

Plot and Structure

Plot

Un sac de billes recounts the 'adventures' of Joseph Joffe and his brother Maurice, the two protagonists of the novel. As Jewish children living in Paris under German occupation, they are forced to flee the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi regime, to seek refuge in the south of France until the end of the war. Although it is a **fictional narrative**, the novel is closely based on the real-life experiences of the author between 1941 and 1944.

Paris, 1941-1942

Chapter 1

- Paris, Porte de Clignancourt (**XVIII^e arrondissement**), 1941. Joseph (Jo) is ten years old. His brother Maurice is 12. The two boys are playing a game of marbles. Realising that they are late, they hurry home to their father's barber shop in the rue de Clignancourt, where their older brothers Albert and Henri also work. Once their homework is done they go out into the street. They see two German **SS officers** heading towards the shop. The boys stand in front of the yellow sign in the window which reads 'Yiddish Gasseher' ('Jewish business') (**Chapter 1**). They laugh as the German soldiers enter the shop 'au milieu des clients juifs' (**Chapter 1**) to wait for a haircut.
- An innocent game of marbles played by two young boys leads us into the story and gives us insight into the relationship between Joseph and his brother Maurice.
 - Paris and the **XVIII^e arrondissement** are seen through Jo's ten-year-old eyes. However grim the physical reality might be, it is, to him, a constant source of adventure and fun.
 - The presence of the SS officers is an ominous reminder of the German occupation of Paris. However, at this point in the novel their presence in a Jewish barber's shop in the centre of the Jewish quarter in Paris is merely a source of amusement to Jo and Maurice, who do not fully understand its significance.

Key quotation

Dans le salon, dans le silence le plus intense que jamais sans doute salon de coiffure ait pu connaître, deux SS têtes de mort attendaient genoux joints au milieu des clients juifs de coiffer leurs nuques à mon père juif ou à mes frères juifs. Dehors se gondoient deux petits juifs. (**Chapter 1**)

PILOT AND STRUCTURE

protagonist *le/la protagoniste* the central character in a story
anti-Semitic antisemite prejudiced against the Jewish race

fictional narrative *un récit de fiction* a story told using the imagination

18^e arrondissement *XVIII^e arrondissement* a section of central Paris - Paris is divided up into 20 arrondissements. The lower the arrondissement number, the closer it is to the centre of Paris.

SS officers *les officiers SS* abbreviation of Schutzstaffel (protective squad/originally Hitler's personal bodyguards, later one of the most powerful and feared organisations in Nazi Germany). Its activities ranged from intelligence operations to running Nazi concentration camps.

Activité 1

Traduisez en anglais cette description du XVIII^e arrondissement de Paris en 1941.

Un Paris gris, avec les lumières des boutiques, les toits hauts et les bandes du ciel par-dessus, les rubans de trottoirs encombrés de poubelles à escalader, de porches pour s'y cacher et de sornettes, il y avait de tout, des condrigues jaillissantes, des voitures à chevaux, la fleuriste et les terrasses des cafés en été. Et tout cela à perte de vue, un dédale, une immensité de rues entrecroisées... (**Chapter 1**)



Footings of Paris

Activité 2

Relisez cet extrait et expliquez ce que Joffo adulte veut dire ici en contemplant son enfance. Écrivez un maximum de 120 mots.

« [...] c'était le temps où tous les écoliers étaient en noir, une enfance en grand deuil, c'était prémonitoire en 1941. »

(Chapter 1)

Chapter 2

That evening, following the incident of the two SS officers in the salon, *Le père Joffo* tells his sons the story of his own father Jacob Joffo, fleeing the **progroms** of Russia to escape to France with his family. He firmly believes that France is, and will remain, a safe haven for all 'fuyards' (fugitives) (Chapter 2).

- The story of Jacob Joffo provides a parallel and foreshadows the forthcoming flight of Jo and his brother.
- The confidence of Jo's father and his belief that he and his family are safe in France are contrasted sharply with the tears and anxiety of Jo's mother.

progrom /*progrom* (n) violent attacks of anti-semitism against the Jews, originally carried out in Russia

Key quotation

- Tu sais ce que ça veut dire, ces mots-là?

- J'ai su vite lire, à cinq ans je lui annonçais les trois mots.

- C'est ça, Joseph, c'est ça. Et tant qu'ils sont écrits là haut, ça veut dire qu'on est tranquilles ici.

(Chapter 2)



Liberté - Égalité - Fraternité

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Activité 3

Faites des recherches sur les lois raciales de Hitler pendant les années 30 et 40. Écrivez une explication de 150 mots maximum sur ce qui s'est passé en Allemagne et dans plusieurs autres pays européens.

Chapter 3

All French Jews must now wear the yellow star badge on their outer garments. At school Jo's badge is admired by his friend Zérali but other boys bully Jo, taunting him with the words of the Nazi anti-Semitic **propaganda**. In the geography class the teacher ignores Jo completely, even when he tries to attract punishment by dropping his slate. At break the taunts continue and Jo and Maurice are both beaten up to the cries of 'youpini youpini youpini' (a derogatory term for a Jew) (Chapter 3). That afternoon their parents decide that the boys will no longer go to school. Many of the residents of the **quartier** have moved out. Henri and Albert have also disappeared without an explanation.

