***Milkweed* Study Guide**

**Ch. 1-7**

1. Describe the main character. What clues reveal who he is? Why does he call himself “Stopthief”?
2. What are the clues that reveal the setting?
3. Who are the Jackboots? How do you know?
4. When Stopthief follows Uri back to the stable to meet the other boys, he finds out they are all Jewish. One of the boys says, “A Jew is an animal. A Jew is bug. A Jew is less than a bug.” (7) The other boys all agree, laugh and cheer. Why would the boys say things like this if they are all Jewish? Why laugh about it?
5. Why do the boys all say that Stopthief is “in for it all right,” and “they hate the Gypsies the most”? (7-8) What is Stopthief in for? Who hates the Gypsies and why do they hate them?
6. How does Uri help Stopthief? What do you think actually motivated Uri to help him?
7. What do you think of the part where Uri and Stopthief drive the streetcar (14-15)? Why would Spinelli put this part in the book?
8. In chapter 5, it becomes clear that the city is being attacked and invaded. How does Stopthief react to all the fighting and destruction? What does he think of it? What does this reveal about his character (traits)?
9. Why is ironic that as war comes to the city, Stopthief says, “Those were the good times” (25)?
10. How does Uri give Misha (Stopthief) an identity? How does this effect Misha?

**Ch. 8-12**

1. What do Misha’s actions before and after Janina’s birthday party reveal about his character (traits)?
2. What does Misha observe happening to the Jews in ch. 8? Do you think he understands what he sees? Why or why not?
3. What motivates Misha to shout his name each time he steals a loaf of bread?
4. What motivates Uri to literally put a leash on Misha?
5. How does some of the characters have different beliefs and feelings about angels? What do the characters’ feelings and beliefs about angels reveal about their character traits?
6. How is life in the city beginning to change?
7. Why does Uri get so mad when Misha gets hit by the automobile?
8. How would you describe Misha’s relationship with Uri? Give evidence to support your answer.
9. Why doesn’t Misha go to live with the orphans?

**Ch. 13-19**

1. On page 63, Misha goes to Doctor Korczak and asks why the orphans don’t go on the merry-go-round. Korczack responds only by saying, “They’re *children…Children*.” Misha then observes that “There was a question on his face, but I could not answer it.” (63). What do you make of this? What do you think Korczack is talking about?
2. Why does Misha lose his desire to ride the merry-go-round (65)?
3. Why does Janina’s mother say, “I was a human being once”? (76)
4. Why would Misha say that he “felt freer to be stupid and silly when he was there than when he was not”? (80)
5. How does Misha feel about being forced to live in the ghetto?
6. Why does Misha run around telling everyone that Janina is his sister?
7. How do people react to seeing dead bodies in the ghetto? What do their responses suggest about human nature?
8. What do you think of Uncle Shepsel?
9. How would you describe life instead the ghetto?

**Ch. 20-24**

1. What do the Jackboots do to the residents of the ghetto in ch. 20? Why on earth would anyone do this to another human being?
2. Why does Mr. Milgrom say that Misha is family now at the end of Ch. 20?
3. In ch. 21, what do you think about Uri insisting that they take Jon’s shoes and give them to Big Henryk? Do you approve of his decision? Does it reveal anything about Uri’s character (traits)?
4. Why do you think the boys joke about Heaven just after their friend has died? What’s motivating them?
5. Why would Jews guard other Jews? (102).
6. Why is does Himmler’s appearance cause such an uproar in the ghetto? (I would try looking up Himmler if you’re not sure.)
7. If Buffo is a Flop, then Buffo is also a Jew stuck in the ghetto. Why then does he enjoy killing children? Why does Misha enjoy taunting him?
8. Why does Himmler’s appearance make Misha decide he no longer wants to be a Jackboot? After all the horrible acts Misha has seen, why would this be what makes him decide he doesn’t like the Jackboots?!?
9. How is the cow like mothers, angels and oranges? How are they all symbolic?
10. Why would Dr. Korczak tell Misha to “Find the cow” when it is very unlikely that the cow actually exists? (115)
11. What is Shepsel’s plan to get out of the ghetto? Do you think it will work? Why or why not?

