

# One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was born in Stavropol Krai, Russia, in 1918. He was raised by his mother after his father was killed in a hunting accident, and she encouraged his interests in literature and science. Solzhenitsyn studied mathematics at Rostov State University, while simultaneously studying literature and history at the Moscow Institute of Philosophy. Solzhenitsyn served in the Red Army during WWII, and during this time, began developing doubts regarding the moral foundations of the Soviet Regime. In 1945, Solzhenitsyn was sent to a work camp for writing derogatory remarks about Joseph Stalin in a private letter to a friend. He was detained at several camps before transferring to a “special camp” for political prisoners, where he worked as a miner, bricklayer, and foreman. After being released, Solzhenitsyn was exiled. During his imprisonment and exile, Solzhenitsyn abandoned his Marxist ideologies, gradually developing a philosophical Christian outlook. After Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” in 1956, Solzhenitsyn was exonerated, and returned to European Russia where he began teaching and writing at night. In 1962, Solzhenitsyn published his first story, *One Day in the life of Ivan Denisovich* in *Novyi Mir*, a popular Russian literary journal, granting Solzhenitsyn literary notoriety in the Soviet Union and in the West. Although Solzhenitsyn continued writing, after Khrushchev was ousted in 1964 his work was denied publication. The controversial works Solzhenitsyn wrote after *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* lead to great controversy and even an assassination attempt by the KGB and the eventual removal of his Russian citizenship. In 1990, his Russian citizenship was reinstated, and he returned to Russia where he died of heart failure in 2008.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*One day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was inspired by Solzhenitsyn’s personal experience while incarcerated in the Soviet Gulag system, which was active from the 1930’s through the 1950’s. Stalin’s regime was notorious for detaining Russian civilians without due cause, and the experiences of the characters in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* depict the injustice and abuse of power inflicted upon Russian citizens during Stalin’s reign. WWII plays an important role in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, as many of the characters were serving in the military prior to their incarceration. During and after WWII, the number of inmates in forced work camps rose drastically. Like Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, the novel’s

protagonist, Solzhenitsyn was a soldier in the Russian army during WWII and was incarcerated while serving.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As a work exploring the experience of incarceration, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* joins a long list of prison novels written in the 20th century that deal with issues of survival under inhuman conditions during incarceration, including, *Papillion* by Henri Charriere, *The Survivor* by Terrence Des Pres, and even films such as *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Great Escape*. As a criticism of Communist ideologies, Solzhenitsyn’s work joins Russian novels such as Andrei Platonov’s *The Foundation Pit*, and Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*, as well as works of American and English literature, such as George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Finally, as a text that revolves around a man’s search for meaning, the novel’s existential nature connects to works such as Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, and the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre and other Existentialists.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
- **When Written:** 1959-1962
- **Where Written:** Ryazan, Russia
- **When Published:** 1962
- **Genre:** Realism, Historical Fiction, Russian Literature
- **Setting:** A Soviet work camp (Gulag) known as H.Q. in an unspecified location in Russia
- **Climax:** The building of the wall in the power station, followed by Shukhov’s close call with being late for the head count
- **Antagonist:** The Soviet Regime, the camp, and the guards (embodied by Lieutenant Volkovoy)
- **Point of View:** A blend of limited omniscient, first person (narrated by Shukhov), and second person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Censorship.** Beginning with Stalin’s rise to power during the 1920’s, literature was subjected to immense censorship, especially literature that questioned the moral foundations of Stalin’s ideologies or revealed the oppression Russian citizens experienced under his rule. Under the Stalinist regime, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* would have never seen the light of day, but when Nikita Khrushchev took power in Russia, he denounced Stalin, and literary censorship was greatly reduced. In 1962, Khrushchev gave Solzhenitsyn’s novel his official sanction, viewing the book as an asset in his goal of denouncing

Stalin. Although the book found publication with Khrushchev's approval, there are still some scholars who believe the book would have been bolder had it not been limited by the still present system overseeing publications at the time the work was released.

**The Skaz.** In *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Solzhenitsyn employs a narrative technique called, the *Skaz*. This technique is a variation on traditional forms of Russian narrative, often used in Russian folktales. In this form, the anonymous narrator possesses the same educational and social background as the characters in the story, is able to relate the main character's actions, and relay his or her thoughts. *Skaz* narratives use a close third-person point of view, and sometimes the first-person plural, allowing the reader to feel close to the characters, and even give the impression that the narrator is actually a character in the story.



## PLOT SUMMARY

At five o'clock in the morning, Ivan Denisovich Shukhov awakes to the morning reveille in a Soviet labor camp. Shukhov always wakes up on time, but this morning he is feverish and his body aches. He decides to stay in bed for a few extra moments of rest, believing that a sympathetic guard is on duty that morning. Just as Shukhov decides to report sick, his blanket is torn off of him, and he realizes another guard, The Tartar, is on duty. The Tartar punishes Shukhov with three days in solitary confinement. As The Tartar walks Shukhov through the camp, Shukhov realizes that he will not be sent to solitary, but will clean the floor of the officers' headquarters instead. They pass a group of guards checking the temperature, which is negative seventeen and a half degrees. Shukhov removes his shoes and cleans the floor quickly. Then, he makes his way to the mess hall for breakfast.

A fellow prisoner, Fetyukov, has saved Shukhov's meal for him, a soup made with black cabbage and putrid fish. Shukov takes out his **spoon**, which he calls "his baby", removes his hat, and eats. After eating, Shukhov heads to the sick bay to report sick for work that day. The medical orderly, Kolya, tells Shukhov that it's too late to report sick, and he should have come the night before. He takes Shukhov's temperature, but it is not high enough to exempt him from work. Shukhov returns to the barracks to join his work gang before the count. Shukhov is given his daily **bread** ration, which he breaks in half, sewing half into his mattress and putting the other half in his coat. The men are then called out into the cold and forced to take their jackets off in the frigid air for the search. One prisoner, Buynovsky, is sentenced to ten days in solitary for wearing extra layers. Shukhov, however, gladly accepts the search, knowing he has nothing to hide.

The gang then begins the grueling march to work. Shukhov's

back aches as he marches, so he begins to reflect on his separation from his family. He states that there is no sense in writing to them since he has nothing to write about. He has more to talk about with his fellow prisoners than his family. He remembers the last letter his wife wrote him in which she suggested he take up rug dying, a new way to earn quick money in the village where he is from. Shukhov finds this idea insulting, as he would rather use his skills in the trades to earn money.

The prisoners arrive at the work site, and Shukhov notices that Alyoshka, a devout Baptist, is smiling and seemingly happy to be at work. The gang is assigned to work on a power station. Tyurin, the foreman of Shukhov's gang, gang 104, assigns Shukhov and Kildigs the task of covering the power station's windows to warm up the space. Shukhov retrieves a trowel he has hidden, and the men retrieve a hidden roll of tarred paper and cover the windows. Then Shukhov is tasked with fixing the stove. A teenaged prisoner, named Gopchik, helps Shukhov. Gopchik asks Shukhov to teach him to make a **spoon** out of a length of wire he has stolen. Meanwhile, Tyurin decides to wait until after lunch to begin laying bricks. Before lunch, the gang takes a quick break. Kildigs mentions that Shukhov is almost done with his sentence in the camp, and Shukhov reveals that he was imprisoned after being wrongly accused of being a spy during WWII.

At lunch, Shukhov manages to swipe a second helping of food, which fills him up. On the way back to work, Shukhov finds a piece of scrap metal in the snow and hides it, hoping to make a knife out of it. The men gather around the stove to warm up before starting work again. Tyurin tells the story of his unjust incarceration for being the son of a wealthy peasant. He, like the other prisoners, is confined without due cause. Shukhov notes that the men of gang 104 respect Tyurin and work hard for him because he is a fair leader who cares about the welfare of his men. The men begin working on the wall of the power station. Pavlo, the deputy foreman, works with the rest of the men, although it is not required for him to help. Shukhov notes that the men respect him for working alongside them, and men will work hard for a foreman they respect. The time moves quickly as Shukhov works, and he takes great pride in his skills.

When the work day ends, Shukhov hangs back to make sure his work is solid and hide his trowel, even though he is risking punishment for being late for the count. Shukhov is almost unable to get back to his gang for the count, but is saved when it is stalled because the guards discover a man is missing from one of the gangs. The man, who had fallen asleep during work, is found and the other prisoners berate and physically assault him for wasting their time.

