

Un Sac de Billes
Par Joseph Joffo

You have now seen the film "Au revoir Les Enfants" directed by the famous French film director Louis Malle, so you will know something about the plight of Jewish people who were living in France during the 1930s and 1940s

Joseph Joffo, author of "Un Sac de Billes" was one of them and in this very moving book, he tells the story of two young boys - himself and his older brother- and what happened to them during these very dangerous years.

In this extract Joseph's father is desperately trying to warn his two young sons why it is so important never to tell anyone that they are Jewish. He pretends to "interrogate" them in the same way that the police would do if they were suspected and caught.

Joseph and his brother aren't even aware that they are Jews as the family don't observe the Jewish religion. So their father tries to explain why they have to hide.



- Enfin dit-il, **il faut que vous sachiez une chose**. Vous êtes juifs mais **ne l'avouez jamais**. Vous entendez : **JAMAIS**

Nos deux têtes acquiescent ensemble.

-A votre meilleur ami vous ne le direz pas, vous ne **le chuchoterez** même pas **à voix basse**, vous **nierez** toujours. Vous m'entendez bien : toujours. Joseph, viens ici.

Je me lève et m'approche, je ne le vois plus du tout à présent.

-Tu es juif, Joseph ?

- Non.

Sa main a claqué sur **ma joue**, une détonation sèche. Il ne m'avait jamais touché jusqu'ici.

- **Ne mens pas**, tu es juif, Joseph ?

- Non

J'avais crié **sans m'en rendre compte**, un cri définitif, assuré. Mon père s'est relevé.

- Eh bien voilà, dit -il, je crois que je vous ai tout dit. La situation est claire à présent.

La joue me cuisait encore mais avais une question qui me trottait dans la tête depuis le début de l'entretien à laquelle **il me fallait une réponse**.

- Je voudrais te demander : **qu'est-ce que c'est** un juif ?

Papa **a éclairé** cette fois la petite lampe à l'**abat-jour** vert qui se trouvait sur la table de nuit de Maurice. **Je l'aimais bien**, elle laissait filtrer une clarté diffuse et amicale que **je ne reverrais plus**.

Papa **s'est gratté** la tête.

-Eh bien, **ça m'embête** un peu de te le dire, Joseph, mais au fond, **je ne sais pas très bien**.

Nous le regardions et il dut sentir qu'il fallait continuer, que sa réponse pouvait apparaître aux enfants que nous étions comme une reculade.

- **Autrefois**, dit-il, nous habitions un pays, **on en a été chassés** alors nous sommes partis partout et il y a des périodes, comme celle dans laquelle nous sommes, où ça continue. C'est **la chasse** qui est **rouverte**, alors il faut repartir et **se cacher**, en attendant que **le chasseur** se fatigue.



Glossary

il faut que vous sachiez une chose = you must know something

ne l'avouez jamais = never confess it

vous le chuchoterez = you whisper it

à voix basse = in a low voice

vous nierez = you will deny

ma joue = my cheek

Ne mens pas = don't lie

sans m'en rendre compte = without realising it

La joue me cuisait = my cheek was stinging me

il me fallait une réponse = I needed a reply

qu'est-ce que c'est = what is ?

a éclairé = lit up

l'abat-jour = lamp shade

Je l'aimais bien = I liked it a lot

je ne reverrais plus = I would never see again

s'est gratté = scratched

ça m'embête = it bothers me

je ne sais pas très bien = I don't really know

Autrefois = in the past

on en a été chassés = we were hunted out

la chasse = the hunt

rouverte = opened up again

se cacher = to hide

le chasseur = the hunter



In groups

Use the glossary to read the extract from "Un Sac de Billes"

Can you work out what is happening in this important scene from the novel?

- Why did Joseph's father hit him?
- What clues are there that the Joffos are not a very religious family?
- According to Joseph's dad, what historically has happened to the Jews?
- What clue is there that Joseph is about to leave his home, never to return?

Work together to summarise the extract IN English using **40 words exactly** (no more and no less). Be prepared to share your summary with the rest of the class.

In pairs

The following sentences tell the main points of the story. However, the second half of the sentences have been mixed up. Match each part of the sentence up and write them down in the order that they occur in the story.

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|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Joseph needs to understand... | g. that his sons don't reveal their religion |
| 2. Joseph's dad slaps him... | c. Joseph does what his father wants. |
| 3. Joseph's dad explains... | b. to come over to him. |
| 4. By not telling the truth... | f. the history of the Jewish exodus. |
| 5. The hunt has started again... | d. although he had never hit him before. |
| 6. The dad says to Joseph ... | e. what it means to be Jewish. |
| 7. Joseph's dad insists that ... | a. and they have to hide until the hunter gets tired |

On your own

Imagine that you are Joseph on the evening that this scene happens. , write a short diary entry about what occurred that day. Remember to include your feelings and thoughts.

