

DOSSIER PÉDAGOGIQUE



**GOLDEN GLOBE®**

MEILLEUR ACTEUR DANS UN SECOND RÔLE - KIERAN CULKIN

“JESSE EISENBERG FAIT BRILLER  
KIERAN CULKIN DANS  
UNE ODYSSÉE TOUT EN FINESSE”

TÉLÉRAMA

“UN VOYAGE INSOLITE  
ET TRÈS ÉMOUVANT”

KONBINI

“MALIN, DRÔLE  
ET TOUCHANT”

CINEMATEASER

# A REAL PAIN

Un Film De  
Jesse Eisenberg

Jesse Eisenberg Kieran Culkin

SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES présente une production TOPIC STUDIOS FRONT TREE BECO PARK EXTREME EMOTIONS  
EN ASSOCIATION AVEC POLISH FILM INSTITUTE "A REAL PAIN" JESSE EISENBERG KIERAN CULKIN WILL SHARPE JENNIFER GREY KURT EGGVANN LIZA SADOVY DANIEL ORESKES  
RÉVISÉ PAR BECKY GILPEZYNSKI MONTÉ PAR OLGA NEUBAUER COSTUMES PAR MALGORZATA FUDALA MUSIQUE PAR ROBERT NASSAU COIFFURE PAR MELIA MELAN PRODUIT PAR MICHAŁ DYMEK  
PRODUIT PAR KEVIN KELLY MICHAEL BLOOM JENNIFER WESTIN RYAN HELLER COIFFURE PAR ENA PUSZCZYŃSKA JENNIFER SEMLER JESSE EISENBERG, p.g.a. EMMA STONE ALLI HERTING, p.g.a. DAVE MCARY  
RÉVISÉ PAR JESSE EISENBERG SEARCHLIGHT

LE 26 FÉVRIER AU CINÉMA



# Organiser une séance scolaire

Le film *A Real Pain* est disponible pour des projections scolaires à la demande dans tous les cinémas, durant toute l'année scolaire. Les séances sont éligibles à la part collective du Pass Culture, via l'application Adage. Vous pouvez contacter directement votre cinéma de proximité.

Pour obtenir les coordonnées d'un cinéma ou pour tout autre renseignement : n'hésitez pas à nous contacter à l'adresse : [contact@zerodeconduite.net](mailto:contact@zerodeconduite.net)



## A REAL PAIN

*Un film de Jesse Eisenberg*

*Avec : Jesse Eisenberg, Kieran Culkin, Will Sharpe, Jennifer Grey, Kurt Egyiawan, Liza Sadoy*

David (Jesse Eisenberg) et Benji (Kieran Culkin) - deux cousins aux caractères diamétralement opposés - se retrouvent à l'occasion d'un voyage en Pologne afin d'honorer la mémoire de leur grand-mère bien-aimée. Leur odyssée va prendre une tournure inattendue lorsque les vieilles tensions de ce duo improbable vont refaire surface avec, en toile de fond, l'histoire de leur famille...

*Durée : 1h29*

*Le 26 février 2025 au cinéma*

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# Introduction



**Connu pour ses rôles dans les blockbusters hollywoodiens (*Insaisissables*, *Zombieland*, *Justice League*) comme dans les films des plus grands auteurs contemporains (David Fincher, Joachim Trier, Kelly Reichardt), Jesse Eisenberg est aussi dramaturge et cinéaste.**

Pour son second long-métrage, *A Real Pain*, il a assemblé des éléments autobiographiques (le voyage qu'il avait fait en Pologne sur les traces de sa tante) et des idées de fiction (une pièce, *The Revisionist*, montée off-Broadway en 2013, une nouvelle, parue dans le magazine *Tablet*) pour inventer cette histoire originale de deux cousins embarqués dans un road-trip à la recherche de leurs racines juives.

Après avoir longtemps tourné autour du thème, il a trouvé l'étincelle à la lecture d'un article sur les "heritage tours", ces voyages organisés pour des Juifs américains (généralement aisés) désireux de renouer avec leurs racines européennes. Il a pris pour cadre l'un de ces voyages de groupe pour raconter la relation entre deux cousins jadis aussi proches qu'aujourd'hui dissemblables : David (joué par Jesse Eisenberg lui-même), qui a su dompter ses névroses pour entrer de plain-pied dans la vie adulte (il a un bon boulot, une femme et un enfant), et Benji (interprété par Kieran Culkin, de la série *Succession*), "adulescent" attardé aussi charmant qu'insupportable, mais dont les fougades cachent un vrai mal-être. David et Benji ont programmé ce voyage pour rendre hommage à leur grand-mère adorée, juive polonaise émigrée aux États-Unis au cours du vingtième siècle ; mais on va découvrir qu'il y a une autre raison, plus profonde, à ce voyage.

## ***Un "buddy movie"***

Centré sur la relation entre David et Benji, le film revisite le genre du *buddy movie*, qui oblige à cohabiter deux individus (souvent des hommes, le genre étant très majoritairement masculin...) aux antipodes l'un de l'autre. David et Benji se connaissent déjà et ont été proches l'un de l'autre (ils ont été élevés "comme des frères"), mais ils ont pris des chemins divergents à l'âge adulte, et l'enjeu du film est de renouer les fils distendus de leur relation. L'opposition propre au *buddy movie* est entièrement basée sur leurs caractères contrastés : Benji est aussi volubile, charmeur et sans-filtre que David est timide, respectueux et terne. On retrouve dans ce duo mal assorti l'opposition traditionnelle, héritée du cirque et du music-hall, entre l'Auguste (digne, sérieux, autoritaire) et le clown blanc (gaffeur, impertinent, incontrôlable).