Upon returning to the camp, the prisoners are searched again. Shukhov submits to his search, but quickly remembers the piece of metal he has hidden in his mitten. He prays that the guard will not find the metal, and providentially, the guard does not discover the contraband. Once Shukhov has been cleared,

he volunteers to save a place in line at the parcel room for Tsezar, a fellow prisoner who receives regular **parcels**, in hopes of receiving a cut for his service. When Tsezar arrives to claim his place in line, Shukhov heads to the mess hall. The men are being admitted in pairs instead of singly, creating a chaotic scene. Inside, Shukhov joins his gang, and is awarded with extra **bread** because of his work that day. When he is finished eating, he takes Tsezar's ration to the barracks. Having received a **parcel**, Tsezar allows Shukhov to keep his supper ration.

Another count is conducted. Afterward, Shukhov gets into bed, even though a second count is imminent. When the second roll call is conducted, Tsezar panics, as the contents of his parcel are out and will be stolen if he doesn't hide them. Shukhov offers to hide the parcel in his bunk. Afterward, Tsezar gives Shukhov a piece of sausage and a couple of biscuits. Before sleeping, Shukhov thanks God for allowing him to survive another day. Alyoshka the Baptist overhears his prayer and begins talking to Shukhov about God. He tells Shukhov that a man should only pray for his daily **bread**. Shukhov misunderstands, and asks Alyoshka if he means his daily ration. Alyoshka explains he is talking about **bread** that feeds the spirit. After hearing Alyoshka's message, Shukhov offers him one of the biscuits he received from Tsezar. After, he reflects that his day was an "almost good one". The narrator concludes by stating that this was only one day of 3,653 left in Shukhov's sentence.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Ivan Denisovich Shukhov** – The novel's protagonist, Shukhov is a prisoner in a Soviet Gulag in 1951. Shukhov's experience represents that of the typical Russian subjected to incarceration in the soviet Gulag system. He is an uneducated, but skilled, working-class man. Shukhov was wrongly accused of betraying the Soviet Union during WWII, and forced to testify against himself to save his own life. Shukhov is strictly principled, proud of his skills in the trades, and determined to maintain his dignity.

**Tyurin** – The foreman of Gang 104, the work gang to which Shukhov belongs in the Gulag. Tyurin is a strict, but noble leader. As the foreman of the gang, he is a sort of father figure within the group, holding the welfare of the men in the forefront of his mind. Because of his dedication to the gang, Shukhov and other members of the gang respect him and follow his commands. Even though Tyurin holds a leadership role within the gang, he is also unjustly imprisoned, like the other men, simply for being the son of Kulak—an affluent farmer class that Stalin had vowed to eliminate. This experience allows him to be both a leader and an individual who identifies with the men he oversees.

**Buynovsky** – Also known as "The Captain" because of his naval background, Buynovsky has not been in the Gulag as long as Shukhov and other characters. Despite his education and esteemed naval background, he struggles to adapt to life as a Zek, and his pride lands him in solitary by the end of the novel. Shukhov notes that Buynovsky has the potential to become a hardy Zek, but through the novel he barks orders at his fellow prisoners as he would have in the Navy and expends his energy too quickly during the day, depicting the way one's identity and values outside of the camp are not beneficial on the inside. Buynovsky's character shows the difficulty prisoners experience in shedding their identities and adapting to life in the camp.

**Tsezar** – A privileged member of Gang 104, Tsezar is an educated, worldly man, who receives parcels on a regular basis. The contents of his parcels make him the envy of the other gang members and he uses the items he gets in the parcels to attain privileged positions within the camp. Like Buynovsky, however, Tsezar struggles to adapt to camp life and feels superior to the other Zeks. Although he is intelligent, Tsezar's lack of "street smarts" make him unable to take care of himself in the Gulag. Shukhov recognizes Tsezar's vulnerability and looks out for him, which entitles Shukhov to a cut in Tsezar's goods. In the end, Tsezar's pride is leveled when he must depend on Shukhov, who he considers inferior, to protect his possessions.

**Alyoshka** – Also known as "Alyoshka The Baptist," he is a devoutly religious member of Gang 104. Alyoshka holds a vastly different view of the Gulag than the other characters, viewing his sentence not as unjust imprisonment but rather as a means for salvation. He sees the Gulag as providing him the ideal setting to develop spiritually, as he is denied material possessions and temptations, which would distract him on his spiritual journey. Alyoshka's perspective of the camp as a cross he bears for God allows him to find purpose and happiness in the Gulag, which Shukhov notices and is intrigued by. Shukhov recognizes that Alyoshka's humility leads to vulnerability in the hostile environment, but in the end, Shukhov is inspired to give freely of himself after hearing Alyoshka's spiritual message.

**Fetyukov** – Known by Shukhov as "The Scrounger", he depicts the way the Gulag ravages an individual's dignity. As opposed to Shukhov, who takes pride in his resourcefulness, skills, and principals, Fetyukov is constantly begging and scrounging for food, cigarettes, and other supplies. What goods he does receive through scrounging and begging, which amounts to quite a bit considering the poverty of the camp, he hoards for himself. His lousy work ethic also contrasts the pride and effort Shukhov puts into his work, leading to a general sense of disrespect from his fellow Zeks.

**Pavlo Pavlo** – The deputy foreman of Gang 104. Although is a younger prisoner, he is not afraid to command the men working under him and does not flinch when standing up to authority

figures. Although Pavlo is a natural leader, he is polite and kind, which Shukhov sees as a deficit in the cutthroat environment of the Gulag. Despite this perceived shortcoming, Pavlo's fairness, patience, and mercy toward his fellow gang members make him a respected leader. And, as Shukhov notes, a Zek will break his back for a foreman he admires.

**Kildigs** – A Latvian prisoner and skilled mason, Kildigs' skills in the trades and good sense of humor gain him Shukhov's respect and make him a popular member of Gang 104. Shukhov notes that Kildigs has a sense of humor because he receives parcels that help meet his needs, and his character represents the relationship between happiness and the meeting of one's basic needs.

**Gopchik** – A sixteen-year-old boy imprisoned for bringing milk to nationalist rebels hiding in the forest. Gopchik's adult sentence to serve in the Gulag despite his status as a child depicts the unyielding tyranny and lack of compassion of the Soviet regime. Gopchik is still innocent, and has not yet been hardened by life in the Gulag, but like Shukhov, he is resourceful and hard working. Shukhov is fond of Gopchik because of these traits, and knows Gopchik will make a good prisoner in time. Gopchik also reminds Shukhov of his own son, who died young, and can be viewed as a representation of Shukhov as a younger man.

**Senka** – A deaf prisoner and member of gang 104. Because of his hearing impairment, Senka is largely isolated from the group and doesn't communicate much. What the gang does know of his story, his adventures in battle, escapes from the Nazi's and the brutality he has experienced at the hands of his captors inspires a sense of intrigue from the other gang members. Senka's hearing impairment and isolation within the group depicts the way in which Zeks struggle to know each other on a deep interpersonal level. Even though other prisoners would like to know more about him, they are unable to learn about him because of his impairment.

**The Two Estonians** – Described as being like brothers, the two Estonians are always considered as a single unit. These two men are not actually brothers, and in fact only met when they both were sent to the camp. They share everything, speak to one another in their native tongue, and even sleep beside one another. These men survive the brutal conditions of the camp by depending on one another, offering a contrast to the "Every man for himself" atmosphere of the Gulag, and showing an alternative means to survive. Likewise, their connection through their national background shows that although the camp is designed to strip one's identity, bonds still form based upon past identifications.

**Kolya** – A medical orderly in the Gulag, who in reality had no medical training at all before coming to the camp. The camp Doctor instructed him to lie about his literary background and claim to be a medical orderly so he could work in the sick bay and write poetry on the side. When Shukhov visits Kolya in the

morning, Kolya is vaguely sympathetic, but he seems more concerned with his poetry than Shukhov's ailment. Kolya's concern for his art over Shukhov's real life problems alludes to Solzhenitsyn's critique of art and artists that do not deal with the real suffering of individual people.

**Lieutenant Volkovoy** – The disciplinary officer in the camp and the cruelest of all of the guards present in the novel. Volkovoy exercises his power and force simply because he can. In the past, he has carried a whip he used to lash prisoners just to watch them bleed. Volkovoy's character represents the way in which having power leads to cruelty, oppression, and violence. Volkovoy, however, is not immune to the dangers of camp life. The narrator suggested that he stopped carrying his whip because men were getting their throats slit in the camp while sleeping, and Volkovoy was fearful that he might be next. In this way, Volkovoy's cruelty can also be seen as an attempt to maintain his power through overt violence and oppressive acts.

