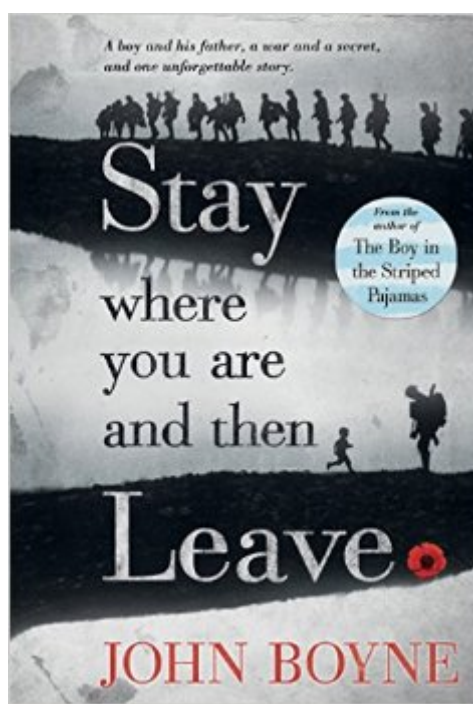


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Stay Where You Are And Then Leave



Synopsis

The day the First World War broke out, Alfie Summerfield's father promised he wouldn't go away to fight—but he broke that promise the following day. Four years later, Alfie doesn't know where his father might be, other than that he's away on a special, secret mission. Then, while shining shoes at King's Cross Station, Alfie unexpectedly sees his father's name on a sheaf of papers belonging to a military doctor. Bewildered and confused, Alfie realizes his father is in a hospital close by—a hospital treating soldiers with shell shock. Alfie isn't sure what shell shock is, but he is determined to rescue his father from this strange, unnerving place. . . . This title has Common Core connections.

Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

Customer Reviews

Written in time for the centennial of WWI, this deceptively simple read is the story of Alfie Summerfield whose father is a milkman turned soldier who seems to have disappeared without a trace. Alfie's mother maintains that his father is on a secret mission but Alfie fears his father is dead. When he discovers that his father is in a hospital for treatment for those suffering from shell-shock, Alfie is determined to rescue his father and to bring normalcy back into his life. John Boyne has written a moving and, at times, wrenching story of The Great War and its impact on those back home. While the war is a looming presence in the background, this book is mostly about the love for one's family and friends. Through Alfie's naïve observations of events unfolding around him we

get to see the strain and the fear felt by the adults around him. Alfie is not immune to all this. While our young hero does not always understand the events, he is observant and has a deep drive to do what must be done to make things right for those he loves best. He knows his mother is struggling to make ends meet and he tries to do his part to help her. He wants to help his father and does what he can to correct what he sees as a terrible wrong. Boyne writes in a simple narrative style and yet he manages to fill this slim volume with much fodder for thought. The petty racisms, the fear, the prejudice and the meanness that rise up in the people around Alfie are balanced, more often than not, by those striving to hold on to their dignity and kindness. Shell-shock, or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, first gained recognition as a diagnosis during WWI. Initially ridiculed and treated with contempt it was a diagnosis that many sought to hide and to cope with it was lonely battle.

Charming. Some readers say this is a YA book; others consign it to a younger age group - but not too young, because of delicate sensibilities regarding the horrors of war; I say it's for YK (Young Kids), YA (Young Adults), and OA (Old Adults). As an OOA (Old, Old Adult), I found the book mesmerizing - a tender story with lots of positive human interactions (but also featuring some dark aspects of human relations), and a relatively positive ending. In fact, the novel could pass as an adult fairy tale. Lots of implausible coincidences, but in the long run important lessons to be learned about human behavior, with an ending that inspires hope for the future. Alfie - 5 in 1914; 9 in 1918; 13 in 1922 - is both extraordinarily naïve and unnaturally sophisticated, at all three of these ages. Both characteristics are developed in highly positive ways. He is a very nice guy, in everything he does. This is so refreshing, considering the bad behavior of many fictional protagonists. I kept wishing there were more children just like Alfie. While Alfie's story is the main thread running through the entire book, the author also gives major consideration to father-son relations (Georgie, his father, is well drawn), and to an aspect of war often neglected in World War I treatments, i.e., shell shock, or what we now call PTSD. So many books about WW I emphasize the horrific loss of life, on both sides, that dragged on for more than four years without any notable gain for either side. But Boyne highlights the equally tragic circumstance of those who managed to live through the carnage but were nevertheless permanently damaged psychologically.

John Boyne's *Stay Where You Are and Then Leave* is an absolute gem of a book. It's being marketed as a YA novel, but don't let that fool you. This is a book that will reward readers of all ages, one that's definitely going on the "essentials" shelf. I don't want to say too much about the contents because I don't want to spoil them for you, but I do want to say enough to

convince you that this is a book you should track down and readâ”and soon! Alfie Summerfield is five when his father volunteers for the British Army at the start of World War I. Heâ”™s an interesting, quirky kid, with a childâ”™s sense of time: âœœGeorgie and Margie [Alfie’s parents] had been very old when they got marriedâ”he [Alfie] knew that much. His dad had been almost twenty-one and his mum was only a year younger.â”•At first, Alfieâ”™s father writes regularly, but then the letters stop coming. Alfieâ”™s mum tells Alfie his dad is on a secret mission, but Alfie grows less and less sure of her honesty as his fatherâ”™s absence grows more extended. Is his father dead? If heâ”™s on a secret mission, what sort of mission is it? Alfie and his mum quickly become âœœperilously close to penury,â”• as she puts it. She works double shifts at a hospital, waking him before she leaves for work in the morning. Sitting alone eating his breakfast each day, Alfie props the newspaper up in front of him as he remembers his dad doing, but heâ”™s only interested in one kind of news:[H]e did what he always did in the morning. He turned to page four to read the numbers. The numbers of deaths on our side. The number of deaths on their side. The number of wounded. But there was only one number Alfie really cared about: 14278. His dadâ”™s number. The number theyâ”™d assigned him when he signed up.

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