- That night their father tells them of his own history as a 'fuyard' (Chapter 2), escaping alone from Russia at the age of seven. The boys realise that it is now their turn. They will need to travel alone to meet up with their older brothers, who are now in Menton near the Italian border in the 'zone libre' (Chapter 3). The boys will leave that night. Their mother and father will join them later.
- Jo is completely dumbfounded by his treatment at school. He doesn't understand what is happening, or what it means to be Jewish. He cannot comprehend why he is suddenly different from his classmates.
- Jo exchanges his *étoile jaune* with Zérali for *un sac de billes*. This is the first of the many business deals he will make during his adventures.
- *Le père Joffo's* own story of his escape from Russia provides another parallel with the imminent flight of his sons to the French free zone.

propaganda /*propagande* (n) messages and information delivered in the press, by radio, on posters and nowadays by television; intended to promote (or damage) the views of a particular political organisation, movement or government

Key quotations

Je me dévends. Au fond, on se séparait mais il était évident que nous nous retrouverions après la guerre qui ne durerait pas toujours.

(Chapter 3)

Dans la nuit sans lumière, dans les rues désertes à l'heure où le couvre-feu allait bientôt sonner, nous disparûmes dans les ténèbres. C'en était fait de l'enfance.

(Chapter 3)

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Activité 4

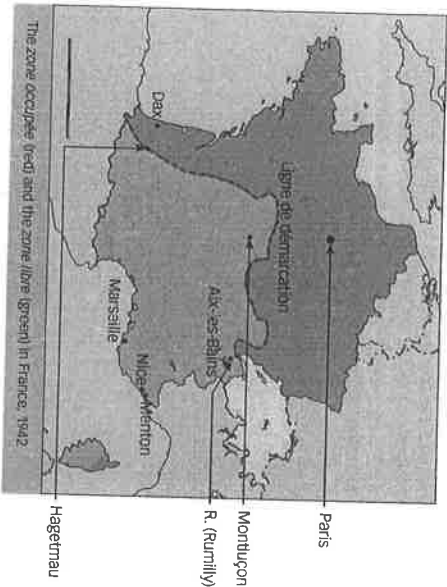
Sans regarder le texte du roman, recopiez cette citation et remplissez les blancs en mettant le verbe entre parenthèses à l'imparfait.

Rue de Clignancourt, la boutique ' _____ (être) fermée. Beaucoup de nos amis étaient partis depuis quelque temps. Papa et maman _____ (parler) entre eux et le ' _____ (sur/prendre) des noms au milieu de leurs chuchotements, c' _____ (être) ceux des habitués, ceux qui ' _____ (venir) au salon, que l'on ' _____ (retrouver) le soir pour le café, ils étaient presque tous partis. Il y ' _____ (avoir) d'autres mots qui ' _____ (venir) souvent. Ausweis, Kommandantur, ligne de démarcation... (Chapter 3)

Ausweis (actually: Ausweis) ID card

Kommandantur German command headquarters

demarcation line la ligne de démarcation the boundary in France between the German-occupied zone and the free zone during World War II



The zone occupée (red) and the zone libre (green) in France, 1942

Tips for assessment

It is worth reading the opening chapters of a novel very carefully since they often introduce important characters, relationships and themes. Referring to these first few chapters and what they reveal can be useful in answers to some essay questions.



Paris-Dax-Hegetrau-Aire-sur-l'Adour, 1942

Chapter 4

Jo and Maurice leave Paris from the gare d'Austerlitz in an overcrowded train heading for Dax. They befriend an old woman on the train who offers them lemonade, but despite her friendliness they remain wary. Joseph falls asleep. He wakes up as the train arrives in Dax and is surprised to see that many passengers have already left the train. German police come aboard. Jo and Maurice take refuge in a compartment where a priest is sitting. They see passengers who have attempted to make a run for it being chased and beaten. Jo tells the priest they have no travel documents. He watches as the old lady who gave them lemonade is taken off the train by the Germans. When the Germans approach the priest, he explains that Joseph and Maurice are with him. The Germans appear to be satisfied and leave. The priest takes the boys to the station buffet for breakfast. Afterwards he gives them a piece of paper on which he has written his address in case they need help in the future.

- On the train to Dax, Joseph quickly learns to think on his feet and make up a credible background story for himself and Maurice. He realises for the first time how much he will have to rely on his wits from now on.
- The relentlessness of Jewish persecution by the Nazis is highlighted here by the checking of travel documents of all passengers heading south.

Key quotation

Je sens très vite qu'il faudra désormais se méfier de l'univers entier, même cette gentille grand-mère pour vivre de école, elle ne doit rien savoir, absolument rien. (Chapter 4)

Activité 5

Relisez la réponse du prêtre (Je n'ai pas menti...). Chapitre 4) quand Maurice lui dit qu'il a menti pour sauver les garçons. Expliquez la réponse.

Chapter 5

The boys arrive in Hagettau, from where they hope to cross the demarcation line into the unoccupied zone. They go to the local café for something to eat. It is full of people. There are more than a hundred other customers, all refugees like Maurice and Jo.

Back outside the boys meet Raymond, a delivery boy, who offers to get them across the line for only 500 francs if they do his afternoon deliveries for him. That night, with Raymond at the head, the boys cross the line, along with dozens of others attempting the same thing. Jo is astonished at how easy it is and feels a little cheated by the experience.

A local farmer provides the boys with blankets and offers them his shed to sleep. In Jo wakes up to find Maurice gone and the shed full of more people. He is initially worried until he finds a note from Maurice, telling him he will be back. Jo goes back to sleep. At dawn Maurice has returned, 20,000 francs richer for having brought another 40 people across the line.

The boys continue their journey. They need to get to the closest railway station to take the train to Marseille. They will have to walk to Aire-sur-l'Adour, some 20 kilometres away. Once again they are in luck and they are offered a lift by the Comte de V. in his horse-drawn carriage.