**DerDer** – A building-foreman who is despised by the other Zeks, is egotistical because of his position of power within the camp. He wears a new, clean regulation coat, and a leather hat, but like the other men, his hat has a white number printed on it. Der is big headed, but unskilled when it comes to labor, which leads Shukhov to resent him. Der attempts to punish Tyurin for using the felt to cover the window, but Tyurin's men step up and protect him, revealing how an individual's sense of having power in the Gulag (as Der does) does not always align with reality.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Stepan Grigorich** – A doctor at the camp who believes that work is the best remedy for illness.

**The Tartar** – A guard who doles out unfair punishments to the prisoners.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### POWER AND AUTHORITY

The theme of power and authority exists on several levels in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. In the most visible sense, power and authority rest in the hierarchical structure existing among the camp's inhabitants—the Zeks (prisoners) existing at the bottom, with the guards, wardens, officials, and commandants above them. On another level, however, the camp can be viewed as a

microcosm of the Soviet Union under Stalin's regime, which is the force that creates the conditions for such a camp to exist in the first place. In this larger picture, the Soviet state stands as the ultimate power and authority over both the officials and prisoners of the camp.

The fact that the camp is a "special camp", designed to punish political prisoners, suggests that the purpose of the camp is to align rebellious individuals with the Soviet Government's ideologies—the ideal being a non-hierarchical collective society where each man works for the good of the state. This ideal, however, is foiled by the conditions of the camp. The Zeks are unjustly incarcerated for crimes that one might consider ridiculous. Gopchik is imprisoned for taking milk to freedom fighters hiding in the woods, Shukhov was falsely accused of being a spy, and Tyurin is punished simply for being the son of a rich peasant father—a social class that Stalin vowed to eliminate. The very fact of their awful existence in the camp is rooted in the abuse of power and authority. The guards, wardens, officials, and commandants act as an oppressive power over the Zeks, but they too are oppressed by the power of the Soviet state, which dictates their lives. As is common with instances of oppression, the guards, who are oppressed by the state, become brutal oppressors over the prisoners, clinging to what power they do possess.

Driven by their sense of power and authority, the camp officials create a laundry list of absurd rules that actually impede the prisoners' ability to survive and function within the Soviet ideal. These rules, which threaten the prisoners' survival, act to pit the prisoners against one another as they attempt meet their basic needs, including access to food, warmth, and clothing, limiting any hope of a collective society within the camp. In other words, a camp meant to forcibly train political prisoners to become good Soviets in fact is governed by rules that promote the opposite. The failure of the Soviet ideal within the camp can be viewed as a critique of the larger Soviet project, showing that abuse is inherent in the possession power and authority, and that as long as this power exists the goal of collectivization—of each man giving freely of himself to help the state and other men—will be futile.



### IDENTITY, PRINCIPLES, AND DIGNITY

The prison camp is designed to strip the Zeks of their individual identities and dignity, reflecting the larger goal of the Stalinist regime—to create a collective society where the individual identity and desires are replaced by a national identity and dedication to the collective good. The prisoners' names are taken from them and replaced by numbers, their boots are tossed into a common heap, their social standing outside of the camp is rendered useless, and prisoners are strip searched for personal possessions several times each day. The stripping of identity and dignity destroys many prisoners, such as Fetyukov. Shukhov does not respect

Fetyukov because he is always nagging and begging for food and cigarettes. At the end of the novel, the guards beat Fetyukov for licking bowls, showing how losing one's dignity has a destructive effect on the Zeks.

Many of the Zeks, however, do retain individual identities. Shukhov tells that, "from the outside, everyone in the squad looked the same—their numbered black coats were identical—but within the squad there were great distinctions." Because the Zeks are stripped of all material possessions and markers of external identity, maintaining strong principals and one's dignity becomes a means by which some characters survive in the camp and maintain their identity. Shukhov, the novel's protagonist, is the primary example of how prisoners maintain identity and dignity. He is a rigorously principled man, refusing to stoop to the degradation of the other characters. Despite the cold, he takes his hat off before he eats. Despite his hunger, he does not eat the eyes of the fish in his soup. Despite his needs, he certainly does not beg for anything.

Work provides an opportunity for Shukhov to gain a true sense of identity and dignity. Even though he does not receive a wage for his work and will not benefit from the labor he puts in, his work ethic and skills allow him to feel some ownership over it, which is immensely important for a man who owns nothing else. Although it appears that Shukhov is acting out the Soviet ideal—giving of oneself for the state—the pride he takes in his work is not rooted his service to the Soviet state, but in the fact that it allows him to feel useful as an individual. Interestingly, the very activities in which the Soviet ideal seems most present are the activities in which Shukhov finds the dignity to resist the stripping of his identity. In the end, his work on the wall and the satisfaction he gained from putting his skill to use stand as a major factor in what made his day "an almost happy one". This final moment shows that maintaining one's dignity through a principled life makes living in the camp slightly more bearable.



### COMPETITION VS. CAMARADERIE

Although the stated goal of the camp is to rehabilitate its political prisoners into citizens of a collective Soviet society, the camp fails to instill and cultivate these values. As opposed to a collective atmosphere, the life of a Zek is defined by competition. On an individual level, the men compete to meet their basic needs—including access to food, warmth, and supplies—placing one's survival over the ideal of working toward a collective environment. The same competition occurs on the group level, as the work gangs compete for job assignments, tools, and supplies to complete their jobs. The very structure of the work camp is flawed, as Zeks pay off the guards in order to attain assignments and privileges, which aligns with a capitalist system, as opposed to the communist ideal. This environment of competition for survival makes the camp a particularly hostile place to live and a profound critique of the methods the Stalinist regime uses to

try to impose a Soviet ideal.

A sense of camaraderie does develop among the members of gang 104. As the group works, the hierarchy within the group is leveled to a certain extent. Pavlo and Tyurin, who are the leaders of the gang, work alongside the men, and although they are strict, they establish a sense of camaraderie. Shukhov suggests that prisoners will not work for a boss who is distant and acts superior to his gang, but will work hard for a foreman that they admire. This sense of camaraderie is heightened when Tyurin tells his story, which depicts the way he is connected to the men he oversees through their shared experience of injustice. Shukhov describes the gang as a family during this scene. This sense of camaraderie that occurs during work, however, unfolds on an individual, as opposed to an ideological level, based not so much on the desire to work for the good of the whole, but based on the merits of the individual. This too works against the Soviet ideal, where the state is valued over the individual. In the end, the Zeks work hard to have their own needs met and to meet the needs of the individuals they respect, as opposed to working for an ideological cause.

The only moment of true camaraderie comes at the end of the novel after Alyoshka talks to Shukhov about turning away from the material world toward the spiritual. “Of all earthly and mortal things,” Alyoshka says, “Our Lord commanded us only to pray for our daily bread.” Unable to think in spiritual terms because of the struggle for physical sustenance, Shukhov asks Alyoshka if he is talking about their daily rations. Alyoshka, however, is talking about bread that feeds the spirit. Shukhov is touched in some way by their conversation, and offers Alyoshka a biscuit without expecting anything in return—a true act of camaraderie. Through this action, it becomes clear that true camaraderie can occur by moving away from the material world toward the spiritual. This change, however, remains particularly difficult in an environment where your life hinges on the attainment of resources. And it is further ironic that the Soviets were extremely hostile to religion in general—the religion that inspired Alyoshka and Shukov’s camaraderie. The conditions of the camp prevent camaraderie, and in a larger sense, make collectivization impossible, as the individual’s fight for survival through attainment of the material remains the primary and necessary focus.



## BELIEF AND FAITH

Belief and faith are another means through which characters survive the horrors of camp life, find meaning, and maintain a sense of identity. The

Soviet regime promoted atheism, as organized religion was viewed as a threat to the soviet project. Belief and faith are elements of a Zek’s life that are systematically stripped from them during their time in the camp. Early in the novel, Shukhov notices a new prisoner cross himself, but quickly notes that the

habit will fade over time, showing the way that belief and faith diminish under the oppressive force of the camp. Some characters, however, retain a sense of belief and faith, including Tyurin and Alyoshka. And the characters that hold onto this aspect of their identity do much better in the harsh conditions of the camp. Holding to one’s faith becomes a discrete way to resist the pressure of Soviet power, which seeks to strip the prisoners’ identities.

