extremely loud and incredibly close

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## what makes Oskar a unique character?

| idea | Characteristic/quote |
| --- | --- |
| Weird inventions | * Birdseed shirt to be able to fly
* Microphones to swallow and hear people's heartbeats
 |
| The train of thought style of writing | * Very muddled and moving from thought to thought
 |
| He is much smarter than the other kids his age | * I told him, 'I'm a pacifist,' and since most people my age don't know what that means, I turned around and told the others, 'I don't think it's right to destroy people's privates. Ever.'
* I used to be an atheist, which means I didn't believe in things that couldn't be observed
 |
| Coping mechanisms: | * Inventing things
* I desperately wish I had my tambourine with me now, because even after everything I'm still wearing heavy boots, and sometimes it helps to play a good beat
* Obsessive search for clues (trying to find things left behind by his dad)
	+ There was nothing, which would have been unfortunate, unless nothing was a clue. Was nothing a clue?
 |
| Thinking about things that 9 year old's don't usually think about | * 'Isn't it so weird how the number of dead people is increasing even though the earth stays the same size, so that one day there isn't going to be room to bury anyone anymore?
 |
| No social skills | * She was obviously mad at me, but I didn't know why. I hadn't done anything wrong. Or if I had, I didn't know what it was. And I definitely didn't mean to do it.
 |
| Weird phrases | * She could tell that I was zipping up the sleeping bag of myself, and I could tell that she didn't really love me. I knew the truth, which was that if she could have chosen, it would have been my funeral we were driving to.
 |
| Asking questions | * Does a cave have no ceiling, or is a cave all ceiling?

  |
| Similes | * She was wearing the bracelet that I made for her, and that made me feel like one hundred dollars. I love making jewelry for her, because it makes her happy, and making her happy is another one of my raisons d'etre.
 |
| Repeated phrases throughout the book | * which I know about, but wish I didn't
* Birdseed shirt
 |

## perspective

​​Consider the novel as a whole, what overarching perspectives is it trying to deliver to readers?
For example;

* Trauma can affect anybody, regardless of time, space and circumstance.
	+ Oskar, his grandparents, his mum, they are all affected by the trauma of 9/11 and they all cope in different ways
	+ Trauma affects people in different and sometimes unexpected ways, people each have their own mechanisms to cope.
	+ Those suffering from trauma find it difficult to communicate their feelings to others.
		- The no and yes hands
* Trauma is something that people have to deal with for the rest of their life, it is not easily solved
* Perspective is often distorted by trauma
* It is hard to find meaning and purpose in a hard time

###

### Oskar

* Oskar’s perspective is that of a child. A child who suddenly lost a beloved parent and is struggling to cope and make sense of it all. In a way he is symbolic representation of all of the children who lost a parent during the 9/11 attacks.
* Innocent
* Oskar’s sections contrast greatly with the other sections of the text, namely because they are from the point of view of two mature adults whereas his is that of a young child.
* Oskar’s passages move freely between notions of fantasy, his search for a lock, his classmates at school to that of him feeling angry, scared of afraid.
* He has suffered a terribly loss and his journey of finding the lock that his key opens is, in his way, an attempt to find meaning and a sense of closure.
* Oskar has a coping mechanism of making up inventions
* Distracted from thinking about the tragedy

###

### Grandma

* Grandma’s perspective is one of loss and loneliness. She suffered the loss of her family in the Dresden Bombings followed by the loss of her son in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Her loveless marriage left her in a lonely place.
* Each of Grandma’s sections in the novel are called ‘My Feelings’ and are presented as letters that she is writing to Oskar.
* The spacing in this section is vastly different to the rest of the text, the spaces between the words are much larger, the lines are indented more frequently, often resulting in only three to four words in a line. This structure adds a lot more emotion to Grandma’s passages and resembles the style of stream of consciousness.
* Having only a few words per line makes audiences read the passage differently making the impact of the words even greater. The spacing and indentations creates a staccato effect forcing the reader to stop as they read, emphasising not only the words but the meaning and weight that they carry. It is a very effective way of portraying Grandma’s emotions and developing her character and perspective.

### Thomas Senior

* Thomas Senior’s perspective is one of grief, loss and guilt. He lost his entire family and his pregnant girlfriend in the Dresden bombings. He had never recovered from his loss and his grief crippled every aspect of his life. He suffers from the guilt of being a survivor and at what he saw and did during the bombings.
* All of Thomas Senior’s sections are structured as letters that he had written to his son Thomas Junior and are his attempt at explaining why he is the way he is and why he left his family.
* His letters contain minimal punctuation mimicking a stream of consciousness style. As he lost his ability to speak after the war, writing has become his main mode of communication. As such, his writing seems to have a sense of urgency, one which is fuelled by the lack of punctuation. In some cases, he even writes over his own words to the point where they are completely unreadable.
* This allows the reader to see that Thomas Senior is essentially a good man, but one who has lost everything and has not found a method of recovery.
* Survivors guilt

