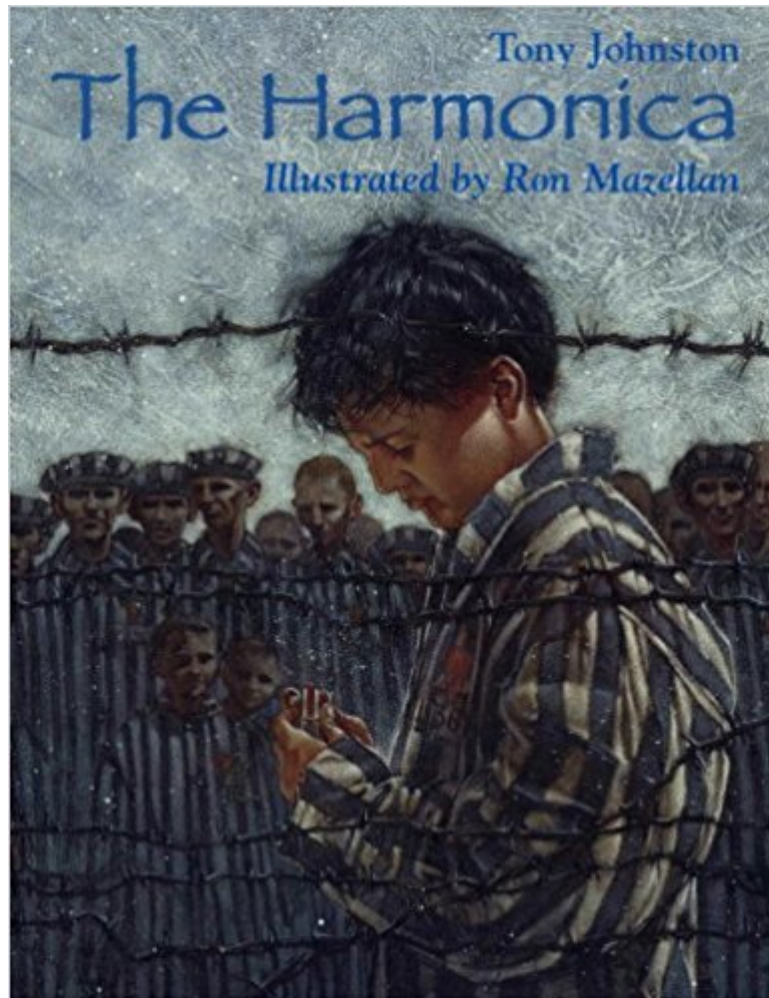




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# The Harmonica



## Synopsis

When the Nazis invaded Poland, a family is split apart. The parents are sent to one concentration camp, their son to another. Only his father's gift, a harmonica, keeps the boy's hopes alive and, miraculously, ensures his survival. Tony Johnston's powerful story, inspired by the life of a Holocaust survivor, is enhanced by Ron Mazellan's luminous artwork. A testament to the human spirit and the transcendent power of music.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 0620 (What's this?)

Paperback: 32 pages

Publisher: Charlesbridge; 1 edition (July 1, 2008)

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Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 24 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #69,693 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #19 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Holocaust #59 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Europe #108 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Prejudice & Racism

Age Range: 7 - 10 years

Grade Level: 3 - 5

## Customer Reviews

Grade 3-6-Inspired by the story of a Holocaust survivor, this exquisite picture book is poignant and powerful. Simple sentences charged with delicate word choices briefly recount the first-person narration of a poor but happy boy and his parents in Poland who were captured, split up, and taken to concentration camps. The youngster manages to take with him the harmonica his father gave him, on which he plays Schubert. The commandant of the camp learns of his talents and orders him to, "Play, Jew!" The boy complies-and finds out that the whole camp hears him and takes heart from the music. The mixed-media illustrations change from a warm to cold palette to underscore the move from home to camp. While the story is set in World War II, the theme is broader, and makes a

case for the power of music/art to support and sustain humanity. There is an appended note about the life of Henryk Rosmaryn. Cris Riedel, Ellis B. Hyde Elementary School, Dansville, NY Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gr. 3-6. Based on a true survivor story, this powerful picture book is yet another astonishing Holocaust account for discussion. A Polish Jewish child, blissfully happy with his loving parents, gets a harmonica from his coal-miner father and learns to play Schubert while his parents dance. The realistic mixed-media, double-page illustrations contrast that glowing warmth of home with the darkness that comes when Nazi soldiers break down the door, separate the boy from his family, and send him to the camps. His harmonica becomes his solace. The commandant hears about the child's playing. He orders the boy to play Schubert and throws him bread. In the end, however, the music does nothing to humanize the brutal Nazis. In fact, one unforgettable picture shows the commandant blissfully listening to the music, one hand over his heart and the other holding a whip. The home memories are idyllic, but there's absolutely no sentimentality about the child's survival. Johnston gives children and grown-ups lots to talk about here--for example, Can a person be both sensitive and cruel? Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Love this book. Beautiful companion piece to *The Book Thief*. I'm a teacher, and this book caught the kids' hearts and helped them see how music is the universal voice, much like the role of the accordion in *The Book Thief*.

Picture books can often be read on multiple levels. *The Harmonica* falls into this category. Primary audiences will be able to see the horrors of the Holocaust through the eyes of the main character, an orphan who is forced to play his harmonica to appease the commandant of a concentration camp. This audience will also appreciate the way the boy is able to derive something positive from an abhorrent situation. This could easily lead to discussions relating to good vs. evil and how people can make a difference by making positive choices. Sometimes small gestures can have profound effects. An older audience will be better able to grasp some of the complexities of the Holocaust. The illustration of the commandant holding the whip while he enjoys the music demonstrates one of these dichotomies. Older readers will likewise be better able to grasp the underlying reasons for the Holocaust and the behavior exhibited by the Nazis.

Great

Clear historical fiction text (mostly based on true events) with a relatable narrator; vivid and descriptive language. I read it with my fifth graders and it led to a great discussion since the details and setting are so simple, yet thought-provoking.

My kids love this book!

Love the book! I use it as a mentor text for my students.

My students loved the book!

A sad story but a very good one. Pictures are beautiful better for older kids.

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