« Un jour je suis tombé sur une publicité pour une entreprise qui proposait un circuit à travers les principaux sites polonais liés à l'Holocauste, mais avec tout le confort matériel attendu par un touriste américain relativement aisé. Je me suis dit que j'aurais pu faire partie de ces touristes, et j'ai compris que c'était un contexte formidable pour y situer ce film. »

Jesse Eisenberg





## *Un voyage mémoriel*

La richesse du film est de faire vivre et évoluer cette relation au sein d'une petite communauté de voyageurs, et sur fond de voyage mémoriel sur les traces traumatiques de la communauté juive polonaise. L'intelligence de Jesse Eisenberg est de ne pas trop appuyer le trait de la satire : il s'affranchit du cliché d'une Pologne post-communiste forcément grise et hostile (au contraire, l'image est plutôt lumineuse et colorée), et ne cherche pas à caricaturer ce groupe d'Américains en goguette. Le "casting" du groupe montre une palette assez riche de relations à la judéité : il y a bien sûr ceux qui viennent rendre hommage à leurs aïeux (qu'ils aient fuit les pogroms ou survécu à l'enfer des camps), comme Benji, David, Marsha la divorcée (Jennifer Grey) ou le couple tout ce qu'il y a de plus ordinaire des Mortinger (Liza Sadovy et David Oreskes).

Mais le groupe est complété et enrichi par la présence d'Eloge (Kurt Egyiawan), rescapé du génocide rwandais qui s'est converti au judaïsme, et cornaqué par James, guide aussi zélé qu'emprunté (Will Sharpe), anglais pur jus fasciné par la culture juive. Des rues pittoresques des anciens quartiers juifs de Lublin jusqu'aux glaçantes allées du camp d'extermination de Majdanek, le film pose, sous couvert de comédie (bercée par les notes de Frédéric Chopin, le plus illustre des compositeurs polonais), des questions, plus profondes qu'il n'y paraît, sur notre rapport à l'Histoire ou la transmission de la mémoire.

## *Entre grandes douleurs et petits enquinements*

L'équilibre, assez miraculeux, trouvé par le film, est à l'image de son titre polysémique (en anglais "A Real Pain" désigne une "vraie douleur", mais renvoie également à l'expression familière "he's a real pain" : "ce gars est pénible") : il navigue avec grâce et drôlerie entre les grandes douleurs (le souvenir traumatique de la Shoah, la dépression de Benji) et les petits enquinements, entre le trivial du quotidien et le tragique de l'Histoire, entre la légèreté de la comédie de caractère et la gravité d'une visite dans un des centres de mise à mort nazis.

« Le titre du film nous interroge sur la nature d'une véritable et légitime souffrance. David peut-il se permettre de ressentir la moindre peine liée à ses troubles obsessionnels compulsifs alors qu'il visite des sites où des actes de génocide ont été commis ? Son anxiété est-elle légitime face à la souffrance bien plus profonde de son cousin ? Voilà les questions que soulève le film. »

*Jesse Eisenberg*

## *Intérêt pédagogique du film*

Par ses thèmes et son traitement, le film **A Real Pain** pourra très bien s'intégrer dans les programmes d'Anglais de Seconde (Objet d'étude : "Le passé dans le présent") et du Cycle terminal ("Identités et échanges", "Territoires et mémoires"). Un travail interdisciplinaire pourra être mené avec le professeur d'Histoire, notamment en Terminale et pour les options HGGSP.



# Repères historiques



## *La communauté juive en Pologne*

Avant le déclenchement de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, plus de **3,3 millions de Juifs vivaient en Pologne**, pays qui abritait la plus grande population juive d'Europe et la deuxième communauté juive au monde. Au fil des siècles, des Juifs de toute l'Europe, persécutés dans leur pays, y avaient trouvé refuge, profitant d'un climat de relative tolérance (qui a cependant fluctué selon les époques). Cette diversité de groupes religieux et culturels avait fait de la Pologne un foyer important de la culture juive, qui rayonnait dans toute l'Europe.

**L'invasion de la Pologne par l'Allemagne nazie**, qui débute le 1<sup>er</sup> septembre 1939, marque une tragique rupture dans cette histoire millénaire. L'administration nazie divise la Pologne en 10 districts : ceux de l'ouest et du nord sont annexés au Reich allemand, ceux de l'Est cédés à l'Union soviétique en vertu du Pacte germano-soviétique. Le plus grand district, au centre du pays, comprenant les villes de Lublin, Cracovie et Varsovie, est institué en Gouvernement général et destiné à devenir une colonie de peuplement du Reich. Sous le nouveau joug nazi, les Juifs ne tardent pas à être l'objet d'exactions et de mesures discriminatoires. Pour mieux les contrôler et pour offrir plus d'espace aux colons allemands, l'administration allemande les parque dès la fin 1939 dans des ghettos au sein des principales villes du pays (Lodz, Varsovie, Lublin...). En 1942, tous les Juifs polonais sont soit enfermés dans des ghettos soit obligés de se cacher.

La mise au point par le Reich, après la Conférence de Wannsee (20 janvier 1942), de la "**solution finale de la question juive**" entraîne à partir de l'été 1942 la liquidation des ghettos : les Juifs sont envoyés dans les camps de concentration et d'extermination ou liquidés sur place, notamment à la suite de l'insurrection du ghetto de Varsovie en avril-mai 1943. La Pologne abrite alors les principaux camps de concentration (Lublin-Majdanek, Plaszow, Auschwitz-Birkenau) et d'extermination (Auschwitz, Majdanek, Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec) nazis. La machine de mort nazie tourne à plein régime jusqu'à la libération des camps par les armées alliées, décimant la population juive polonaise.

