



# A Study on the Influence of Holocaust Fiction on Public Memory

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## 1. Background

- Holocaust fictions blurs the lines between fiction and reality
- Still proves one of the most popular genres
- Its potential negative influence on public memory of the Holocaust needs to be explored
- 100 people born between 1941 and 2005 were asked to fill out a questionnaire on their engagement with the Holocaust

## 2. Questions and Aim

1. Is fiction perceived as reliable source of information on the Holocaust?
  2. Do people read/watch it to educate themselves?
  3. How confident is the public in differentiating between fact and fiction?
- Assessing the potential of fiction to negatively influence the public memory of the Holocaust

## 3. Critical engagement with Holocaust fiction

### a) Most popular forms of introduction to the Holocaust

1. Oral history through the family (27%)
2. Novels (26%)
  - i) *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, mentioned 11/26 times
  - ii) *Diary of a Girl* by Anne Frank, mentioned 11/26 times

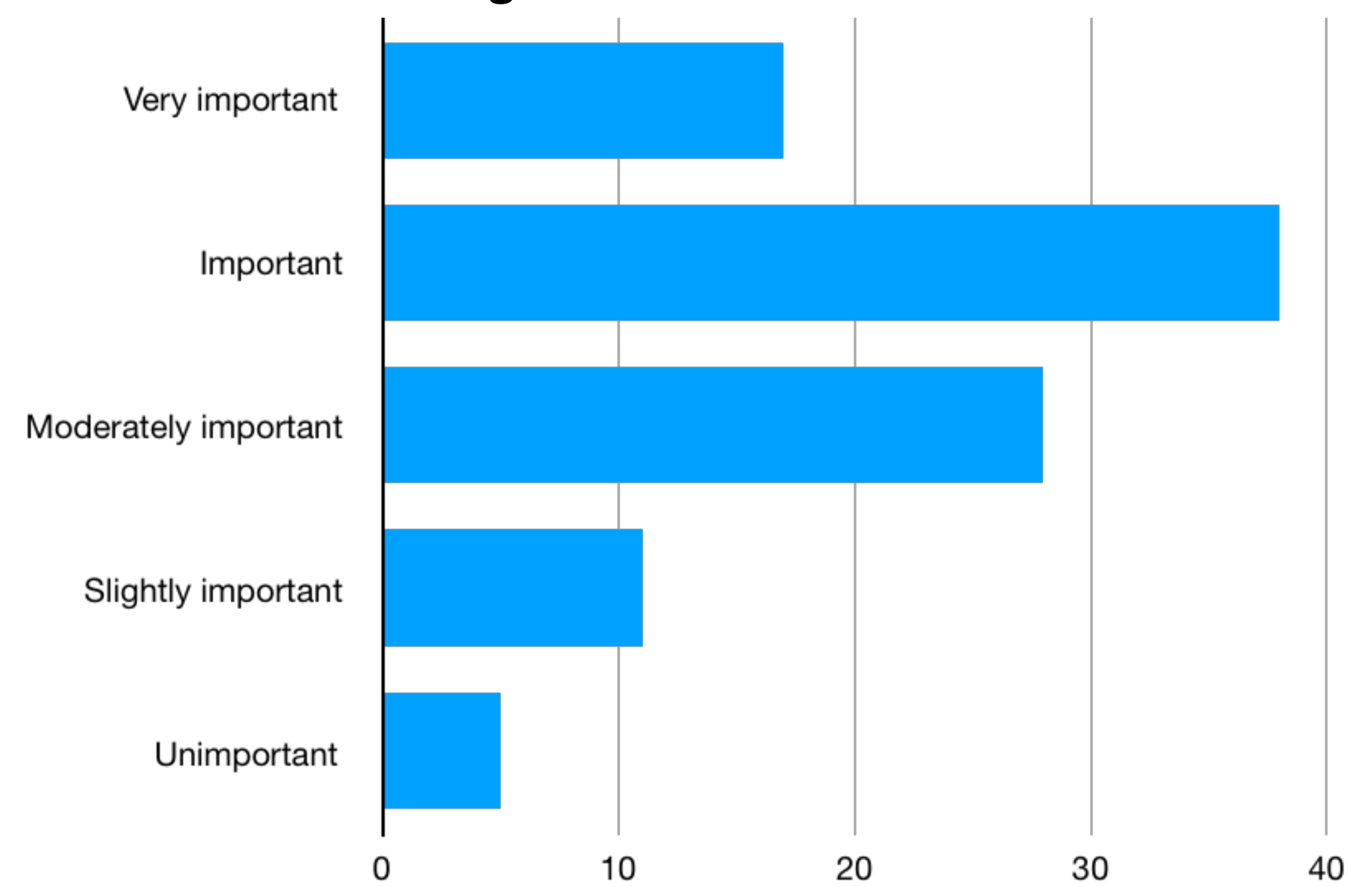
### b) Engagement with publications on the Holocaust

