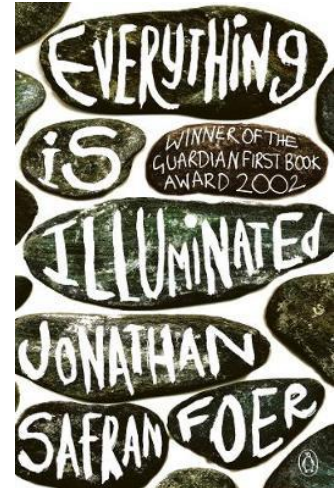


Everything is Illuminated

Jonathan Safran Foer

Reading Group Questions

1. How do you feel about the way that the Jews were represented in this book?
2. Does the book improve our understanding of the Holocaust?
3. Do you think the shtetl Trachimbrod, should have been called something different to avoid confusion with Trachinbrod, the read Jewish shtetl?
4. Do you think Grandfather Alex should be held accountable for the murder of Herschel?
5. Is telling a story about a relatively unknown location a good idea? What are the positives and negatives of this?
6. Does your opinion of Alex change throughout the book? Why?
7. What key things do we learn about Jonathan and Alex's relationship throughout the book?
8. *Everything is Illuminated* jumps around in time. Does this make it difficult to understand the plot?
9. What do you think helps us learn more about the Holocaust: the stories of Trachimbrod and of the journey to find Augustine, or more direct portrayals of specific events in the Holocaust?
10. Jonathan Safran Foer writes novels based on historic events. For example, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is a novel written about a boy searching for answers about his father who died in the 9/11 terror attack. Is it right for someone who has never experienced direct trauma of these events, to be writing about them?
11. The Guardian newspaper reviewed *Everything is Illuminated* and described the character Alex as 'unconvincing on other levels too – as are all the other Ukrainians in the book. They are all antisemitic con-artists whose main ambition is to get to America and/or rob Americans.'



Oh, and they aren't very bright. And they drive rubbish cars. It's like Borat, only less funny and more patronising.' How far do you agree/ disagree with this statement?

12. Would you recommend this book to someone? Why?

A Survivors Perspective

Val Ginsburg

Val Ginsburg – Val's family had their property taken from them when the Soviet army occupied Lithuania and declared that anyone with land or business were part of the capitalist enemy. Worse followed: the Nazis invaded. The Jewish community of Val's hometown, Kaunas, were forced into a ghetto and all but eradicated. By the end of the war, Val had been taken to Dachau concentration camp, almost one thousand miles from home. Once he was free, he felt a deep depression because all of his family were killed, and his community and culture were destroyed. He was in the same position as the woman Alex mistakes for Augustine in *Everything is Illuminated* – returning home to Trachimbrod to find everything and everyone gone.



<https://holocaustlearning.org.uk/stories/val-ginsburg/>