**À peine 11 % des Juifs de Pologne - 369 000 personnes - ont survécu à la guerre.**

Les survivants, confrontés après-guerre à un **antisémitisme persistant** (attisé par le régime communiste), ne cherchèrent pas à revenir et à reconstruire leurs communautés d'origine. Les vagues d'émigration, vers Israël et dans une moindre mesure les États-Unis, continuèrent à vider la Pologne de ses Juifs.

On estime aujourd'hui **la communauté juive polonaise à 25 000 membres au maximum.**



# Les lieux du film



## Varsovie et ses lieux de mémoire

La capitale de la Pologne était aussi la première ville juive d'Europe avant la 2<sup>e</sup> Guerre mondiale et le génocide nazi. Varsovie comptait alors 350 000 juifs, soit environ 30% de la population de la ville. En octobre 1940, le régime nazi décréta la création du ghetto de Varsovie, où s'entassèrent tous les Juifs habitant la ville et d'autres des environs, soit plus de 400 000 personnes dans une zone de 3 kilomètres carrés. Dans le film, David, Benji et leur groupe visitent les vestiges du ghetto, mais aussi deux monuments commémoratifs : le Monument aux héros du ghetto, édifié dès 1948, à proximité de l'endroit où commencèrent en avril 1943 les affrontements entre combattants juifs et soldats allemands, et le **Monument de l'insurrection de Varsovie (photo)**, inauguré en 1989.



## Lublin

Ville importante de l'est de la Pologne, Lublin a conservé un quartier ancien très pittoresque, qui permet de s'imaginer ce qu'était la vie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, notamment celle de la communauté juive. Les Juifs furent nombreux à s'établir à Lublin dès le XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle, et la ville devint un centre intellectuel et spirituel important, avec une imprimerie hébraïque et une école talmudique de grande renommée. Au moment de la déclaration de la guerre de 1939, 45 000 Juifs vivaient à Lublin. La ville comptait sept synagogues, un hôpital juif, une bibliothèque, des écoles etc. Dans le film, on peut voir la **porte Grodzka (photo)**, appelée également "porte juive" car elle marquait l'entrée dans le quartier juif, et le pittoresque cimetière de la rue Kalinowszczyzna, qui date du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle.

## Le camp de Majdanek

Le camp de Majdanek, appelé également Lublin-Majdanek, a la particularité d'être situé à proximité immédiate d'une ville importante, et non dans une zone reculée et abritée des regards. Comme Auschwitz, Majdanek était un camp de concentration qui servait également de centre de mise à mort. De 170 000 à 235 000 personnes moururent ou furent tuées à Majdanek, dont 60 000 à 80 000 Juifs. Le camp fut le premier libéré par l'Armée rouge, le 24 juillet 1944. Il avait été abandonné quelques jours plus tôt et les prisonniers transférés à Auschwitz, mais les nazis n'eurent pas le temps de détruire les installations, ce qui explique que le camp soit resté relativement bien conservé, avec ses baraquements, ses chambres à gaz, ses **fours crématoires** (la photo montre la cheminée du crématoire).



## I/ Before watching the film

### 1/ Take a look at the film poster.



### 1/ Pick out the following elements:

<b>Film title</b>
<b>Film director</b>
<b>Actors</b>
<b>Film reception</b>

2/ The film poster displays an illustration and not a film still or a photo. What difference does it make?

3/ Imagine the relationship between the two characters drawn on the poster. What do their appearances and expressions convey about the film? What conflict is evident in the poster?

4/ What persuasive techniques are used by the poster?

Does the poster use the names and images of popular actors?

Does it use genre conventions to appeal to fans of that genre? Does it pique our curiosity? Does it refer to other films the filmmaker made to appeal to fans of those films?



**5/** Focus on the film title. It refers to pain.  
What kind of pain can it be?

Read the definitions of the word pain.

## *pain*, noun

1 - a bad feeling in a part of your body when you are sick or hurt:

- stomach pains
- Are you in pain?
- I felt a sharp pain in my foot.

2 - sadness: I can't describe the pain I suffered when he died.

3 - be a pain (in the neck) - informal - to be annoying:  
My brother can be a real pain in the neck sometimes.

**6/** What kind of film do you expect to see?

**7/** Who do you think is the intended audience for the poster?

**B/** Another film poster was the one below.  
It did not use an illustration but a film still.



**1/** Compare the two film posters.

Do we find the same elements on each poster?

**2/** Which film poster makes the film more appealing to you? Why?



**c/** Watch the trailer of the film and answer the questions



<https://youtu.be/b2et8Vpu7Ls?si=z87-G88KjFgw07fe>

- 1/** What is the setting of the film?
- 2/** Who are the main characters?
- 3/** What is the link between the two characters and what relationship do they have?
- 4/** What is the mood of the film?
- 5/** What emotions do we see in the trailer?
- 6/** What kind of movie is it?
- 7/** Write a prediction for what the resolution might be.

## II/ “A tour about pain”

David, Benji and their traveling companions embark on a journey tracing Jewish history and culture in Poland. These tours are usually called “heritage tours” or “memory tours”.