- At several points in their journey Jo and Maurice receive help, unasked for, from total strangers. This will be a recurring feature of their travels.
- Maurice displays his quick thinking by claiming to be a *Passseur* in Hagettau so that he can increase the dwindling funds that he and his brother have left. This *entrepreneurial* skill contributes to the survival of the brothers throughout the novel.

smugler *le passeur* a person who illegally transports people or goods
entrepreneurial *entreprénariat* taking initiative and incurring risk in the hope of profit

Key quotations

Ce sont donc des gens comme nous, en fuite, des juifs, bien sûr et ils attendent pour passer la frontière. Mais qu'attendent-ils? C'est peut-être plus difficile que nous le supposons.

(Chapter 5)

Et c'est ainsi que Maurice et moi, nés à la porte de Clignancourt, Paris XVIII^e, arrivâmes sur la place de la gare d'Aire-sur-l'Adour dans une calèche du siècle dernier avec pour cocher le comte de V.

(Chapter 5)

Activité 6

Établissez une chronologie où vous noterez chaque étape du voyage de Jo et Maurice, avec les détails importants. Complétez le diagramme au fur et à mesure de votre lecture. Suivez l'exemple ci-dessous.

Paris 1941/1942	→	Paris-Dax 1942	→	Dax-Hagettau 1942	→	etc.
• Jo et Maurice chez eux		• Le début du voyage		• La ligne de démarcation		
• Les SS au salon		• 'Grand-mère limonade'		• Maurice le passeur		
• Le jour de l'étoile jaune		• Le prêtre dans le train: 'Les enfants sont avec moi'				

Marseille-Cannes-Menton/Sainte-Agnès, 1942

Chapter 6

Jo and Maurice reach Marseille and see the sea for the first time in their lives.

Crossing the port on a ferry they end up in the red-light district and are teased by prostitutes before returning to a cinema, where they sit and watch *Les Aventures du baron de Minderhausen* three times in a row.

Back at the railway station, returning from the toilers, Jo has to pretend to two policemen (gendarmes) who stop to question him that he is travelling with his father, providing them with a false address. Maurice, sensing that something is wrong, mingles with other passengers, trying not to be seen. Jo escapes the gendarmes and, checking up with Maurice, he learns that all passengers are having their identities checked. A large number of policemen arrive and begin asking for papers as the arrival of the train is announced. The crowd rushes for the platform and the boys find that they are in luck because the guards have forgotten to lock the train doors. They climb aboard and the train pulls out of Marseille.

Jo and Maurice will spend the next four months with their older brothers in Menton, which is occupied by the Italians. They find jobs: Maurice at the local bakery and Jo with Monsieur and Madame Viale, who have a farm in the mountains above Sainte-Agnès. Jo receives bad news: their parents have been arrested near Pau, having fled Paris to escape the round-ups of Jews, and are currently being held in a transit camp.

transit camp *le camp de transit* a prison camp, where Jewish prisoners in particular were held before transportation to concentration (extermination) camps in Germany

While Henri goes to Pau and tries to arrange for their parents to be released, Jo and Maurice are registered to attend the local school. At school the boys quickly re-establish their ability to set up deals which will benefit them. Jo exchanges marbles for vitamin pills, knowing that he will later win the marbles back in the playground during break-times. Henri eventually returns with good news. Their parents are free and are now in Nice, where their sons will soon be able to join them. A few weeks later two gendarmes arrive at Albert and Henri's house. The two older boys have been summoned as part of the *Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO)* and will be deported to Germany. A speedy decision is reached. They will all leave for Nice as soon as they can.

- Although the author gives details which clearly identify the film that the boys watch in Marseille in 1942, *Les Aventures du baron de Munchausen* was not released until March 1943. Here is evidence that the story Joffo relates to the reader is a blurring of fact and fiction.
- When Henri travels to Pau to arrange the release of his father and mother, he displays the same trait of cunning resourcefulness that is shared by his younger brothers, as well as the same ability to construct a relatively plausible background story.
- We are never told the real motives behind the decision of the commandant of the transit camp in Pau to release Monsieur and Madame Joffo. In Jo's interpretation of events, we are offered for the first time a view of the German occupying forces which suggests that some are sympathetic towards the plight of the Jews.

compulsory work service in Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO) the forced enlistment and deportation of thousands of French workers to Nazi Germany, where they were to provide labour for the German war effort.



Young men being alerted up for the STO in Vichy, 1943

Key quotations

Avec plus d'une demi-heure de retard, le train s'est ébranlé et nous avons poussé un énorme soupir de soulagement, c'était la dernière étape.

(Chapter 6)

...] brusquement, je replongerais dans la réalité et cela me donnait subitement un goût amer dans la bouche.

(Chapter 6)

Activité 7

Imaginez que vous êtes Maurice. Décrivez et commentez (en 100 mots maximum) votre journée à Marseille, à partir du moment où vous voyez la mer pour la première fois le matin jusqu'à votre retour à la gare Saint-Charles le soir.

Activité 8

Traduisez en anglais cette citation qui décrit le départ de Jo de la maison des Viale.