Number of publications	0	1-3	4-6	7-9	10+
Novels	23	50	17	5	4
Memoirs	52	37	7	2	2
Feature films	6	60	22	3	9
Documentaries	18	46	16	6	14

### c) Reasons for engaging with popular novels and Holocaust movies

1. To educate themselves: 35
2. Interest in history: 21
3. Required in school: 15
4. Fascination/Curiosity: 12
5. Entertainment/Fun: 8

### d) Importance of popular novels and movies for their personal understanding of the Holocaust

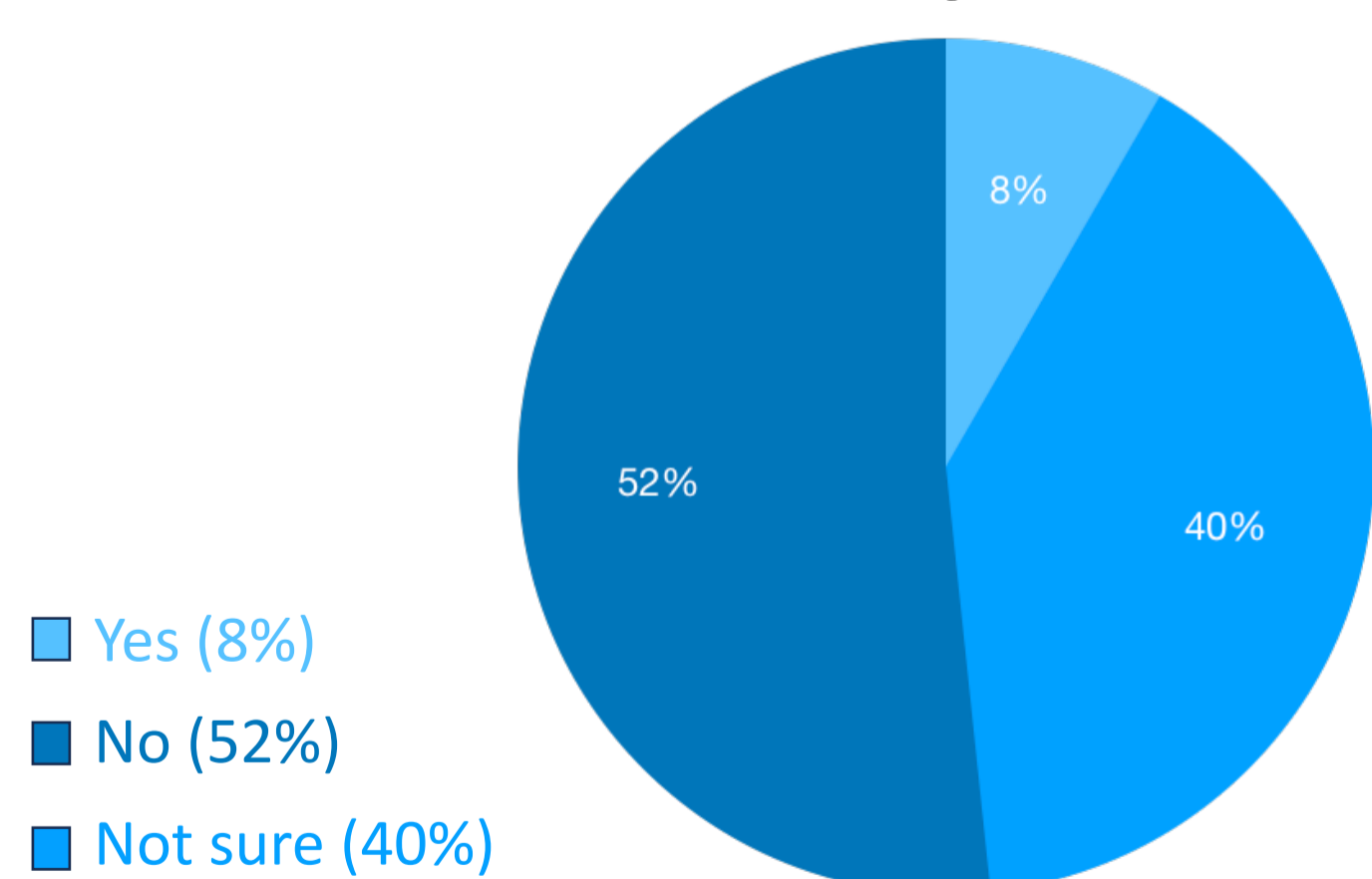