### A/ The history of the Jewish community in Poland

Read this text and answer the questions

Before the outbreak of World War II, more than 3.3 million Jews lived in Poland, the largest Jewish population in Europe and the second-largest Jewish community in the world. Poland served as the center for Jewish culture, and a diverse population of Jews from all over Europe sought refuge there, contributing to a wide variety of religious and cultural groups.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Immediately, restrictions were placed on Polish Jews. All Jewish stores were forced to display a Star of David. Jews were not allowed to own bank accounts and they were barred from certain professions.

Under German occupation, Poland was divided into 10 administrative districts. The western and northern districts were annexed to the German Reich, and the eastern districts were ceded to the Soviet Union (according to the Molotov-Ribentrop agreement). The largest district, the central section including the cities of Lublin, Kraków, and Warsaw, was set aside as a German colony and came to be known as the General Government. Russia subsequently invaded Poland on September 17, 1939.

When the German-Russian War began, the areas previously controlled by Russia were incorporated into the Soviet Union. Of the 3.3 million Polish Jews at the outbreak of the war, about two million came under Nazi rule, and the remainder were under Soviet occupation.

To provide more “living space” for Germans, the Jews were removed from the Polish countryside and concentrated in the cities of the General Government. Ghettos were created in Lodz, Warsaw, Lublin, Radom, and Lvov. By 1942, all Polish Jews were either confined to ghettos or hiding.

That summer, the Nazis began liquidating the ghettos, and within 18 months, almost all of them had been emptied. The Warsaw ghetto uprising (April-June 1943) reverberated throughout Poland and the rest of the world as an example of courage and defiance.

Poland had three major Nazi concentration camps: Lublin-Majdanek, Plaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau. Poland also housed six German extermination camps: Auschwitz, Majdanek, Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobibor and Belzec.

Barely 11% of Poland’s Jews – 369,000 people – survived the war. Following the Holocaust, when Jewish individuals who fled from Poland attempted to return to their homes and villages, they faced a new wave of anti-Semitism. Most of these people chose then to go on to Israel, America, or any other country that would have them.

Approximately 20,000-25,000 Jews live in Poland today, mainly in Warsaw, but also in Krakow, Lodz, Breslau, and other cities. Even though the Jewish population is so small, Poles still hold anti-Semitic attitudes. A 2013 survey showed that 60% of Polish adults harbor resentment of Jews and believe in a global Jewish conspiracy.

**Source :** [https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/poland-virtual-jewish-history-tour?utm\\_content=c-mp-true](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/poland-virtual-jewish-history-tour?utm_content=c-mp-true)



## Questions

- 1/ How many Jews lived in Poland before World War II?
- 2/ How big was the Jewish community in Poland prior to World War II?
- 3/ When did Germany and Russia invade Poland?
- 4/ What were the first measures taken by the Nazis against the Polish Jews?
- 5/ How was Poland divided during the war?
- 6/ Why were ghettos created?
- 7/ Pick out the name of a very heroic act of Jewish resistance that happened in 1943.
- 8/ Give the names of three notorious Nazi concentration camps in Poland.
- 9/ Give the names of six German extermination camps in Poland.
- 10/ How many Polish Jews survived the Holocaust?
- 11/ How many Polish Jews were murdered during World War II?
- 12/ What problem do Polish Jews still face today in Poland?

# ACTIVITÉS PÉDAGOGIQUES

## B/ Places visited

1/ Match a picture and a monument or landmark that you saw in the movie.

- 1 The old Jewish cemetery in Lublin
- 2 The Majdanek concentration camp
- 3 The Grodzka Gate in Lublin
- 4 The Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw
- 5 The Warsaw Uprising Monument



2/ Which places belong to pre-WWII Jewish history, and which places relate to WWII and the genocide of the Jews?

3/ Do you remember in which places these sentences were uttered?

1 'On the other side of this threshold was the Jewish quarter.'

2 This is a sacred site where many thousands were murdered and I think you'll find this place kind of speaks for itself.'

3 'What I was going to suggest is that we could put a rock on Kopelman's headstone.'

4 And that's because this is a monument that celebrates the Jewish heroes that fought back against the Nazis.'

5 'Can you just get a picture of me then fighting with my Polish brethren?'



# ACTIVITÉS PÉDAGOGIQUES

## C/Who's who?

David, Benji and their fellow travellers are all connected to Jewish history and culture, but in different ways. Match each character in the photo and his/her name.

Four empty boxes for matching are positioned above the main photo. Three empty boxes for matching are positioned below the main photo. Red arrows indicate the connections between the characters in the photo and the boxes.

**Benji** (Kieran Culkin) and **David** (Jesse Eisenberg) are cousins. Their beloved grandmother Dory has recently passed away (=died) and part of her will was that the two of them revisit the places she lived in before she escaped to the USA.

**Dave** (Will Sharpe) is a British, Oxford-educated, Gentile (*non-Jewish*) tour guide fascinated by Jewish history.

**Marcia** (Jennifer Grey) is a divorcee who has recently moved back to New York. She is on the Holocaust tour to honor her mother who survived the camps.

**Eloge** (Kurt Egyiawan) is a Rwandan genocide survivor. He converted to Judaism because he felt a strong connection with the pains endured by Jewish people.

**Mark** (Daniel Oreskes) and **Diane** (Liza Sadovy) are a retired midwestern couple. Mark's family was from Lublin and emigrated to the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## D/ Memory tourism

1/ Explain why Benji is very upset on the train. What is he trying to say?