## voice

|   | Oskar | Grandma | Thomas Snr. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| notes | * Answers a question in great detail after posing the question
* Informal language
* Slang expressions
* Goes into detail about the small things
* His imagination is very strong
* 'no way jose'
 | * Confused
* Asks rhetorical questions
* Double spacing
* Spaced out so you read it slower
 | * No punctuation and so you read it faster
* urgency
 |
| detail | * Goes on tangents
* Includes details that are assumed
* Descriptive not emotive in the descriptions
 | * Emotion in details
 | * Lacks detail
 |
| syntax |   | * Shorter sentences = read it slower
* Illusion that she dwells on meaning before moving on
 | * Longer sentences
* No spacing
* More fast paced
 |
| tone | * Inquisitive and intellectual
* Naïve
 | * Explanative and cathartic
 | * remorseful
 |

imagery = verbal representation of sensory experience

syntax = sentence length, punctuation

tone = emotion or feeling you get when reading the words

## The trauma narrative

* At the beginning of the novel Oskar describes a mapping game he was playing with his father in Central Park but he does not understand the rules. This is seen when Oskar says: “The more I found the less I understood” and “I could connect them to make almost anything I wanted, which meant I wasn’t getting closer to anything”. The random patterns of dots on the map could represent the lack of definable structure of the novel.
* Oskar is easily frustrated by his inability to understand when his father further states that: “Another way to look at it would be, how could you ever be wrong?” Thus implying that there is no right or wrong way to interpret meaning. This could lead to the idea that the novel itself has no fixed meaning or interpretation, that it is ultimately up to the reader to ‘connect the dots’.
* To make meaning from the novel’s unconventional structure requires active participation on behalf of the reader. In this way, readers of the novel can bear witness to the trauma experienced in the events of 9/11.
* The notion that readers can only make meaning of the text by moving forward through its pages and actively piecing the events together contributes to the idea that mourning (moving on with time) is the only way to heal after trauma. This is further supported by the flip book of the reversal of the falling man at the novel’s conclusion. It suggests that Oskar is on the road to recovery and has found at least some sense of closure as the flip book can only be operated by the readers flicking forward through its pages.
* The story goes against the traditional narrative of the search for meaning as there is no simple solution to trauma. This is displayed in Oskar’s search, typically people would search for a key to a lock but in this narrative, it has been reversed. Oskar is looking for a lock that fits his key.

## mourning and melancholy

* melancholy (or ‘acting out’) entails a complete repression of all trauma-related memory, mourning (or ‘working through’) is an endeavour to remember the traumatic event and fit it into a coherent whole
* Melancholy and mourning apply to memory
* Acting out and working through
* Thomas Schell - a shell of the man he once was

### Oskar

* Heavy boots
	+ Very sad and depressed
* Feeling like 100 dollars
	+ Very happy
* Explicitly expressed a Deathwish
	+ ‘What’s so horrible about being dead forever, and not feeling anything and not even dreaming? What’s so great about feeling and dreaming?’ (Foer 145).
* Oskar asked for coffee
	+ Believes it is stunting his growth because he wants to never grow older
* Psychological need to do detective work
	+ Quest for the lock (step towards unlocking his trauma)
* Hypervigilance and overactivity
	+ Obsessively on the lookout for dangers
	+ Goes out of his way to be away from the empire state
	+ Doesn’t use elevators and tall buildings
	+ Targets for future terrorist attacks
	+ Panic attacks
	+ Avoids all things that make him feel panicky
* Overactive in thought and actions
	+ Meant to soothe a brain in overdrive
* Treasure hunts to make sure he doesn't go insane
	+ Like sharks that die if the don’t swim
* Inventions
* Horrible deaths for people he loves
* Sleeping - nightmares

### Grandma

* Drive to communicate and tell the story of her life
* Suggestion of writing her life story (from her husband)
	+ He believes that writing will be therapeutic and a way to lighten her burden
	+ Typewriter and desk are in the guest room (a nothing space)
* She is not coping at all
* Suicidal
* Coming to terms with her trauma is fake
	+ Writing is faked by constantly hitting the spacebar
* Plans to drown herself in the Hudson river
	+ Motioning her to come back
	+ Her lifeline but she takes a second to decide
	+ Torn between life and death
* Not inclined towards self-destruction
	+ Carrying a big rock across Broadway
	+ Oskar never gets this rock but she usually gives the rocks to him
* Would their house have burnt less brightly?
	+ She believes her letters contributed to the fire
	+ Guilty for 'fuelling the fire'
* When Oskar is asking for advice
	+ 'I'm not very smart but I think'
	+ Self loathing - insults herself before talking
* Wanting to talk to people about her ideas
	+ Wants to gain competence in English
	+ Feverishly writing a letter to her son validating her actions at the end of the novel
* Tried to help her father free himself from the rubble
	+ He survived but he killed himself soon after
* Better at coping than her husband
* She spent her life learning to feel less
	+ She said she didn't feel anything when seeing the burning buiildings
	+ She didn't feel empty when finding out her son was dead
* Emotionless
* Marks on her body
	+ Around her eyes
	+ She has bad eyesight (she cannot see at all - the blank story)
* Pretending she was going blind was a way to get Thomas' attention
* Hurting herself
	+ Breaking her hands

### Thomas Senior

* Trauma from his girlfriend Anna dying in the Dresden bombing
* He encountered and escaped death
* Crisis of death and crisis of living
* Survivors guilt (PTSD)
	+ Distorted self image
	+ No self esteem
	+ He feels unworthy
	+ He doesn’t feel he is worthy to survive
* Unable to live in the present and unable to let go of the past
	+ Something and nothing places
	+ Eventually more nothing places than something places
* He insists on making love in a nothing place
	+ Unable to let go of Anna
* Loss of speech
	+ Comes hand in hand with him losing Anna in Dresden
* Coming to terms with the past
* Melancholia
	+ Living in the past
	+ Cannot move past what happened
* Married Anna's younger sister
	+ Last remaining link to Anna
	+ He sculpts Anna after her sister's modelling (to reconstruct her)
* Unable to let go of the memory of Anna
* Obsession with the past
* He is cherishing projections of what a life with Anna could have been
* Aphasia
	+ Refusal/inability to speak
	+ Cannot share his experiences with people
	+ ‘Sometimes I think if I could tell you what happened to me that night, I could leave that night behind me’ (Foer 2005, 208)
	+ Tattoos of 'yes' and 'no'
	+ His life meaning is broken down to just 'yes' and 'no'