“ Je me souviens m'être retourné vers la ferme perdue au creux de la vallée, cernée de montagnes, cette ferme où une vie s'était construite, heureuse au fond [...] Cela m'aurait causé une douleur profonde si, en cet instant, j'avais su que je ne reviendrais jamais à la maison des Viale et que je ne devais plus les revoir. ”

Nice, 1942-1943

Chapter 7

Nice, August 1942. Jo and Maurice run a thriving **black-market** trade with the Italian soldiers who are occupying the city. They have struck up a particular friendship with Marcello, one of the soldiers. Henri and Albert are doing well, cutting the hair of both men and women, and have become well known for their skills as 'les frères Joffro' (Chapter 6). Their parents have also settled quite comfortably into their new life in Nice. September arrives and the boys attend the local school. From the BBC, news on **Radio Londres**, the family learns of the **Allied** landings in Africa, which coincide with Madame Joffro's birthday in November. From that point on, they plot the movements of the armies on a map. In the following July, just before the end of the school year, they hear of the Allied landings in Sicily.

That summer, many of the Italian occupying forces leave Nice; many soldiers have actually **deserted**. When, in September 1943, the Italians sign an **armistice** with the Americans, there are few Italians left in Nice at all.

On 10 September, divisions of German soldiers arrive to replace the Italians as an occupying force, along with officers of the SS and the **Gestapo**.

- The Joffro family spend a year in Nice, safe from persecution by the Nazi regime.
- The author provides a marked contrast in this chapter in his descriptions of the easy life the Joffro family seems to be leading, with the realities of the war, particularly on the Eastern Front.

black market le marché noir: the system of buying, selling or exchanging goods illegally, especially in violation of controls and rationing

Allies (les Alliés, m/pl): the group of countries (including Britain and the Commonwealth, the USA, China and the Soviet Union) who fought against Germany and its allies in World War II

to **desert** (deserteur) to leave the armed forces illegally

armistice l'armistice (m): an agreement by opposing sides in a war, to cease fighting

Gestapo (le Gestapo): the secret state police of Nazi Germany and German-occupied Europe

Key quotations

Un matin, Nice se réveille sans occupants. Pourtant, les rues étaient mortes, les visages inquiets, les passants rasaient les murs. (Chapter 7)

La deuxième occupation était commencée. Nous savions tous qu'elle n'aurait rien à voir avec la précédente [...]. (Chapter 7)

Radio Londres

Radio Londres was established in June 1940 and broadcast until 1944. It was the voice of the Free French Forces (the French military forces which continued to fight against the Germans during the occupation) and broadcast up to five hours a day. The first broadcast was a call to the French to stand up against the Germans, given by **Charles de Gaulle**, who led the Free French Forces. His speech is considered to be the origin of the French Resistance.

Charles de Gaulle an important member of the French government until 1940, when he opposed the French armistice (agreement to stop fighting) with the Germans, which led to the German occupation of France (see page 37)

Resistance la résistance: the underground organisation which was formed by ordinary citizens to fight against enemy occupation

Activité 9

Utilisez un dictionnaire, si nécessaire, pour trouver le sens le plus approprié en anglais de ces mots et expressions dans le Chapitre 7.

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| a) la patrie | b) le trafic | c) les gros titres |
| d) la relève de la garde | e) une combine | f) les échanges |
| g) la croix gammée | h) un militaire | i) la caserne |
| j) le débarquement | | |

Goffe-Juan (Moisson Nouvelle), 1943

Chapter 8

The Nazis now occupy Nice. The Gestapo have taken over the Excelsior Hotel. Every Friday trainloads of Jews, who have been rounded up and **interned**, are sent by special rail convoy to transit camps. The Joffro family is no longer safe.

Henri and Albert head for Aix-les-Bains in Savoie, some 500 km away. Maurice and Jo leave for Goffe-Juan, approximately 20 km from Nice, and join Moisson Nouvelle, a **paramilitary** youth camp.

to be **interned** être interné(e): to be imprisoned, often for military or political reasons

paramilitary paramilitaire: organised similarly to a military force

The director of Moïsson Nouvelle is Monsieur Subinagui, who seems to be fully aware of Jo and Maurice's plight. He arranges for the boys to work in the kitchens at Moïsson Nouvelle. They work alongside Ange Testi, a refugee from Algiers who is also likely to be Jewish, although he does not admit it, and Jean Masso from Grasse. The boys get regular news of the progress of the war from visitors to the camp. They learn that anyone suspected of being Jewish is now being deported to the transit camps. During their stay at Moïsson Nouvelle, Jo and Maurice decide on a 'backstory' for themselves in the event that they are caught by the Germans. They will embroider the truth with fiction by adding details from their own lives, along with details from the life of their friend Ange. Their planning proves to be timely.

One day, Subinagui's assistant Ferdinand offers to take Jo and Maurice back into Nice. In Nice, however, all three of them are captured when Ferdinand, who is also a Jew, calls at a house which had been a centre for the Resistance, and from where he had hoped to obtain papers which would allow him to escape the Germans. They are taken to the Gestapo headquarters at the Excelsior Hotel.

- Once they are working in the kitchens at Moïsson Nouvelle, it is not long before Jo and Maurice are once more trafficking goods on the black market.
- Subinagui represents another of those adults who, throughout the novel, are prepared to assist Jo and Maurice for no personal gain.

Key quotations

«...! Le Gestapo s'est installée depuis trois jours à l'hôtel Excelsior [...] Le kommandantur se trouve place Masséna et des rafles ont eu lieu. Il y a des arrestations nombreuses de Juifs opérées sur dénonciation, mais les quadrillages par quartier ne vont pas tarder. (Chapter 8)

« Votre papa m'a parlé de vous, j'ai accepté de vous prendre bien que vous n'ayez pas l'âge requis, mais vous faites assez grand l'un et l'autre. Je crois qu'ici, vous serez bien, et... en sûreté. (Chapter 8)

Activité 10

Relisez la dernière partie de Chapitre 8 (« Et, les jours, vous venez avec moi? [...] En face de moi, c'est l'hôtel Excelsior. Le siège de la Gestapo n'opère). Racontez du point de vue de Ferdinand les événements de la journée de votre arrestation à Nice avec les frères Jo et Maurice jusqu'à votre arrivée devant l'hôtel Excelsior. Écrivez un maximum de 150 mots.