Alyoshka symbolizes the benefits and disadvantage of maintaining belief and faith in the camp. Alyoshka, a devout Baptist, reads from a hand written portion of the New Testament and prays before work. Shukhov notices him smiling when they arrive at the work site, which strikes him as strange considering the labor set out before them. Alyoshka’s perception of his fate allows him to find happiness in the camp. He views his imprisonment as a cross he is bearing for God, and understands the camp as a good thing for his spirit, as the outside world would distract him with material wants, and distract him from the cultivation of his spirit. Although Alyoshka plays a positive role in gang 104 through his kindness and willingness to take orders, having this attitude in the camp can be dangerous. The meek prisoners at the camp receive harsh treatment from the guards and other prisoners. This fact, however, does not bother Alyoshka because he is more concerned with the development of the spirit, which is enhanced by the abuse he receives, and his views allow him to accept his situation.

Belief in God allows Alyoshka to attain a sense of spiritual freedom in the camp. While the other characters are consumed by their need for material things, including food, clothing, warmth, Alyoshka is interested in cultivating his spirit. From this angle, the camp is the ideal place for him to be. This shift of perspective has a liberating effect, and his message at the end of the novel has such an effect on Shukhov. After hearing Alyoshka’s spiritual message, Shukhov gives him a biscuit without expecting anything in return. Shukhov still thinks that Alyoshka’s way of life is impractical, and gives him the biscuit out of pity because he believes Alyoshka does not know how to take care of himself. Yet Shukov still gives the biscuit in a spirit of pure generosity, asking for nothing in return, suggesting that Shukhov has grown spiritually through Alyoshka’s message, and that Shukov’s view of Alyoshka’s way of life as being impractical may not be correct. After all, in the end, Alyoshka has his needs met without a self-seeking motive behind his kindness, suggesting that belief and faith may be a viable means to exist in the camp.



## TIME

The theme of time reaches across many levels in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. In the broadest sense, the novel is about “doing time”, or being incarcerated. The narrative unfolds over the course of a

single day, from the morning reveille to lights out, and the depiction of this single day over the length of the entire novel shows that even this short period remains an immense obstacle for the prisoners. In addition, the loss of time is one of the primary ways prisoners are punished, which is shown figuratively in the fact that prisoners are not allowed to have watches—the guards tell the time for the prisoners—and literally in the fact that the Soviet government has the power to add time to any prisoners sentence without justification.

In another sense, a prisoner's free time is his most precious possession. The prisoners are held at the camp for extended periods, but they are afforded little time for themselves. Apart from sleep, a prisoner's only free time is during meals, for a brief time upon wake up, and a few minutes before work. This "time to oneself", however, is not actually something men can enjoy, as it is spent trying to survive by attaining basic needs, such as food, clothing, and supplies. Because time is necessary for a Zek's survival, taking away someone's free time is one of the greatest sins in the camp. When one prisoner falls asleep during work, causing the others to get held up during the count, he is verbally and physically assaulted, depicting the seriousness of his crime.

Because each Zek's primary focus is his survival on a daily basis, he is essentially trapped in the present. By its very nature, the camp is designed to separate prisoners from their pasts by removing them from their families and communities, and allowing them to write only twice a year. For Shukhov, the past, or more specifically, the time period before Stalin took power in Russia, is reflected on fondly, but seems so distant it isn't worth much thought. Shukhov treats the future with the same indifference, since he knows either his sentence will be extended, or he will be exiled.

The past, however, does make its way into the present through the characters' perceptions of themselves and others. Although the camp is designed to strip one of one's past, Shukhov continues to refer to people based on their standing before entering the camp, and he retains a sense of his own identity through his expertise as a tradesman and upholding the beliefs he developed before coming to the camp. Using these skills, which connect him to his past, are part of what make his day, "an almost good one". This positive note, however, is stifled by the novel's final lines, which remind the reader that this day is only one of the three thousand six hundred and fifty three more days Shukhov will be in prison. The last sentence, which states, "the three extra days were for leap years," leaves the reader with a new perspective on the life of a Zek: that there is no relief in a prisoner's sentence, and even the extra three days will be an immense struggle.

Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## SHUKHOV'S SPOON

Shukhov's **spoon** symbolizes his unique identity, and simultaneously his dedication to self-preservation, both physically and spiritually. The spoon is one of Shukhov's only possessions and by far his most beloved. In the gulag, everything including boots, bowls, and living quarters are communal, so Shukhov's spoon, his only possession, symbolizes his individuality. The camp is designed to strip the prisoners of their individual identities, so in a sense, the Zeks move inward to maintain their identities. The way Shukhov hides his spoon in his boot, alludes to the way in which his identity is hidden by his external appearance and circumstances, but remains incredibly close to him at all times. It is no mistake that this symbol of identity is connected to the act of eating. Some of Shukhov's strongest principals are connected to his eating habits—he takes off his hat, does not eat the fish eyes, and never licks bowls—and these principals are essential to Shukhov's sustained sense of personal identity. The spoon is also a tool Shukhov has connected with sustenance, and the spoon works in one sense to bring food to his mouth, but in a deeper sense to feed his identity by allowing him the means to maintain his principals.



## BREAD

A Zek's life revolves around the attainment of **bread**. In a physical sense, bread is the main source of sustenance for the prisoners, and their skimpy bread rations allow them to survive on a daily basis. But survival in the camp goes deeper than the attainment of physical bread. The maintenance of one's identity, principals and dignity is another essential element of a Zek's survival. In this way, the obsession with bread is destructive, as it causes prisoners to sacrifice their dignity and principals in the process of attaining bread. In a metaphorical sense, however, bread symbolizes spiritual sustenance that comes through preserving one's dignity. Alyoshka recommends Shukhov ask God only for his "daily bread", an allusion to the Lord's Prayer, in which bread represents spiritual sustenance. In moving away from the obsession with bread in a physical sense, a Zek is able to find liberation from the physical circumstances in which he lives. This idea plays out at the end of the novel when Shukhov offers Alyoshka a biscuit without expecting anything in return. Shukhov's sense of joy in the final moments of the novel are connected to his movement away from physical bread toward the idea of bread as a symbol of spiritual nourishment, suggesting that spiritual bread may be the truest form of sustenance available to a prisoner.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and



## TSEZAR'S PARCEL

Tsezar's **parcel** symbolizes the worldly pleasures the men are denied within the gulag. Tsezar is the envy of the men of Gang 104, as the contents of his parcels allow him to assuage his hunger and grant him the ability to attain special privileges by paying off the guards. But even though Tsezar receives help with his physical needs, he struggles to adapt to camp life and develop the skills that allow a Zek to survive successfully in the camp. In fact, his parcel makes him a target in the camp, as shown by his fear of losing the contents during the count. In this way, the parcel depicts the futility of investing oneself in the material world. This idea is furthered upon considering Tsezar's name. "Tsezar" translates to the name "Caesar" in English, who signifies power and privilege in the Bible, and Jesus famously instructs that his followers should "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21)—to separate the spiritual from the material, with an emphasis on the importance of the spiritual. Although the Zek's situation seems as far from "the kingdom of God" as one could possibly go, Alyoshka does find happiness and meaning in the camp by turning away from the material world that Tsezar's parcel represents, and Shukhov shares this sense of joy after he shares his bread freely with Alyoshka.

either do or do not "belong" to him. The ninety minutes that follow the sound of the reveille belong to him: he is able to exercise some control over what he will do during that time—but this brief bit of independence by no means entails leisure for Shukhov, who takes advantage of this sliver of freedom by performing chores to earn extra money.

This quote gives us a first glimpse into the radical lack of control Shukhov has over planning his life, and how he views that life as being fundamentally divided into parts which he does and does not own.

From the outside, everyone looked the same—their numbered black coats were identical—but within the squad there were great distinctions. Everyone had his grade.

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 15

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when Shukhov and his squad eat breakfast in the mess hall.

The bleak homogeneity and repetitiveness characteristic of life as a *zek* appear here. The prison represses individual identity by branding every *zek* with a number used in place of their name, and by forcing every prisoner to wear the same uniform, which makes everyone look the same. The prison also radically diminishes spontaneity and possibility from the *zeks'* lives by turning each day into a repetition of the same, scripted schedule. By strictly regulating the *zeks'* sleeping, eating, and free-time with mandated inspections, a strictly enforced curfew and wake-up time, and a rationed diet of the same gruel and soup every day, the prison turns its inhabitants' days into one omnipresent routine.