*I think we should move to another train car. You don't feel weird being in a first-class car? Does no else see the irony here? Like eating fancy food and sitting up here when 80 years ago, we'd have been herded into the back of these fucking things like cattle?*

2/ Here is a definition of a tourist: "Someone who visits a place for pleasure and interest, usually while on holiday." Can the characters in the film be considered as tourists?

Yes, they are just tourists because...	No, they are more than tourists because...

3/ Let's imagine you are going on a school trip to Poland for a Jewish heritage tour. You can only stay for 4 days. Which places would you like to discover? Have a look at some package tours online and find an itinerary and places to visit.

- [http://www.polandjewishheritagetours.com/Poland\\_Tour.php](http://www.polandjewishheritagetours.com/Poland_Tour.php)
- <https://www.momentumtours.com/jewish-heritage-tours-poland/>
- <https://heritageretreats.com/heritage-tour/>



# ACTIVITÉS PÉDAGOGIQUES



## III/ Benji and David's relationship

### A/ Two very different characters

The main plot of the film is based on the relationship between Benji and David, two cousins who used to be very close but who have grown apart.



#### 1/ David or Benji ?

	Benji	David
He lives in his aunt's basement.		
He lives in Brooklyn, New York.		
He lives in New Jersey.		
He is married and has a kid.		
He is currently single		
He was very close to his grandmother.		
He works in the advertisement industry.		
He is currently unemployed.		
He tried to commit suicide.		
He feels secretly guilty for his cousin's suicide attempt.		

#### 2/ Choose five adjectives in the list that best describe David and Benji.

*Adventurous - anxiety-ridden - caring - charming - considerate - endearing - energetic - fearless - flexible - foul-mouthed - free-spirited - fun - humorous - inhibited - kind - open-minded - original - passionate - stubborn - trustworthy - unconventional - witty - moody - sensitive*

#### 3/ Pick some information from questions 1 and 2 and write a portrait (10 lines) of Benji or David.

## B/ A buddy movie ?

You will find an analysis of "buddy movies" (or "buddy films") below.

1/ Read the text and underline the sentences that apply to the film *A Real Pain*.

### *"It's Still a Guy Thing: The Evolution of Buddy Movies"*

Patrick Goldstein - *The Los Angeles Times*

Westerns are dead. Detective movies are gone. Screwball comedies\* are kaput. But buddy films are still alive and well. (...)

Buddy films come in 57 varieties - the genre is elastic enough to include everything from *Some Like It Hot* and *The Man Who Would Be King* to *Easy Rider* and *Swingers* - but they are essentially fables about the foibles\* of the male species. (...) Whatever the film, the premise is the same: two wildly different men are thrown together, their relationship tested by events until they discover an unlikely affinity, forging a bond of friendship that replaces the customary boy-girl sexual union at picture's end.

The key to buddy movies is chemistry that derives from opposites that attract. It's why so many modern-day buddy films pair up black and white actors -the stark contrasts in racial style give the movies an extra kick.

Buddy pictures have always been a man's, man's world. Try to compile a list of female-driven buddy pictures: after you jot down\* *Thelma and Louise*, you may find hard to come up with more examples. (...) There's something quintessentially American about male bonding.

It flourished long before movies were even invented, dating at least as far back as Mark Twain, who created two pivotal buddy archetypes: Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer (...).

\* screwball comedy = used to describe a type of film in which there are funny characters and silly situations

\* buddy film = a film portraying a close friendship between two people

\* foible = slightly unusual or annoying habit

\* to jot down = noter

Source : adapted from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-oct-09-ca-54963-story.html>

2/ Does the film *A Real Pain* perfectly fit the description of buddy films? What is different and original in this movie?

3/ Can you give other examples of buddy movies?



## IV/ Reflecting on the film

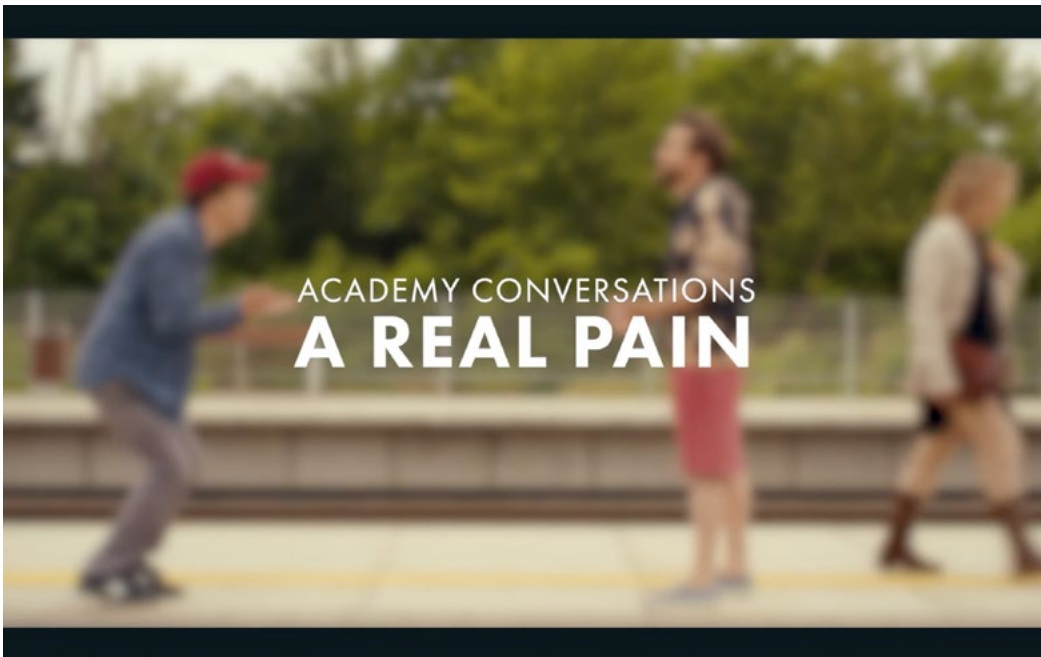
**1/** Now you've seen and studied the film, remember the question about the film title. Write a short essay to explain how meaningful and polysemic it is.