Nice (Hôtel Excelsior), 1943 Chapter 9

On 10 September 1943, SS **Hauptsturmführer** Anis Brunner arrived in Nice. Brunner's task was to oversee the 'final solution' of the 'Jewish problem' in the region (their extermination). He established his headquarters at the Excelsior Hotel. In the lobby of the Excelsior Hotel, while they wait to be questioned, Jo and Maurice witness people being boarded onto lorries which will take them to transit camps. Jo is struck by both the dignity of other prisoners, particularly an old Jewish man, and the ordinariness of the SS guards.

Joseph, Maurice and Ferdinand are taken upstairs to be interviewed. Ferdinand crumbles once the interrogation starts and the SS officer slaps him about the face. He admits that he is Jewish and is taken away. When it is the turn of Jo and his brother, Maurice takes the lead and offers the story that the boys have concocted about being from Algiers. The SS officer tells them they will need to be medically examined to see whether or not they are **circumcised**. The boys realise that they might be in trouble.

In the medical examination room, despite the fact that the boys are indeed circumcised, they both insist that they are not Jewish and that they were circumcised for medical reasons. The doctor tells them he is called Rosen and that he is a Jew so they can confide in him, but they do not. The doctor can only tell the SS officer that the circumcision 'ist chirurgische gemacht' (Chapter 9) (has been done for medical reasons). Jo and Maurice are taken back downstairs.

The boys are interrogated again for a day, but separately. Jo is fully aware that the SS are hoping to catch them out. Six days later, their fate undecided, Jo and Maurice are still at the Excelsior Hotel. They are now working in the kitchens. Jo is becoming increasingly unwell with constant headaches.

In the hotel lobby the boys see Jean Masso, who tells them that Moïsson Nouvelle was raided, although Subinagui had already sent away many of the Jewish refugees. As they leave him, Jo is unaware that he will never see his friend again.

Jo becomes more seriously ill. He is fed by Maurice but finds it hard to keep his food down and is diagnosed with the onset of meningitis. While he is ill he is looked after by a pretty young girl, Mademoiselle Hauser. As she starts to recover he asks her why she does not wear a nurse's uniform and she explains that she is not a nurse, and adds, 'Je suis juive' (Chapter 9). Jo would very much like to tell her that he too is Jewish, but he just kisses her instead.

Hauptsturmführer a rank of soldier in the SS, equivalent to a captain
circumcised *circumcisé* (a male) who has had his foreskin cut off in infancy, as a religious, the (especially in Judaism or Islam) or as a medical practice

The interrogations begin again. Subiragui has corroborated their story, but the boys now need to provide proof that they are not Jewish, by obtaining their communion certificates from the church where they received their first Catholic communion. Maurice is given 48 hours to bring back the certificates. Maurice returns with the certificates, signed by the priest from la Buña. The interrogator refuses to accept that they are genuine and says that he will require them to be checked.

Three days later the priest from la Buña comes to the Excelsior Hotel. He explains that he is prepared to come back every day, 'de façon à ne pas laisser les services administratifs nazis commettre une lourde erreur dont pâtiraient deux enfants' (Chapter 9). Days later, he is eventually seen and brings with him a supporting letter from the archbishop. Jo and Maurice are released.

They return to Moisson Nouvelle with Monsieur Subiragui but the respite will be short-lived. Two weeks later they are to set off on their travels again.

- This chapter is perhaps the bleakest and most tense chapter of the whole novel. Jo and Maurice, as prisoners of the Gestapo, experience the Holocaust first-hand.
- During their initial interrogation, the boys stick to their story and Maurice demonstrates his bravery and confidence as he adds convincing details to their story.
- Jo wonders why Doctor Rosen finally went along with Maurice and him. We are left in the dark about the doctor's real motivation, just as we are about the commandant of the internment camp in Pau. This is a technique used several times by Joffo. It raises the idea that, even in horrific circumstances, there is some intrinsic good in some people.
- Mademoiselle Hauser is one more friend Joseph will never see again. When Joffo is about to write 'Je ne la revais jamais' (Chapter 9), he points out how acutely aware he is of how many times already he has used similar words.
- The boys have an opportunity in the garden to try to escape, but realise it is a trap. They demonstrate the importance of courage in sticking to their plan.

Key quotations

Nos garde gardes sont toujours là. Celui qui m'a frappé fume. Je le regarde à la décrochée. C'est fou ce qu'il a la tête de tout le monde, pas du tout une gueule de brute, alors pourquoi?

(Chapter 9)

Je sais qu'ils vont comparer avec la déposition de Maurice, mais là, peu de chances qu'ils nous coincent.

(Chapter 9)

Activité 11

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

À sept heures ce matin, on ¹ nous ² _____, il ³ _____ que nous ⁴ _____ aux cuisines. Quand ils en ⁵ _____ assez de nous faire ⁶ _____ ils nous ⁷ _____ je le sens. Ce que je ⁸ _____ également, c' _____ que le moral s'en ⁹ _____, c'est dû à une sorte de névralgie qui me ¹⁰ _____ j' _____ une migraine presque constante depuis le dernier interrogatoire.