Shukhov notes that all these regulations—the uniform in particular, here—tend to make every *zek* have the same outward appearance. The prisoners' external appearances, and the external actions which make up their lives (apart from their inner, mental lives), are regulated to the extent that outward differences between individual prisoners become blurred, if not erased. Yet despite this, Shukhov asserts that internally, there are great differences between all the men. In a situation that is as harsh and monotonous as the camp, one's interior experience, beliefs, and identity become the whole of one's dignity and sense of self.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the New American Library edition of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* published in 2008.

### Section 1 Quotes

Shukhov never overslept reveille. He always got up at once, for the next ninety minutes, until they assembled for work, belonged to him, not the authorities, and any old-timer could earn a bit.

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 3-4



### Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears at the beginning of the novel, after the reveille—the prison camp's morning alarm—has sounded.

Here, we see one way in which the prison camp has affected Shukhov's thinking about time. He conceives of time in terms of ownership, his days being divided into periods that



●● Apart from sleep, the only time a prisoner lives for himself is ten minutes in the morning at breakfast, five minutes over dinner, and five at supper.

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 16

### Explanation and Analysis



This quote occurs shortly after the previous one, when Shukhov and his squad are eating breakfast in the mess hall.

The division which Shukhov perceives at the core of his life as a prisoner--the division between the periods of time which he owns and those which he gives up to carry out his orders--resurfaces in this passage. Here, the narrator considers sleep to be one of those few periods in daily life when a prisoner "lives for himself." That the narrator regards sleep as one of the few activities which a prisoner performs voluntarily and for his own health--that the unconscious state of being asleep counts as an example of active *living*--amplifies the senses of fatigue and lost vivacity which permeate everyday existence in the book.

The narrator paints the activities which *zeks* perform in their conscious, everyday lives as lifeless in comparison to the time they spend sleeping. The real world of waking consciousness, for the *zeks*, is a death-sentence to their freedom, and the energy and enjoyment of life has become relegated to the realm of sleep (apart from twenty total minutes of waking life per day), which functions as a reliable, day-to-day form of escape. It's as if the *zeks* go to sleep feeling they're about to reclaim their lives, yet feel their life wane when they awake--a total inversion of how people ordinarily view the relationship between sleep and life. The *zeks* awake to death and fall asleep into life.

## Section 2 Quotes

●● No clocks or watches ticked there--prisoners were not allowed to carry watches; the authorities knew the time for them.

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 21

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Shukhov is in the sickbay.

The lack of power that prisoners possess in planning how they spend their time is further exposed here. In previous

quotes, we've seen how, in the camp, a *zek's* relationship to the passing of time is rigidly divided. A *zek* has very few moments where he can willfully or voluntarily choose how to pass his time, and endures a comparatively overwhelming number of moments when he must follow orders dictating how he must spend his time.

This passage depicts that inhumane and oppressive division at the heart of the prisoners' lives in yet another way. The prisoners, without access to any clocks or watches, are kept in the dark about time. They lead a life not molded and shaped by the unfolding or ticking of numerical time, but rather a life shaped and organized by orders and commands. The authorities arrange, organize, and plan the temporal structure or schedule of the *zeks'* daily lives. In this way, the authorities come to take over the role of the clock. The passing of time is no longer simply an impersonal, neutral procession measured by an abstract system of numbers, for the authorities have hijacked time from the *zeks*; consequently, obeying the authorities and trying to avoid punishment are the sole measures in relation to which the *zeks* can orient their plans, actions, and behaviors if they want to survive.

## Section 3 Quotes

●● The thoughts of a prisoner--they're not free either. They kept returning to the same things. A single idea keeps stirring. Would they feel that piece of bread in the mattress? Would he have any luck at the sick bay that evening? Would they put Buynovsky in the cells? And how did Tsezar get his hands on that warm vest. He'd probably greased a palm or two in the warehouse for people's private belongings? How else?

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov (speaker), Buynovsky, Tsezar

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 38

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs while Shukhov and his fellow *zeks* are marching from the prison camp to the town where they'll be working for the day.

Here, we get a sense of how imprisonment in the camp affects not only a prisoner's external actions and behaviors--what he does and does not do in order to avoid punishment--but a prisoner's inner mental life as well. The psychological realm of one's inner thoughts--which some



might conceive as a private, inner refuge which the outer world cannot ultimately influence--is revealed here, in the case of Shukhov, to actually be deeply impacted by the prison environment.

Even Shukhov's intimate, internal train of thought is somehow regulated by the prison: he's worried that his hidden piece of bread might be discovered, that he'll be rejected again by the sick bay, and he envies Tsezar's vest, which leads him to speculate about the manner in which Tsezar acquired it. This illustrates the severity of the anxiety which occupies much of Shukhov's thought. A moment of peace and contentment--though such a thing does exist, however crudely, at certain points in the novel--is something which seems very out of reach for Shukhov, here. His mind can never be steady or contently rested, for his thoughts are always "returning to the same things." Shukhov's thoughts are almost always subconsciously running through a mental checklist about the rights and wrongs of his behavior in order to gauge the probability of his being punished by the authorities.

future possibility is the prospect of being released at the end of his ten-year sentence; other than that, his life is wholly absorbed in the present, in the day-to-day procession of a relentlessly repetitive way of life.

That the "authorities did his thinking for him" illustrates how the lack of any thought about preparing for the immediate future has enclosed Shukhov's thinking within an omnipresent reality engineered by the Gulag. Shut off from the possibility of the future--the possibility of something new, something different than the present, day-to-day reality--Shukhov and his fellow *zeks* are looped into a perpetual replay of the same script, the daily schedule designed by the authorities. Having resigned himself to the inevitability of this constant repetition, Shukhov has effectively handed his power of creative thought--his ability to conceive of the future as something ultimately unpredictable and therefore worthy of advanced preparation--over to the authorities. By stripping Shukhov of his ability to think in terms of the future--which amounts to his ability to think for himself, to plan his own life--the authorities draw him into the daily, unchanging loop of their regime, drastically limiting the control Shukhov has over his own thoughts.

☛ During his years in prisons and in camps he'd lost the habit of planning for the next day, for a year ahead, for supporting his family. The authorities did his thinking for him about everything—it was somehow easier that way.

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 41

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote, following shortly after the previous one, provides another depiction of Shukhov's thoughts as he walks from the prison camp to the town where the day's work will take place.

The monotony and repetitiveness of life in the prison camp, as well as the deep influence which the authorities have over the inner mental lives of the *zeks*, resurface here. The same, unchanging, scripted schedule that structures his every day in the prison camp causes Shukhov to lose the "habit of planning for the next day." On any given day in the camp's future, the same, pre-established routine will merely repeat itself; there's therefore no use in making special preparations for the next day, or even year, when every new day will follow the same pattern. (This is also a nod to the book's title and central conceit--the narrator only needs to describe "one day in the life of Ivan Denisovich" because all his days are mostly the same.) Shukhov's only horizon of

## Section 4 Quotes

☛ Writing now was like dropping stones in some deep, bottomless pool. They drop; they sink—but there is no answer. You couldn't write and describe the squad you were working with...just now he had a good deal more to talk about with Kildigs the Lett than his family at home.

**Related Characters:** Kildigs

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 39

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs shortly after the previous one, as Shukhov and his fellow *zeks* march from the prison camp to the town where they're working.

Here Shukhov is discussing the difficulty he has with writing letters to his family. Having been imprisoned for over eight years, Shukhov has acquired a life separate and isolated from his family. Since Shukhov, therefore, no longer has a clear image of what his family is like, sending letters to them is like "dropping stones in some deep, bottomless pool." He would be sending his letters out towards something (his family) which he no longer knows. Like a bottomless pool,

the family to which he writes perpetually recedes his dated ideas about them. Furthermore, most of the prison experiences he might convey to his family would (he thinks) be of no interest to them--thus, at this point he ultimately feels a closer connection to his fellow prisoners than to his own family.

## Section 6 Quotes

☛ Why, you might wonder, should prisoners wear themselves out, working hard, ten years on end, in the camps? You might think they'd say: No thank you, and that's all. We'll drag ourselves through the day till evening, and then the night is ours.