**2/** An autobiographical and personal movie

Let us watch filmmaker and actor Jesse Eisenberg speak about his 'autobiographical and personal movie'.

Anticipate the explanation Jesse Eisenberg will give :

<https://youtu.be/otTulfOsgOI?si=bwcZgtM06PowC1Rj>



**a/** Can you imagine what difference the filmmaker makes between autobiographical and personal? What may be autobiographical and what may be personal in his movie?

**b/** Watch the first two minutes (Stop at 1.55mn) and take notes. Share your notes with the class.

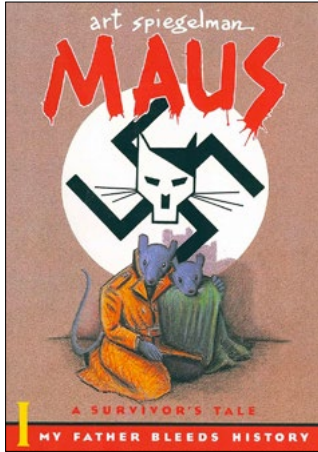
**c/** Now, you are going to watch the filmmaker speak about the representation of the Holocaust and more specifically about the Majdanek concentration camp in his movie. Do you think it is easy to represent the Holocaust in a movie? Why?

**d/** Can you imagine what decisions Jesse Eisenberg took for the filming of the shots in the concentration camp (think of the images - the music - the dialogues - the mood)? Do you remember what is shown in the movie?  
How must have the characters in the movie felt?

**e/** Watch another extract from the very same video (from 9.23 mn to the end) and find Jesse Eisenberg's and Kieran Culkin's answers to these questions.

## V/ Going further

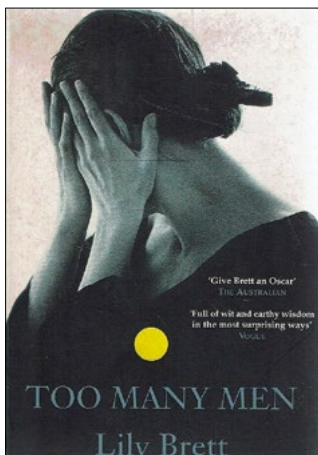
Here are the summaries of four books that deal with the same theme as the film: how the descendants of survivors of the Jewish genocide come to terms with their past.



### **Maus: A Survivor's Tale** By Art Spiegelman, 1980

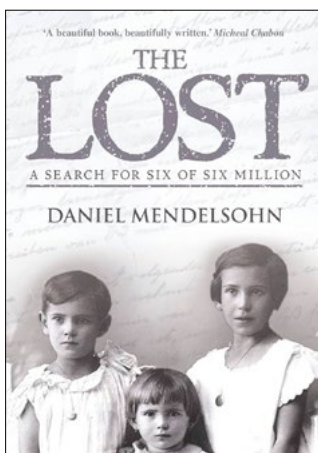
A brutally moving work of art –widely hailed as the greatest graphic novel ever written– Maus recounts the chilling experiences of the author's father during the Holocaust, with Jews drawn as wide-eyed mice and Nazis as menacing cats.

*Maus* is a haunting tale within a tale, weaving the author's account of his tortured relationship with his aging father into an astonishing retelling of one of history's most unspeakable tragedies. It is an unforgettable story of survival and a disarming look at the legacy of trauma.



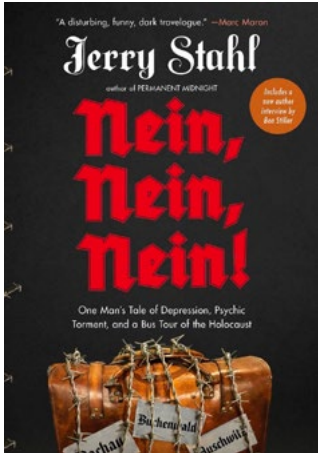
### **Too Many Men: A Novel** By Lily Brett, 2002

Ruth Rothwax, a successful woman with her own business, Rothwax Correspondence, can find order and meaning in writing words for other people –condolence letters, thank-you letters, even you-were-great-in-bed letters. But as the daughter of Edek Rothwax, an Auschwitz survivor with a somewhat idiosyncratic approach to the English language, Ruth can find no words to understand the loss of her family experienced during World War II. Ruth is obsessed with the idea of returning to Poland with her father, but she doesn't quite understand why she feels this so intensely. To make sense of her family's past, yes. To visit the places where her beloved mother and father lived and almost died, certainly. But she knows there's more to this trip. By facing Poland, and the past, she can finally confront her own future.



### **The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million** By Daniel Mendelsohn, 2006

This is the story of a young boy who grew up in a family haunted by the disappearance of six relatives during the Holocaust - an unmentionable subject that gripped his imagination from his earliest childhood. Years later, spurred on by tales of a terrible betrayal, Daniel Mendelsohn sets out to find the remaining witness to his relatives' fate. His quest takes him to dozens of countries before it finally leads him back to the small town where the story began - and found - in the passage of time.