(Chapter 9)

travailler	est venu	tracasse	descendions	réveiller	auront
faut	tueront	sens	và	est	ai

Activité 12

Dressez une liste de toutes les personnes qui ont aidé les frères Joffo jusqu'à ce point dans le roman. Pour chaque personne, indiquez la nature de l'aide qui a été offerte.

Goffe-Juan-Montignon/Almay-le-Veill, 1943

Chapter 10

Subiragui tells Jo and Maurice that their father has been arrested and taken to the Excelsior Hotel. The brothers are to make their way to Montignon and the village where their sister Rosette is expecting them. As they travel north by train from Cannes, the weather gets increasingly colder. The boys realise that they will have to buy warmer clothes.

In Montignon they take refuge in a clothing shop but there are no coats for them to buy. The best the shopkeeper can offer them is a couple of scarves in imitation wool. She also offers them a bed for the night, since the only other accommodation in town is not only likely to be unheated but has been requisitioned by either the Germans or the *Milice*.

The boys finally arrive in the hamlet of Almay-le-Veill, where Rosette and her husband Paul live in a house near the church. Rosette tells them they cannot stay in Almay-le-Veill and that they will need to travel to Aix-les-Bains, where Henri and Albert are. Jo no longer seems to care that his flight seems never-ending.

Milice is *Milice*, a French voluntary paramilitary organisation, established in January 1943 to help fight against the Resistance.

- Quick thinking as ever: when the boys see the interpreter from the Excelsior Hotel at the railway station in Cannes, they provide details of their journey that the man in the ticket office has just given them and pretend they are traveling to Roanne. Fortunately for them, the interpreter has been on leave and is unaware of *le père Joffo's* arrest.
- The lack of stock and scarcity of goods in the clothes shop in Montluçon shows just how difficult life has become in France due to the war and the occupation.
 - The shopkeeper is yet another stranger who offers Jo and Maurice assistance in their plight.
 - The villagers, who live in constant fear, are typical of many of the French during the years under German occupation, partly after the *zone libre* was reclassified as the *zone sud*.

Key quotations

— Ce n'est pas tout, votre père avait ses papiers sur lui, à son nom. Les Allemands ne vont donc pas tarder à faire le rapprochement avec vous, ils vont donc venir vous chercher. Il n'y a pas une minute à perdre. Forcez. (Chapter 10)

Je ne tiens au fond peut-être plus guère à la vie, seulement la machine est lancée, le jeu continue, il est de règle que le glibier coure toujours devant le chasseur et je me sens encore du souffle, je ferai tout pour qu'il s'alerte pas le plaisir de m'avoir. (Chapter 10)

Activité 13

- La vie en France sous l'occupation était pleine de dangers, même pour les Français non-juifs, surtout en 1943-1944. Pourquoi? Relisez ce chapitre et faites une liste expliquant de ces dangers. Écrivez un maximum de 100 mots.
- Pourquoi est-ce que Rosette et les autres villageois ont si peur? Expliquez ce qui s'est passé récemment. Écrivez un maximum de 150 mots.
- Qui est *Matthe Rosenberg*? Quelle est son histoire? Répondez à ces questions en écrivant un maximum de 100 mots.

The town of R. in Haute-Savoie, 1943-1944, and the return to Paris, 1944

Chapter 11

It is the end of 1943. Jo falsifies ration tickets to make a little extra money and has become well known in the small town of R, where he now lives with the Mancelier-family above their book and stationery shop. He works as a delivery boy. Maurice has a live-in job at the local hotel.

22

Ambrose Mancelier is a **pétainiste** who despises the Jews, and is completely unaware that he has employed one. His son Raoul shares the same, if not more extreme, views. François Mancelier, his daughter, is 14 years old. Jo is smitten by her. This love is entirely one-sided: Jo does not even know whether or not François is aware of how he feels for her.

From Maurice, Jo learns of the progress of the war and that the Germans seem to be in retreat. The boys would both like to join the **maquis**, who have a hideout in the mountains nearby, but they are far too young to do so. It is Christmas 1943. Jo celebrates alone, with leftover food that Maurice has sent him from the hotel where Germans and **collaborators** are celebrating.

6 June 1944 arrives. It is the day of the Allied landings in Normandy and it is a dark day for Mancelier. The war is drawing to a close. Mancelier cannot avoid the inevitable repercussions of his collaboration with the occupying German forces. He has sent his daughter to live with her aunt. He and his wife no longer leave the house. Someone smashes the window of their kitchen. The Germans leave the village. Mancelier is attacked in his own home. Jo jumps to his defence and, in an act of compassion, saves him from the villagers by claiming that Mancelier knew, despite being a collaborator, that he was harbouring a Jew and has thereby saved Jo's life. Instead of killing Mancelier, the villagers take him to prison. Just Mancelier knowing that he has had a Jew living under his roof all this time is revenge enough for Jo: 'c'est le genre de choses qu'il ne pouvait pas avaler' (Chapter 11).



Philippe Pétain was the French head of state and collaborated with the Germans by making peace with them.

pétainiste follower of Marshal Pétain and his pro-German policies
maquis the irregular bands of guerrilla resistance fighters (irregulars), often men who had escaped into the mountains to avoid conscription into the STO
collaborator *le/la collaborateur/-trice* (collab) someone who cooperates with the enemy during occupation

Paris is liberated. Delayed as he tries to make his way to the railway station, Jo is saved by Monsieur Jean, who remembers him from the small service he gave to the Resistance. He can finally go home.