But that didn't work. To outsmart you they thought up work squads—but not squads like the ones outside the camps, where every man is paid his separate wage. Everything was arranged in the camp that the prisoners egged one another on. It was like this: either you all got a bit extra or you all croaked.

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 57


### Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs at the work site, when Shukhov and Kildigs are trying to warm up the room that is under construction in the power station.

Here, the fundamental question is raised: why, exactly, do the prisoners feel compelled to work so hard? The answer reveals the cunning strategy of how the Soviet authorities socially engineered the prisons. To ensure a high output and quality of work, the authorities organized the prisoners into "work squads," which promotes competition among fellow *zeks* because they must constantly be checking up on each other to see if everyone is performing satisfactory work. The *zeks* are punished or rewarded in rations on a collective, not individual, basis--another way in which individual identity is sacrificed for the collective, but also a sign of the hypocrisy of collectivism itself--for it's only in individual competition (a generally capitalistic idea) that good work is done by the Communist collective.

☛ And then every thought was swept out of his head. All his memories and worries faded. He had only one idea—to try to fix the vent in the stovepipe and hang it up to prevent it smoking.

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 58

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs as Shukhov works to warm up the room of the power plant in which his squad is working. Tyurin has assigned him the task of fixing a stovepipe so that a fire can be kindled.

The sense of Shukhov's extreme psychological absorption in the present, day-to-day experience of reality and work is further echoed here. His connection to the past and his ideas about the future are wiped away as "every thought [is] swept out of his head" except the idea of his current task: fixing the stovepipe and making the room warm.

This passage gives a concrete shape to Shukhov's relationship with the present--we witness his thinking about time having a definitive impact on his immediate experience--as well as a glimpse into the dedication and dignity with which he performs his work. Even though Shukhov is performing slave labor, he feels connected enough with his task such that it becomes the sole occupation of his thought, and even gives him pleasure and a sense of purpose. Another possible reading, however, might deny that Shukhov's focus has anything to do with dignity and a principled work ethic, but rather that, by turning his thoughts solely towards his task, Shukhov is trying to escape the anxiety and misery that characterize the rest of his experience.

☛ "The sun's already reached its peak," he announced.  
 "If it's reached its peak," said the captain reflectively, "it's one o'clock, not noon."  
 "What do you mean?" Shukhov demurred. "Every old-timer knows that the sun stands highest at dinner-time."  
 "Old timers, maybe," snapped the captain. "But since their day a new decree has been passed, and now the sun stands highest at one."  
 "Who passed that decree?"  
 "Soviet power."

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, Buynovsky (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  



**Page Number:** 63

**Explanation and Analysis**

This passage occurs shortly after Shukhov, working with his squad in the power plant, looks up at the sky and realizes that, based on the sun's position (it's at its peak), it's dinner time.

Seeking to confirm with someone (no name is given) who has informed him and his squad members that it is noon, Shukhov cites his observation of the sun at its peak. Buynovsky, however, challenges Shukhov's belief that the sun reaches its peak at noon. Mocking the severity and largely unchecked authoritarian rule of Soviet power, Buynovsky says that Soviet rule has decreed that the sun's peak now corresponds to one o'clock, and no longer noon. Buynovsky's comment satirizes the vast reach and extensiveness of Soviet power. That something seemingly so beyond the reaches of state power and intervention--the correspondence of the cycles of the natural world with the human clock--could become regulated and managed by Soviet rule seems absurd. Buynovsky has rather tellingly dramatized the seeming omnipotence of Soviet power for those living in the Gulag.

☛ Even those serving three-year sentences were kept for another five. The law can be stood on its head. When your ten years are up they can say, "Here's another ten for you." Or exile you.

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 65

**Explanation and Analysis**



Occurring shortly after the last passage, this quote appears after Kildigs remarks that Shukhov's prison sentence is nearly finished.

The narrator exposes the haphazard, unprincipled disorder of Gulag law here. Gulag authorities, we learn, often do not apply the law consistently: "the law can be stood on its head." A completed ten-year sentence can be deemed inadequate on a whim, with another ten years instantly issued in its place.

Further, the surprisingly casual tone of "Here's another ten for you" highlights the *zeks'* ingrained awareness and anticipation of brutality and injustice from the Gulag system. Though Shukhov is excited by and hopeful for the prospect of being released from the camp, he still has doubts about whether or not the authorities will actually

follow through with it.

☛ Yes, you live with your feet in the mud and there's no time to be thinking about how you got on or how you're going to get out.

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 65

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs very shortly after the previous one. Kilgas has just remarked that Shukhov's sentence is nearing its end.

The narrator, describing Shukhov's thoughts about the passing of his prison sentence, conveys here another instance of Shukhov's tendency to feel absorbed in the present moment. Shukhov thinks that, upon entering the camp, a prisoner has no time to think about how he was arrested or how he will escape. It's as if a *zek's* past life dies, for the past is no longer fruitful to mull over and contemplate; once a *zek* is arrested, his future becomes effectively predetermined for the next ten or even twenty-five years--and no memories from the past will be able to change this. The future similarly becomes almost non-existent and difficult to imagine for a *zek*, who lives repeating the same, seemingly omnipresent script day after day. It's as if the time-span that stretches from Shukhov's entrance to and exit from the camp constitutes one massive present moment.

☛ And however much blood you sweat at work, however much you grovel on your belly, you'll force no food out of that earth; you'll get no more than the damned authorities give you.

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 71

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs while Shukhov is having dinner with his squad at the work site.



Here, the narrator brings attention to the fact that food in the prison is distributed strictly according to a system of rations--not according to merit, effort, difficulty of labor, or

health. Prisoners only eat what the authorities provide them, unless they happen to be fortunate enough to receive a parcel containing food.

The bland, rationed-out, and sparse diet provided to the *zeks* yet one more element that exposes the dread of imprisonment. Overworked and subjected to extremely cruel working conditions, the prisoners are fed a shoddy diet that comes nowhere near being adequate fuel for the labor they're ordered to perform--all because of the whims of authority figures.

☝ [Buynovsky] was a newcomer. He was unused to the hard life of the Zeks. Though he didn't know it, moments like this were particularly important to him, for they were transforming him from an eager, confident naval officer with a ringing voice into an inert, though wary, Zek.

**Related Characters:** Buynovsky

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 77


### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs during the dinner scene at the work site. Buynovsky is behaving obnoxiously; the narrator claims he's just yelled at several people to leave the work site canteen and is sitting somewhere in the way of the incoming squad.

The narrator hints here at the process by which Buynovsky's confidence and vivacity will be broken and torn from him by the challenges of prison life. But the narrator goes on to say that it is only through the process of becoming an "inert" *zek* that Buynovsky will be able to survive his twenty-five-year sentence. Only by succumbing to the harsh reality of prison life and putting aside his pride (and even his individuality) will Buynovsky acquire the personality and way of thinking required to meet the challenges of his new environment.

## Section 8 Quotes

☝ It was a family, the squad.

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 83


### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after dinner at the work site has ended, and Shukhov and his squad are sitting and conversing in the room where he fixed the stove.

This moment in the novel celebrates the camaraderie and deep bonds formed between the prisoners. Having been torn from their families and faced with long-term imprisonment, the *zeks* could either turn to each other or keep to themselves. The novel seems to suggest, however, that keeping to oneself and/or remaining attached to the memory of one's independent, self-governed past, is basically a death sentence. Survival depends largely on self-sacrifice and the relations subsequently formed with one's fellow prisoners, especially one's squad-mates.

☝ And now Shukhov was no longer seeing that distant view where the sun gleamed on snow...Shukhov was only seeing his wall...he worked with drive, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 90

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, Shukhov is busy laying brick with Kilgids at the work site.

This passage reveals how important construction work and the craftsmanship it requires are to Shukhov. He's able to lose himself in his work--to focus solely on the wall--but in a way that also bolsters his sense of identity. By having a craft to which he can wholly dedicate himself, Shukhov can find an escape from the bleakness of imprisonment. The fact that Shukhov works with "drive" and lets his thoughts drift elsewhere conveys the pleasurable dissociating effects he derives from the labor. Further, Shukhov's work is a source of dignity and pride amidst a degrading, authoritarian climate of Soviet power.

## Section 9 Quotes

☝ A man who's warm can't understand a man who's freezing.