## **Nein, Nein, Nein!: One Man's Tale of Depression, Psychic Torment, and a Bus Tour of the Holocaust** By Jerry Stahl, 2022

In september 2016, Jerry Stahl was feeling nervous on the eve of a two-week trip across Poland and Germany. But it was not just the stops at Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Dachau that gave him anxiety. It was the fact that he would be traveling with two dozen strangers, by bus. In a tour group. And he was not a tour-group kind of guy. The decision to visit Holocaust-world did not come easy. Stahl's lifelong depression at an all-time high, his career and personal life at an all-time low, he had the idea to go on a trip where the despair he was feeling out-of-control sadness, regret, and fear, not just for himself, but for the entire United States would be appropriate. And where was despair more appropriate than the land of the Six Million?

**1/** Fill in the table below.

Title	Author	Date of publication	Genre

**2/** If you had to choose one of these books to read, which one would it be, and why?



# ÉLÉMENTS DE CORRECTION

## I/ Before watching the film

A/ 1/

Film title	<i>A Real Pain</i>
Film director	Jesse Eisenberg
Actors	Jesse Eisenberg - Kieran Culkin
Film reception	The film received very good/positive reviews : ‘a masterpiece’ - ‘a delightful, funny and beautiful film’ - ‘a must-see’

2/. The film poster is original. It piques our curiosity. Two men seem to be going on a trip. The film may be a road movie or a buddy movie.

3/ There may be an imbalance between the two characters. One character seems to be a burden on the other. The one on top of the backpack may be bossy and assertive whereas the other character may be submissive and compliant. The one on top seems to be cool and laid-back even if he seems to be giving orders to the other character. The relationship between the two men may be dysfunctional/ strained/ tense.

4/. The poster taps into a nostalgia for holiday. We all have fond memories of trips. We also want to know more about the relationship between the two men.

The poster shows the name of Jesse Eisenberg, a popular actor. Jesse Eisenberg has become a household name in the film industry since starring in *The Social Network*. Kieran Culkin is not as famous as Jesse Eisenberg but he is a popular actor since starring in HBO TV show *Succession*.

5/ The film may be about pain, loss or suffering. One of the characters may be sick/ have a disease. One character may be *A Real Pain* for the other one. He may be annoying. He may drive the other character mad.

6/ I expect to see a road movie, a buddy film or a tragicomedy.

7/ The intended audience for the poster may be men or buddies.

## B/

1/ Both film posters seem to show the lead characters. The red color is used to indicate the film title. ‘A Real Pain’ may also be a quote from the movie. However, there are also some differences between the two film posters. One film poster seems to underscore the strained relationship between the two characters whereas the other poster seems to insist on the closeness between the two characters. The spatial closeness may suggest a special bond between the two men.

2/ The film poster that uses the illustration may be more appealing as it insists on the strained relationship between the two lead characters. It is more humorous and fun.

## C/

1/ The film is set in Poland.

2/ The two main characters are two American guys who seem to be mismatched.

3/ They are cousins.

4/ The film seems to be funny even if it explores trauma and the Holocaust.

5/ We experience a whole gamut of emotions, from joy to sorrow.

6/ It may be a road movie, a buddy movie or a tragicomedy.

7/ The trip may create a very special bond between the two cousins.

## II/ “A tour about pain”

### A/ The history of the Jewish community in Poland

1/ 3.3 million Jews lived in Poland before the outbreak of World War Two.

2/ Prior to World War Two, Poland was home to the largest Jewish community in Europe and to the second-largest community in the world.

3/ Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and Russia invaded Poland on September 17, 1939.

# ÉLÉMENTS DE CORRECTION

- 4/ Jews had to wear a yellow star. They could not own bank accounts. They were also excluded from many trades.
- 5/ Poland was divided into several districts. The western and northern districts were annexed to the German Reich whereas the eastern districts were occupied by the Soviet Union.
- 6/ Jews were forced into ghettos to be confined and segregated. They were concentrated in the cities of the General Government.
- 7/ The Warsaw ghetto uprising was a very heroic act of Jewish resistance.
- 8/ Three notorious Nazi concentration camps in Poland were Lublin-Majdanek, Plaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau.
- 9/ Six German extermination camps in Poland were Auschwitz, Majdanek, Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobibor and Belzec.
- 10/ Barely 11% of Poland's Jews - 369,000 people - survived the war.
- 11/ Around 3 million Jews were murdered during World War Two.
- 12/ Polish Jews still face high levels of antisemitism today.

## B/ Places visited

- 1/ 1. B. The old Jewish cemetery in Lublin
2. E. The Majdanek concentration camp
3. A. The Grodzka Gate in Warsaw
4. D. The Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw
5. C. The Warsaw Uprising Monument

2/ The old Jewish cemetery in Lublin and the Grodzka Gate in Warsaw belong to pre-WWII Jewish history and the Majdanek concentration camp, the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw and the Warsaw Uprising Monument relate to WWII and the genocide of the Jews.

3/ 'Can you just get a picture of me then fighting with my Polish brethren?' = the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw

'What I was going to suggest is that we could put a rock on Kopelman's headstone.' = the old Jewish cemetery in Lublin

'On the other side of this threshold was the Jewish quarter.' = the Grodzka Gate in Warsaw

'And that's because this is a monument that celebrates the Jewish heroes that fought back against the Nazis.' = the Warsaw Uprising Monument

'This is a sacred site where many thousands were murdered and I think you'll find this place kind of speaks for itself.' = the Majdanek concentration camp

## C/ Who's who?

From left to right: Benji, Elogé, David, Mark, Marcia, Diane and Dave

## D/ Memory tourism

1/ Benji is upset because he feels privileged sitting in a first-class car. He remembers the past and how Jewish people were herded like cattle into cramped trains to be sent off to concentration camps or extermination camps. He thinks their trip is too luxurious.