In Paris, the street where Jo lives has not changed, although *Méme Epstein* is no longer there and the Goldenberg restaurant has closed down. At the barber's shop, Henri and Albert are at work. Jo's mother is also there. Monsieur Joffo, one more victim of Hitler's Holocaust, is not. However, Jo's travels are over at last.

23

- While Jo is living with the Mancelier family and forging ration tickets, Maurice is as resourceful as ever, stealing from the hotel kitchens and doing very well on the black market. He shows the same ability to turn things to his advantage in his rise with the 'cognac' he exchanges for fuel, so that he can negotiate a seat in the car which will take him back to Paris.
- Jo gets to make a small contribution to the efforts of the French Resistance in this chapter, by taking a secret message from the hotel guest who is arrested by the *Milice* and delivering it to Monsieur Jean at the garage behind the Cheval Blanc café.
- Once the Germans have left, Joffo describes the brutal reprisals for collaboration with the enemy: the girls from the town whose heads have been shaved and who have had swastikas painted on their faces, and the rumour of the shooting in the woods of the neighbour's son who had joined the *Milice*.
- Jo writes of his return to Paris that 'Trois ans plus tôt, j'ai pris le métro par un beau soir pour la gare d'Austerlitz [...]'. (*Chapter 11*). Comparing the novel's own internal chronology with historical fact, this must be an approximation. We know that the boys leave Paris shortly after the Nazi regime in France ordered all Jews to wear the yellow star (May, 1942). Jo returns shortly after the liberation of Paris (August, 1944), two years later.
- Some time after the publication of the novel Joffo revealed that the mountain town of R. was actually the town of Rumilly in Haute-Savoie. He had decided when he wrote the novel that he would protect the inhabitants of the town, who were still alive, by not revealing the actual names of the town where he spent the last year of the war.

Key quotations

Lorsque je pense aujourd'hui à ces années, c'est peut-être ce visage de petite fille qui surgit bien avant autre chose, bien avant les faces des SS, des gens de l'Excelsior, avant même le visage de papa. Si pendant ce temps de fuite je n'avais pas eu mon histoire d'amour, il aurait manqué quelque chose au tableau.

(*Chapter 11*)

Je me vois dans la vitrine avec ma musette.
C'est vrai, j'ai grandi.

(*Chapter 11*)

Activité 14

Ecrivez environ 150 mots pour expliquer pourquoi, à votre avis, Jo défend Monsieur Mancelier.



At 3.30 p.m. on 25 August 1944, the German garrison in Paris, surrendered and Charles de Gaulle made a triumphant return to the city at the head of the army. This photo shows a celebratory parade on the Champs-Élysées.

Paris, 1973

Épilogue

Jo is now 42 years old. He reflects upon why he wrote this book and comes to the conclusion that the story came out quite naturally, almost as if 'cela m'était peut-être nécessaire'. As he watches his son sleeping, he is filled with joy that he will never have to tell him to flee as his own father once told him. He wonders if the world is now a better place. He tells us that, as Einstein pointed out, potential suffering and potential joy are only separated by brief seconds. He wishes only for one thing: that his son will never have to experience the suffering and fear that he himself once did. Surely it won't happen again ...

Key quotation

Les musettes sont au grenier, elles y resteront toujours.
Peut-être ...

(*Épilogue*)

Activité 15

Considérez les dernières pages du roman (*Épilogue*). Qu'est-ce que ces pages ajoutent au roman? À votre avis est-ce que cet épilogue est nécessaire? Écrivez une réponse de 100 mots maximum.

Structure

Time frame

The events of *Un sac de billes* take place over three years, starting from when Jo is ten years old and his brother Maurice is 12 years old. Discounting the epilogue (which is set almost 30 years later, in 1973), the story ends when Jo is 13. The events are related **semi-autobiographically**, from the standpoint of the adult Joseph Joffo, aged 42. The novel has a **linear structure** which is organised chronologically and follows the flight of the two Joffo boys from Paris to Menton in 1942, their relocation to Nice (1942–1943), their continued flight to Aix-les-Bains and the town of R, in the winter of 1943, and their eventual return to Paris after the surrender by the Germans in 1944.

Activité 16

Trouvez une carte de France. Marquez sur cette carte les voyages de Jo entre 1942 et 1944. Attention! Rappelez-vous que Jo et Maurice ont voyagé par le train, en car et à pied.

How the structure of *Un sac de billes* works

Each stage of the flight of Jo and Maurice, and indeed the flight of the other Joffo family members, is the result of a reaction to historical events and the increasing danger of **anti-Semitic persecution**. The novel is constructed around a series of **causes and effects**. At the beginning of the novel, Joffo establishes the social environment in which Jo lives and shows how it is all too suddenly thrown into turmoil as world events are thrust upon him and his family: events which literally threaten to destroy them all. The subsequent stages of Jo's story represent the reactions of himself, his brother Maurice and the other Joffo family members to these events which are totally beyond their control. These events become, for the most part, a source of progressively increasing fear, confusion and despair. However, on occasion they also provide a source of boyish adventure and fun.

semi-autobiographically quand l'auteur raconte une histoire qui combine des éléments autobiographiques et fictionnels

linear structure la structure linéaire: une structure qui relate des événements dans l'ordre dans lequel ils se sont produits

anti-Semitic persecution la persécution antisémite: persécution de la part de cause and effect: la cause et l'effet: the way actions and events cause other actions

The **narrator** of the story is Joseph (Jo). His account is related in **first-person narrative** on two levels. The main narrator is the adult Joseph Joffo, aged 42, looking back to the events of his childhood, but for the most part he uses the voice of his ten-year-old self to describe the events.

narrator le narrateur: the person who is telling the story

first-person narrative le récit à la première personne: a story told from the perspective of a narrator speaking directly about himself or herself, using the pronoun 'I' / 'je'



Jo and Maurice outside the barber shop, from the 2017 film adaptation of *Un sac de billes*. In the novel, the adult Joffo often recalls the events of the German occupation with a light-hearted tone.