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 111

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs when the *zeks* have gathered before the gates of the work site, where the guards will count them before starting back towards camp. Tsezar asks Buynovsky how his day went, and the narrator calls this a foolish question, since "a man who's warm can't understand a man who's freezing." Tsezar, an office worker, had spent the day in an environment incomparably "warmer" (both literally warmer and far less harsh overall) than Buynovsky's.

The narrator's repeated emphasis in the novel on this theme--that feeling literally warm fundamentally bars one from empathizing with people who are freezing--highlights an important gap between certain people in the prison community. The *zeks* who are able to work in heated spaces are incapable, according to the narrator, of imagining how continual exposure to severe cold alters one's mental state. In a way, one's exposure to heat is a form of power; those who avoid working in the cold have a higher chance of surviving their sentence and, in general, suffer considerably less than those who face extended exposure to the cold. In addition to Tsezar, at the beginning of the book, the narrator considers Kolya--the medical orderly who takes Shukhov's temperature--to be another person who cannot understand those who must endure the cold.

prisoners. Throughout the novel we are exposed to the contradiction at the core of the camaraderie and social bond shared by prisoners: the fact that everyone is ultimately vying to survive, to fend for oneself among incredibly sparse rations, and to acquire and maintain goods (like tobacco) that provide the minimum amount of comfort required to tolerate daily existence. In this way, despite the familial nature of the prison community, interpersonal relations among the *zeks* are fundamentally split between collective and individual interests.

☞ It isn't so terrible to unbutton your coat now. We're going home.

That's what everyone used to say: "going home." We never had time to think of any other home.

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 122

**Explanation and Analysis**

Following soon after the previous quote, this moment occurs while the *zeks*, having returned from the work site, are gathered outside the entrance to the main camp. The guards order them to unbutton their coats so that they can be frisked.

That the *zeks* refer to the prison as "home" suggests how incredibly central it's become to their identity. It's as if their memories of their former homes have been subsumed by the prison, and rendered obsolete and inaccessible. For, if the prospect of leaving the prison sometime in the future is never certain or guaranteed, then one's memories of the past--of the home to which one might return--gradually become less reliable in helping a *zek* to imagine and predict where he will return or go when he's released. Eventually, it must become harder and harder to envision a future beyond the prison at all. In this way, the prison camp not only takes time away from the prisoners in the sense of keeping them constantly busy with work--which would take time away from thinking about returning home--but also through totally reorienting a *zek's* thinking about time by changing his relationship to the future. By disrupting a *zek's* ability to imagine a future beyond their sentence, the prison takes away "time to think of any other home" at a fundamental, cognitive level.

**Section 10 Quotes**

☞ Who's a *Zek's* main enemy? Another *Zek*. If only they weren't at odds with one another--ah, what a difference that'd make.

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 121

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs when the *zeks*, returning from the work site, are approaching the main camp. The guards order them to drop the firewood they've gathered, and the *zeks* begin to quarrel with one another about who should and should not drop their firewood, since the placement of some *zeks* in their marching columns are more favorable for concealing firewood than others, and if a *zek* on the outside edge of a column is seen with wood, then those on the inside will likely be searched.

In seeming contradiction of the narrator's former claim that a squad was like a family, this statement highlights the element of competition involved in the relations between

●● That bowl of soup—it was dearer than freedom, dearer than life itself, past, present, and future.

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 126

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after Shukhov has been inspected by the guards upon re-entering the main camp with the other *zeks*. The narrator describes a bowl of half-burnt cabbage soup which the *zeks*, freezing and starving, would welcome like "rain to the parched earth."

Here we see another way in which the prison reorients the *zeks*' sense of time. Underfed and freezing from a considerably long exposure to brutal cold, the *zeks*' thoughts are consumed by anything that might put an end to the pain they feel in their bodies. And so a simple bowl of cabbage soup—however unappetizing to the typical palate—comes to stand as the sole object of their desire, becoming "dearer than freedom" and "life itself, past, present, and future."

Because they are constantly subjected to extreme and inhumane working conditions that inflict intense sensations of cold, hunger, and other debilitating effects upon them, the *zeks* are consistently put into positions where the desire for simple items (like cabbage soup) that will alleviate their pain takes precedent over all their other thought processes. Caught in a cycle going in and out of this extreme state of desire, day after day, *zeks* often barely have the energy to think about anything other than the present circumstances of their immediate environment. While there are exceptions, such as Tsezar Markovich, we must remember that he has the privilege of working indoors and the comforts afforded him by his luxurious parcels.

●● And now Shukhov complained about nothing: neither about the length of his stretch, nor about the length of the day, nor about their swiping another Sunday. This was all he thought about now: "We'll survive. We'll stick it out, God willing until it's over."

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 141

### Explanation and Analysis

Having just had a satisfying bowl of fish stew with his squad in the mess hall, Shukhov's vitality and perseverance to endure his sentence are restored.

The energy and comfort provided by the stew reboots Shukhov's mood, giving him just enough vigor to think about the possibility of his survival and future beyond the prison. Neither the eight years he's lost of his life, the long, tiring day, nor the fact that the *zeks*' day off has been replaced with another work day—none of this occupies his thought. With the long, physically and emotionally demanding day now coming to a close, this small sliver of hope—"We'll survive . . . God willing until its over"—is the only thought that Shukhov can muster about his future. Entirely at the mercy of the camp authorities, and constantly uncertain about his future, Shukhov suddenly is able to feel—with the burst of joy his soup provides—a sense of possibility.

●● The belly is a demon. It doesn't remember how well you treated it yesterday; it'll cry out for more tomorrow.

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 142

### Explanation and Analysis

Having had a double-helping of stew at supper, Shukhov decides to save his bread for the next day. The narrator then articulates Shukhov's reasoning in this quote.



Shukhov demonstrates here how resource management and prudent self-discipline are essential to his daily life. It would probably be very satisfying for Shukhov to have his bread with his unusually large dinner, but he realizes that he would pay the price the next day, since his body would expect the same high quantity of food. The belly, like a "demon," has a will of its own, and must be strictly managed, especially considering Shukhov's limited supply of provisions.



This is another instance emphasizing the force and pull of the present moment in time. The belly, having no memory about "how well you treated it yesterday," feels only the sensation of hunger as it's attached to the present moment; it does not feel the fullness it once possessed in the past. Therefore, in order to stave off hunger tomorrow, Shukhov must be economical with his resources and actively consider the needs of his body before the desires of his mind.

## Section 12 Quotes

“Even eight years as a convict hadn’t turned him into a jackal—and the longer he spent at the camp the stronger he made himself.”

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 147

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs when Shukhov delivers Tsezar's bread ration. Shukhov, having stood in line to receive Tsezar's ration while he went to see if a parcel had arrived for himself, arrives at Tsezar's bunk and sees him surrounded by various foods. Having received a bountiful parcel, Tsezar tells Shukhov to keep his ration of bread.

Instead of directly asking Tsezar whether his parcel arrived or not—for this would give a hint that Shukhov held Tsezar's place in line in order to have rights to part of his parcel—he simply says: "Your bread, Tsezar Markovich." After Shukhov refrains from asking about the parcel directly, the narrator explains that "even eight years as a convict hadn't turned him into a jackal."

Shukhov's ulterior motive for standing in line for Tsezar, however self-interested, is counterbalanced in this scene by Shukhov's dignity in respecting Tsezar's right to his own parcel. Shukhov doesn't pressure Tsezar into giving him anything; he doesn't behave like a desperate, starving "jackal" (a kind of small wild dog). Instead, he gladly accepts Tsezar's bread ration. Further, the narrator reveals that prison hasn't eroded Shukhov's principles of self-conduct—prison hasn't made him into a meaner, rougher, or more aggressive person. Rather, prison has been a place where Shukhov has strengthened his sense of self-control.

“Well,” [Shukhov] said conclusively, “however much you pray it doesn't shorten your stretch. You'll sit it out from beginning to end anyhow.”  
“Oh, you mustn't pray for that either,” said Alyoshka, horrified. “Why do you want freedom? In freedom your last grain of faith will be choked with weeds. You should rejoice that you're in prison. Here you have time to think about your soul.”

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, Alyoshka

(speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 163

**Explanation and Analysis**


This exchange between Shukhov and Aloyshka occurs after Shukhov and most of his squad have gone to bed, and just before the guards call for a second count.