### e) Personal ability to differentiate between fact and fiction

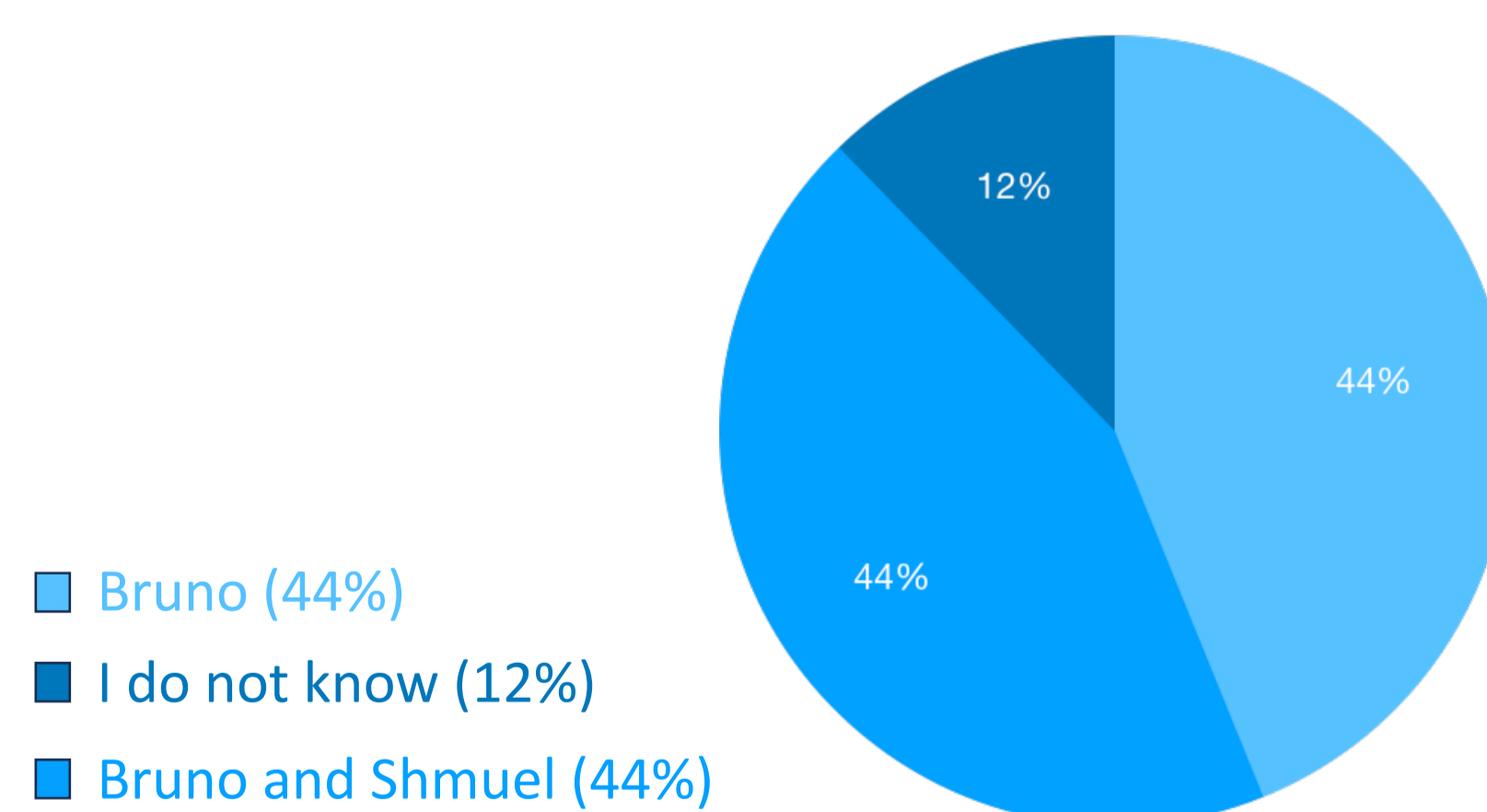
- 34 answered that they could **always** or **often** differentiate between factual and fictional elements within novels and movies
- 1/3 of those answered only 50% or less of the basic knowledge questions on the Holocaust correctly making their personal assessment of their ability questionable