Tips for assessment

You need to consider how *Un sac de billes* is structured and, particularly, what the story gains from this structure, which shows what happened from a child's perspective but with the added benefit of the hindsight of an adult.

Appréhender

Key quotation

C'est au travers de mes souvenirs d'enfant de dix ans que j'ai raconté mon aventure des temps de l'Occupation.

Trente ans ont passé. La mémoire comme l'oubli peuvent métamorphoser d'innombrables détails. Mais l'essentiel est là, dans son authenticité, sa tendresse, sa trépidante et l'angoisse vécue. (Prologue)

Activité 17

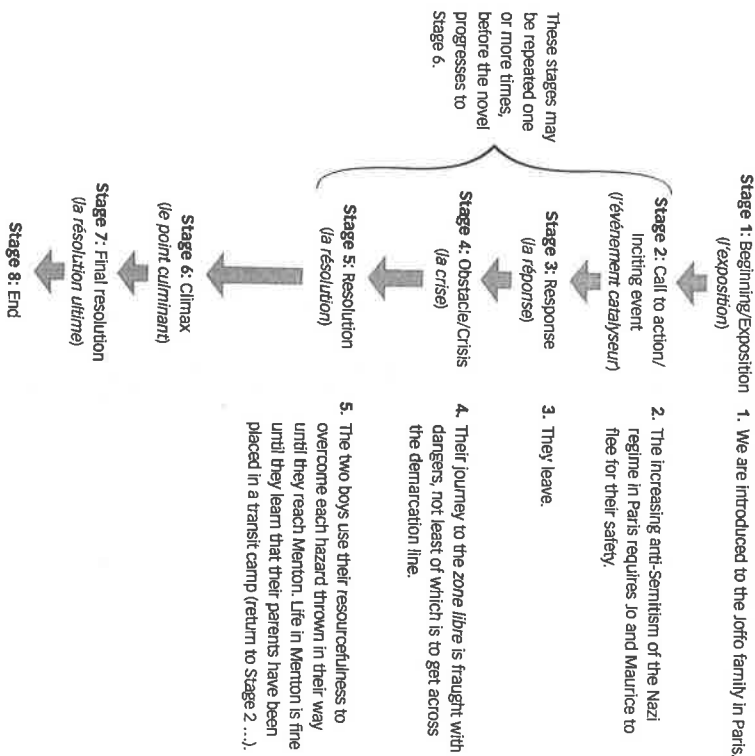
Considérez le fait que les événements du roman nous sont racontés du point de vue du jeune Jo Joffo.

- Trouvez des exemples dans le texte où c'est la voix adulte qui intervient dans le récit. Quelle est la raison et quel est l'effet de ces interventions?
- Montrez comment Jo apprend ce qui se passe quand il n'est pas là pour ensuite en témoigner personnellement. (Qu'est-ce qu'il entend? Quelles conversations est-ce qu'il surprend? Qu'est-ce qui lui est raconté, et par qui?)

Activité 18

Considérez les trois étapes majeures de la fuite de Joseph et Maurice: Paris—Menton, Menton—Nice, Nice—la ville de R. Expliquez comment ce sont les persécutions des Juifs en France pendant l'occupation qui les obligent à reprendre leurs musettes à chaque étape, montrant bien que la structure du roman est fondée essentiellement sur le principe de la cause et de l'effet. (150 mots)

The structure of many novels can be simplified as in the diagram below. By examining the first part of *Un sac de billes* we can see how this structure is put to use.



Writing about plot and structure

Although you will not score marks simply by recounting the plot of *Un sac de billes*, you need to know the plot of the novel extremely well. This does not mean retelling the story. You must select the precise information which you feel is relevant to the question set and which will support your answer. You are likely to have a mixture of references to events and direct quotations. Always remember that a quotation will not make the point for you. It will instead provide an example to reinforce what you are aiming to say.



Vocabulary

le cadre setting	présager to foreshadow
le catalyseur catalyst	présenter to present, portray
convaincant(e) convincing	provoquer une réponse to provoke a response
convaincre to convince	se rappeler to recall, remember
la crise crisis	le rapport relationship
démontrer to show, demonstrate	réaliste realistic
développer to develop	le récit story, account
établir to establish	révéler to reveal
l'étape (f) stage	le signe prémoniteur forewarning
l'exposition (f) exposition	se souvenir de to remember, recall
les faits (mpl) historiques historical facts	ultime final, ultimate
inattendu(e) unexpected	vraisemblable realistic, true to life
le point culminant climax	
Useful phrases	
Les événements du roman se déroulent... The events of the novel take place ...	
Le récit se focalise sur... The plot focuses on ...	
Il devient clair que... It becomes clear that ...	
A plusieurs reprises... At several recurring points ...	
Au fur et à mesure que l'histoire se développe... As the storyline develops ...	
Les dernières pages nous laissent avec un sentiment de... The final pages leave us with a feeling of ...	
capturer l'intérêt du lecteur to capture the reader's interest	
frapper l'imagination du lecteur to capture the imagination of the reader	