2/

Yes, they are just tourists because...	No, they are more than tourists because...
They are visiting Poland. They are on a Holocaust tour.	They are on a fact-finding trip. They want to learn more about the Polish Jews and Jewish history and the Holocaust. Their experience during the trip is sometimes harrowing. Some of the characters in the film have Polish ancestors and the trip is very personal.

## III/ Benji and David's relationship

### A/ Two very different characters

1/

	Benji	David
He lives in his aunt's basement.	X	
He lives in Brooklyn, New York.		• X
He lives in New Jersey.	X	
He is married and has a kid.		• X
He is currently single	X	
He was very close to his grandmother.	X	
He works in the advertisement industry.		• X
He is currently unemployed.	X	
He tried to commit suicide.	X	
He feels secretly guilty for his cousin's suicide attempt.		• X

2/ Many answers are acceptable.

Benji: endearing, free-spirited, foul-mouthed, charming, sensitive

David: anxiety-ridden, inhibited, kind, trustworthy, respectful

3/ Example: Benji is a Jewish man who has decided to go on a trip to Poland with his cousin David. Benji has always been very close to his Polish grandmother and he wants to (re)discover his roots and he wants to see the house where his grandmother lived. He is very endearing and charming but he is also mentally unstable. He has tried to commit suicide . He can be A Real Pain and a burden to his cousin David. David feels secretly guilty for Benji's suicide attempt. The two cousins are not as closed as they were in the past.

### B/ A buddy movie ?

1/ 'Whatever the film, the premise is the same: two wildly different men are thrown together, their relationship tested by events until they discover an unlikely affinity, forging a bond of friendship that replaces the customary boy-girl sexual union at picture's end.'

'The key to buddy movies is chemistry that derives from opposites that attract.'

'Buddy pictures have always been a man's, man's world.'

2/ The film *A Real Pain* fits the description of buddy films. What is different in this movie is that the two cousins are reunited for a holiday but they seem to drift apart again at the end.

3/ Many examples are available !

### IV/ Reflecting on the film

1/ The film is about pain, the pain that Jewish Poles experienced in the past. It is also about a strong and sometimes tense relationship between two cousins. Benji is A Real Pain in the neck sometimes but he can also be charming and a bundle of laugh. Both cousins love each other even if sometimes one can drive the other one mad. This film is intense and very emotional.

2/ Jesse Eisenberg may say that he has a relative that survived the Holocaust. He may also have met survivors of the Holocaust and heard them tell him their personal stories. He may be a Polish Jew who has emigrated to the USA.

a/ Some stories and details may be autobiographical, and drawn from Jesse Eisenberg's real life story. Other elements may be personal, that is to say very deep and intense personal emotions or feelings.



# ÉLÉMENTS DE CORRECTION

b/ Jesse Eisenberg says that his movie is both autobiographical and personal. The autobiographical elements include - the house they visit at the end of the movie, which is the house his family lived in; - the towns they visit are the towns his family is from; - the trip they do is a trip he and his wife did in 2008; - and the child in the movie is his own kid.

The things that are personal are all the emotions behind the movie. Jesse Eisenberg is a person with anxiety, a person who faces a dilemma as he lives in a modern world and is comfortable materially but his family experienced pain and thus, he feels guilty about it. He also admires and envies people like his cousin and he feels frustrated that people like this exist in the real world.

b/ It must be very difficult to represent the Holocaust as it is a very harrowing story and it is hard to portray it. The filmmaker must also think about the intended audience. Will children watch the movie? The filmmaker must find reliable testimonies and primary or reliable sources about the Holocaust and he must tell the truth.

c/ Jesse Eisenberg must have wanted to keep these shots simple with no or little music, a few words and a gloomy atmosphere. I remember that the scene shot in the concentration camp is very short. The characters must have experienced pain/ must have had a harrowing experience as the film was shot on location in the Majdanek concentration camp.

d/ Jesse Eisenberg explains that he had to negotiate for a long time before being allowed to shoot his movie in a concentration camp. He felt very lucky to be able to shoot on location. He was tempted to shoot long sequences in the concentration camp as all the buildings and all the barracks were worth seeing but he resisted this temptation. He says that the scene shot in the concentration camp was the most dramatic scene in the movie but that it was not the core of the movie. The core of the movie is the relationship between the characters. Finding the right way to represent the concentration camp was hard and Jesse Eisenberg decided to put no music, no dialogue, no stylised shots, no close-ups of people in this specific scene and to limit the scene to 4 minutes.

Kieran Culkin adds that the film crew had a harrowing experience when they visited the concentration camp as they experienced it in real time and they were not on a movie set.

## V/ Going further

Title	Author	Date of publication	Genre
<i>Maus: A Survivor's Tale</i>	Art Spiegelman	1980	Comic book
<i>Too many men:</i> <i>A novel</i>	Lily Brett	2002	Novel
<i>The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million</i>	Daniel Mendelsohn	2006	Memoir / postmemorial autobiography
<i>Nein, Nein, Nein!: One Man's Tale of Depression, Psychic Torment, and a Bus Tour of the Holocaust</i>	Jerry Stahl	2022	Memoir / humour

# *Crédits*

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pour le site [www.zerodeconduite.net](http://www.zerodeconduite.net)

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