**Ch. 25-32**

1. Describe Janina. What do you think of her? Do you think she’s changed at all since being in the ghetto? Why or why not? Support your answer with evidence.
2. When Misha asks the other boys where Heaven is, what do they tell him? What do their answers reveal about them? (128).
3. Why do Jackboots and their girlfriends come and start taking pictures of Janina and Misha? What do you think this says about human nature?
4. What motivates Misha to continue to smuggle despite how dangerous it is?
5. What motivates Janina to insist on smuggling with Misha?
6. Remember that Misha tells Mr. Milgrom that Janina has been following him in an effort to prevent her from smuggling. Later though he finds that she’s been following him anyway. This time he doesn’t tell Mr. Milgrom about it. What do you think of the decisions Misha has been making? Which time is he making the right choice? Or is he making the right choice both times?
7. Describe Misha and Janina’s relationship. Do you think Janina is motivating Misha to change in anyways?
8. Why would Misha call the flamethrower “gorgeous”? (137)
9. Right away in the book, it was clear that Misha is incredibly innocent and immature. He seems completely unaware of how the world works. Do you see any evidence in this section that Misha is actually maturing? If so, where?
10. What is the significance of calling the other side of the wall “Heaven”?
11. At one point, Uncle Shepsel why he comes back from the other side of the wall every night: “You go. Every night you go…Why do you come back?” (148) Why ***does*** he come back?
12. Why do you think Mrs. Milgrom died when the rest of her family survived? The book never said she was sick or that she was getting less food than the others.
13. Milkweed is mentioned on pages 143 and 151, and it is also the title of the book. What do you think is the significance of the milkweed?
14. When the Milgrom are burying Mrs. Milgrom, bombs start falling on the city. Mr. Milgrom has Misha and Janina get down in the grave with Mrs. Milgrom. What do you think is the significance of this?
15. Go back on read the last paragraph on page 151. What imagery is creating in this paragraph? For some reason this is my favorite paragraph in the whole book. I can’t help but think the imagery is somehow incredibly poignant (emotional) and significant. I feel like Spinelli is trying to tell me something here! What are your thoughts?

**Ch. 33- 37**

1. Why is Enos laughing on pg. 152? Nothing really funny has happened.
2. What motivates the Jackboot and his girlfriend to throw food to the people in the ghetto? What does this say about human nature?
3. How does Mr. Milgrom explain happiness to Misha? Why does he have to explain it this way? Do you agree with his definition?
4. Why does Mr. Milgrom insist on celebrating Hanukkah?
5. Describe Mr. Milgrom. What kind of a person is he?
6. Why does Janina “lose her happy” after she sees the burning cow?
7. Why does Mr. Milgrom say to MIsha, “The miracle is you”? (163) Do you agree? Is Misha a miracle?
8. Why does bringing Janina a hard-boiled egg and a pickle, help Janina “find her happy” again?
9. How do Janina and Misha react to and cope with life in the ghetto differently? Why don’t they respond to life in the ghetto the same way?
10. Why are some people actually excited for the resettlement?
11. One day Misha realizes that Mr. Milgrom knows Janina is following has been following Misha out of the ghetto, which means that Mr. Milgrom has actually been *allowing* Janina to go. Why would Mr. Milgrom change his mind and allow Janina to follow Misha?

**Ch. 38-end**

1. Why does Mr. Milgrom actually want MIsha and Janina to stay on the other side of the wall? What is motivating him?
2. Why won’t Janina stay on the other side of the wall (out of the ghetto)? What is motivating her?
3. Read the last sentence of ch. 38. What do you think of the way Spinelli chose to end this chapter? Why do you think he made this choice? Was it a good choice?
4. Is what happened to Janina Misha’s fault? Did Misha fail Mr. Milgrom? Why or why not?
5. What do you think motivated Uri to shoot Misha? What evidence supports your answer?
6. After Misha wakes up at the train station and discovers that everyone is gone, he says, “The tracks curved out of the station. I started to walk. I walked out of the station yard, out of the world. The tracks came to a point in the sky.” (158). What do you think of Spinelli’s writing here? Why end the chapter this way? Do you think the image of track coming “to a point in the sky” holds any significance? If so, what?
7. What motivates Misha to follow the train tracks and to *try* to get to the ovens?
8. Considers how the farmers treat Misha. Would you call their actions kindness or cruelty?
9. At the end of ch. 43, when Misha makes his way back to Warsaw, why does he try so hard to get Buffo’s attention?
10. Why do you think Misha talks so much later in his life? What do you think is motivating him?
11. Why does Misha behave so oddly in America?
12. Why does Misha never share his memories about Janina when he shares his memories about everything else?
13. What is Misha’s identity at the end of the book? Do you think he has finally found peace and happiness? Why or why not?
14. How does Misha’s identity change throughout the book? What causes his identity to change so much? Consider also how Shepsel tries to change his identity as a Jew. How is identity related to survival?