## 4. Example: John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*

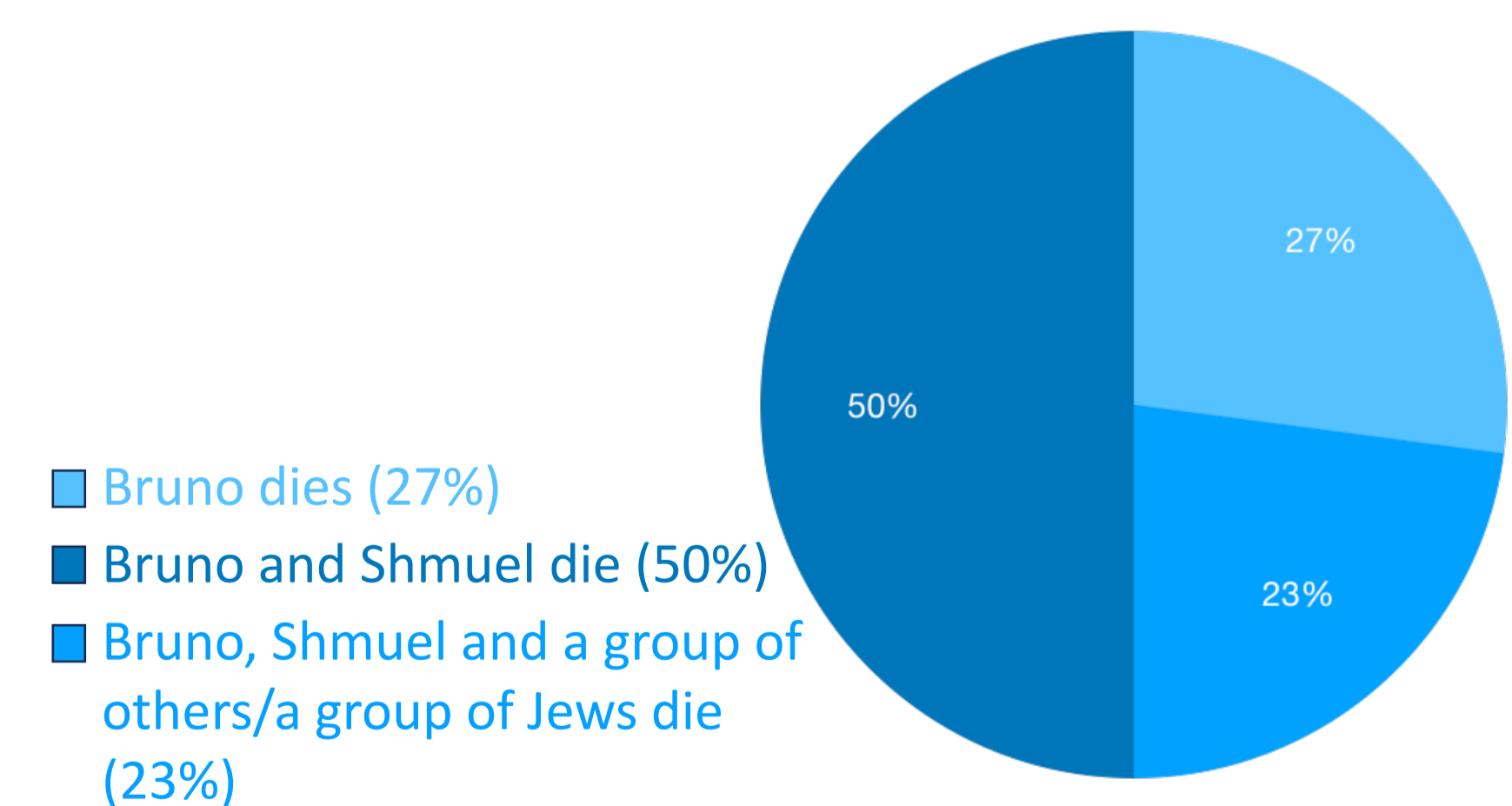
### Is the story fictional?



### Who is at the centre of the story?



### How does the story end?



## 5. Conclusions according to this survey

- Novels and feature films make the most popular publications among participants
- Used mainly to educate themselves or further explore their interest in history, treating fiction as a reliable source of information
- Participant's confidence in differentiating fact from fiction is unrealistic as the general educational level on the Holocaust does not match this perception

- Applied to examples of fiction this means, the actual victims are forgotten about and the focus is shifted while nearly half of participants are unsure about or believe in the publication's legitimacy
- ➔ **High potential to influence the public memory of the Holocaust negatively due to its serious reputation within society and by introducing incorrect narratives and information to consumers**

## Acknowledgements