

Weekly Read week 4B: this is an extract from near the beginning of *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, a novel by Heather Morris based on the real life story of Lale Solokov, a 26 year old Slovakian Jewish man, who was given the traumatic job of tattooing numbers onto the arms of other Jews in the Auschwitz concentration camp. In this section, Lale arrives at Auschwitz after a harrowing journey on a packed train with hundreds of other Jews.

After two days the cattle train stops again. This time there is a great commotion outside. Dogs are barking, orders are yelled in German, bolts are released, wagon doors clang open.

'Get down from the train, leave your possessions!' shout the soldiers. 'Rush, rush, hurry up! Leave your things on the ground!' Being on the far side of the wagon, Lale is one of the last to leave. Approaching the door, he sees the body of the man killed in the skirmish. Briefly closing his eyes, he acknowledges the man's death with a quick prayer. Then he leaves the wagon, but brings with him the stench – covering his clothes, his skin, every fibre of his being. Landing on bended knees, he puts his hands on the gravel and stays crouching for several moments. Gasping. Exhausted. Painfully thirsty. Slowly rising, he looks around at the hundreds of startled men who are trying to comprehend the scene in front of them. Dogs snap and bite at those who are slow to move. Many stumble, the muscles in their legs refusing to work after days without use. Suitcases, bundles of books, meagre possessions are snatched from those unwilling to surrender them or who simply don't understand the orders. They are then hit by a rifle or fist. Lale studies the men in uniform. Black and threatening. The twin lightning bolts on the collar of their jackets tell Lale who he is dealing with. The SS. Under different circumstances he might appreciate the tailoring, the fineness of the cloth, the sharpness of the cut.

He places his suitcase on the ground. *How will they know this one is mine?* With a shiver, he realises that it's unlikely he will see the case or its contents again. He touches his hand to his heart, to the money hidden in his jacket pocket. He looks to the heavens, breathes in the fresh, cool air, and reminds himself that at least he is outdoors.

A gunshot rings out and Lale jumps. Before him stands an SS officer, weapon pointed skywards. 'Move!' Lale glances back at the emptied train. Clothing blows away and books flap open. Several trucks arrive and small boys clamber out. They snatch up the abandoned belongings and throw them into the trucks. A heaviness settles between Lale's shoulder blades. *Sorry, Mumma, they have your books.*

The men trudge towards the looming dirty pink brick buildings, with picture windows. Trees line the entrance, flush with new spring growth. As Lale walks through open iron gates he looks up at the German words wrought from the metal.

ARBEIT MACHT FREI

Work will make you free.

He doesn't know where he is, or what work he is expected to do, but the idea that it will set him free has the feeling of a sick joke.

SS, rifles, dogs, his belongings taken – this he'd been unable to imagine.

'Where are we?'

Lale turns to see Aron at his side.

'The end of the line, I'd say.'

Aron's face falls.

'Just do as you're told, you'll be fine.' Lale knows he doesn't sound terribly convincing. He gives Aron a quick smile, which is returned. Silently, Lale tells himself to take his own advice: *Do as you're told. And always observe.*

Once inside the compound, the men are corralled into straight lines. At the head of Lale's row is an inmate with a beaten face sitting at a small table. He wears a jacket and trousers of blue and white vertical stripes, with a green triangle on his chest. Behind him stands an SS officer, rifle at the ready.

- List **4 things** from the first paragraph that Lale remembers about the end of the train journey.
- Find **two adjectives** from paragraph two that the author uses to describe the SS soldiers.
- Give **two different examples of techniques** the author uses in the second paragraph (these could be examples of language or sentence structure) in order to convey Lale's feelings about what is happening.
- Read paragraph three. Where does the author use language that **contrasts** with the descriptions used in the previous paragraph? How does this make you feel about Lale?
- Why are some of the sentences written in **italics**?