on the development of one of the main characters in the novel. You will need to demonstrate a thorough knowledge and understanding of each character, their importance and contribution to the plot and the nature of their relationships with other characters. Consider the following points:

- What does each character say? How do they say it?
- What do they do? How do they do it? How do they react?
- What does the narrator (Jo) tell us about other characters?
- Why has each character been included in the novel? What is their role?

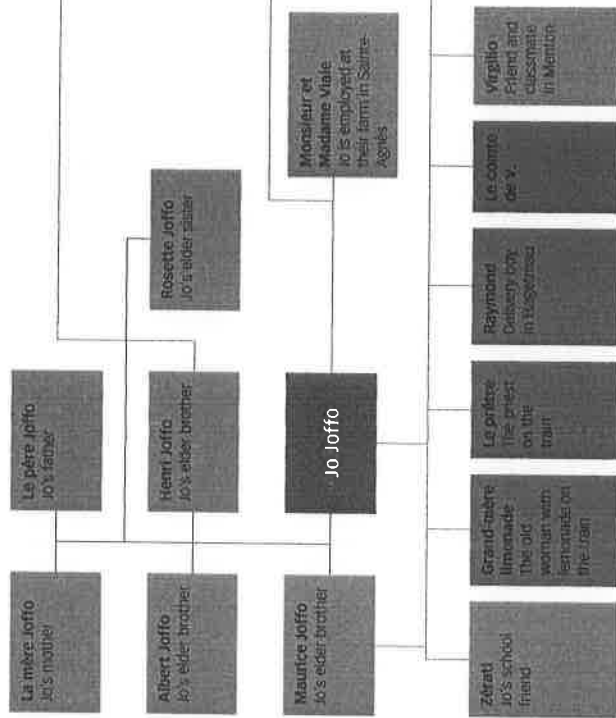
Vocabulary

les actes (m) de gentillesse	acts of kindness	l'entêtement (m)	stubbornness
aventureux(-euse)	adventurous	naïf/naïve	naive
le bonheur	happiness	optimiste	optimistic
le comportement	behaviour	les pensées (fpl)	thoughts
se comporter	to behave	le personnage principal	main character
le courage	courage	le personnage secondaire	secondary character
courageux(-euse)	brave, courageous	pessimiste	pessimistic
débrouillard(e)	crafty and resourceful	la reconnaissance	recognition,
la débrouillardise	ability to improvise and get oneself out of trouble	acknowledgement (also: gratitude)	
le durcissement	hardening of personality	reconnaisant(e)	grateful
l'effet (m)	effect	soupponner	to suspect
l'enfance (f)	childhood	la suspicion	suspicion

Useful phrases

Il/Elle se comporte comme/comme si...	He/She behaves like/as if ...
Parfois Il/elle...	At times he/she ...
Il/Elle se montre (m)capable de...	He/She proves to be (incapable of ...
On peut le/la considérer...	He/She can be considered ...
Il/Elle veut avant tout...	He/She wants more than anything ...
On suppose que...	We (pre)suppose that ...
Ses réactions sortent...	His/Her reactions are ...
On voit (souvent) qu'il est...	We (often) see that he ...
Il y a des moments où...	There are times when ...
En fin de compte...	When all is said and done ...
Au début de l'histoire...	At the start of the story ...
À la fin de l'histoire...	At the end of the story ...
On peut le/la caractériser comme...	He/She can be characterised as ...
Ses actions nous montrent que...	His/Her actions show us that ...
Ce personnage joue un rôle essentiel dans...	This character plays a vital role in ...

Character map



KEY

- Family relationship
- Characters linked through friendship or by events in the text
- Joffo family
- Mancelier family
- Porte de Cugnancourt, Paris
- Journey to Menton
- Menton/Sainte-Agnès
- Nice
- Excelsior Hotel
- Moisson Nouvelle
- Pau