Here we witness two radically different views about prison life. For Aloyshka, prison is a religious opportunity where one is able to think about and develop a closer relationship with one's soul. Freedom, for Aloyshka, is something that could easily destroy one's faith; freedom exposes one to a multitude of options and possibilities in life that can turn one away from a religious path. In prison, however, this isn't the case—faith is strengthened by the lack of any worldly distractions.

For Shukhov, this way of thinking seems twisted and idealistic. Regardless of Aloyshka's piety and devotion, Shukhov says he is doomed to live out his sentence the same as everyone else. He therefore sees no point in Aloyshka's devoutness. But getting out of prison, as we've seen, is not the goal of Aloyshka's faith. This clash showcases an interesting meeting between two minds with diametrically opposed views of their lives in prison.

“Freedom meant one thing to him—home. But they wouldn't let [Shukhov] go home.”

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 164

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs while Shukhov is in bed, just before the guards announce the second count.

Freedom, for Shukhov, has only one meaning, only one thing, object, or quality with which it's associated: home. Freedom doesn't mean a certain philosophy of the free will or a certain belief in a freedom granted through religious or spiritual practice, nor does it mean economic fairness or equal opportunity—it simply means "home." At the end of the day, for Shukhov, freedom is simply the thing that means the very opposite of the prison—and that thing is "home." Returning home would put an end to the prison, an end to



that tragedy which has so far taken away eight years of his life. Home is the symbol of freedom resonating at the core of his mind.

●● Shukhov went to sleep fully content. He'd had many strokes of luck that day: They hadn't put him in the cells; they hadn't sent his squad to the settlement; he'd swiped a bowl of kasha at dinner...He'd built a wall and enjoyed doing it... A day without a dark cloud. Almost a happy one. There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days like this in his stretch. From the first clang of the rail to the last clang of the rail. Three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days. Three extra days were for leap years.

**Related Characters:** Ivan Denisovich Shukhov

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 167

**Explanation and Analysis**

The last and perhaps most profound paragraph of the entire novel, this quote ends our glimpse at one day in the life of Ivan Denisovich Shukhov.

Here, Shukhov recounts a day which many people might consider to be a living hell as "almost a happy one." Simply avoiding peril--such as being put in the cells or sent to the settlement--serves as a basic source of satisfaction. The mere evasion of danger or harm becomes something that Shukhov can tally as a source of pleasure in his day. And so his day is "almost a happy one" simply because it didn't have a "dark cloud."

"Three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days"--made into a self-standing sentence--forces us to imagine an overwhelming repetition of the entire novel we've just read, of thousands of more versions of this one day where nearly every thought, with a few exceptions, is wracked with worry, uncertainty, bodily pain, and hopelessness. Multiplied by 3,653, this bundle of experience called "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" becomes especially alive: we, as readers, are invited to imagine the vast stretch of identity-erasing monotony, hardship, and flickering hope that still remains in store for Shukhov.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## SECTION 1 (SHUKHOV WAKES UP TO KOLYA TAKING SHUKHOV'S TEMPERATURE)

Shukhov wakes up at five in the morning to the sound of reveille. He is in a Soviet labor camp called "H.Q.," which is designed to house political prisoners. The sound barely penetrates the windowpanes, which are covered in frost two inches thick. The sound ends quickly because the cold drives the guard back to his quarters where it is warm.

Shukhov reflects that he never oversleeps reveille. The ninety minutes before work are incredibly valuable to him—they belonged to him, not the authorities. This time in the morning provides the opportunity to do extra work. Some prisoners go to the mess hall and do the dishes in exchange for an extra bit of food. At times, prisoners find a bowl with food caked to the sides and lick it out. Shukhov, however, never licks the bowls. His first captain, a long-term inmate at the first camp where Shukhov was detained, informed him that, "the ones who don't make it are those who lick other men's leftovers, those who count on the doctors...and those who squeal on their buddies."

Shukhov notices that he is feeling sick. He hears his deputy foreman, Pavlo, and the foreman, Tyurin, getting out of bed. Pavlo goes off to the **bread** storage room, and Tyurin goes to the Production Planning Department. Shukhov realizes that the fate of his gang, the 104th, hinges on Tyurin's conversation with Production Planning. They are planning to shift the 104th from the building shops, to a new site, "the Socialist Way of Life Settlement." The settlement is outside in the open country, where there is no shelter. They will have to dig holes for posts, and attach barbed wire, trapping themselves inside so that nobody will run away.

Tyurin takes a pound of salted pork with him to the Production Planning Department to attempt to persuade the senior official to assign another crew to the assignment.

*From the very moment Shukhov awakens, the authorities at the camp dictate his life. The ice in the windowpanes introduces the oppressive force of the cold, blocking him from the outside world. Unlike Shukhov, the guard has the privilege of going inside to the warmth, while Shukhov's living quarters are ice cold.*



*Shukhov's refusal to oversleep is one of many ways that he maintains a principled life—an essential element to his survival. A Zek's free time is his most precious possession, used to procure goods that allow for survival. Shukhov takes pride in his self-sufficiency, refusing to lose his dignity by licking bowls. As his former squad leader told him, self-sufficiency and loyalty to your comrades is essential for survival.*



*Pavlo and Tyurin, the gang's leaders, are the first ones out to make sure the gang has what they need for the day—bread and a good job placement—showing their dedication to the gang's wellbeing. The dreaded "Socialist Way of Life Camp" alludes to the overall critique of communism and socialism found in the novel. It is a place without protection, isolated in the cold, where the men must wire themselves in.*



*Even though the camp is intended to instill communist ideologies, good work assignments are gained through the exchange of commodities, suggesting the presence of a capitalist ideal. This reality later creates a strong sense of competition, and establishes a hierarchy of power among the inhabitants.*



Shukhov realizes that a good-natured guard working this morning, so he decides to stay in bed for a few extra minutes. Shukhov hears another guard grumbling about how the gang should have received four twenty-five-ounce loaves of **bread**, but he was only given three. Meanwhile, Shukhov hears Alyosha murmuring his prayers.

The very moment Shukhov decides to report sick, his blanket is torn off, and Shukhov sees The Tartar staring at him. The Tartar calls Shukhov, "Scha-854", the number printed in white on Shukhov's jacket. The Tartar tells Shukhov he will receive a three-day penalty with work. Shukhov asks why, but reflects that three days punishment with work was better than three days punishment without work. Real jail, he thinks, is when you're kept you back from work and you were trapped with your own thoughts.

The Tartar tells him that he is being punished for failing to get up at reveille. Shukhov, feeling resentful about the charge, reflects that he wouldn't have been so upset if he was being charged with something he deserved. The charge is particularly hurtful because he is always the first one to be up. He gets dressed and follows the Tartar out of the bunkhouse. None of his fellow prisoners protest his punishment, knowing it would be no use, but Shukhov knows they will save his breakfast for him.

The Tartar brings Shukhov to the wardens' quarters, and Shukhov realizes that he is not going to the cells. The Tartar simply needed someone to scrub the guardroom floor. Cleaning the guardroom floors was the job of another prisoner, but he grew big headed as he overheard information even some of the guards didn't know. After the guards caught wind of his egoism, they started calling on other prisoners to do the job.

The wardens' quarters are warm, and two guards are playing checkers. Another guard is still sleeping in his sheepskin valenki (knee high felt boots). Shukhov is delighted that he is not going to the cells, and thanks the Tartar. He promises he will never oversleep again. Having been given his work to do, Shukhov's aches and pains seem to disappear.

*The good-natured guard suggests that all guards do not exert their power the way some do. The guard's concern over bread rations connects him to the prisoners who share the same concerns. It is no coincidence that Alyoshka is introduced during the act of praying, as his faith becomes the defining attribute of his identity.*



*The replacement of Shukhov's name with Scha-854 shows the way the camp attempts to strip prisoners of their identities. His unjust punishment for being sick—something entirely out of his control—begins to show the injustice inherent in a Zek's existence in the camp. The true punishment, as later revealed, is being isolated with one's own thoughts.*



*The injustice is furthered by the fact that Shukhov is always up on time. The other prisoners do not speak up for him because they realize their powerlessness, but Shukhov's knowing that they will save his food suggests that camaraderie exists among the gang members.*



*The fact that the Tartar was looking for someone to punish depicts the way in which prisoners are exploited by the guards. The story of the prisoner who was fired for becoming big headed shows that the guards will not tolerate any reduction of the power they hold over the Zek's.*



*The guards inside of the quarters are enjoying leisure activities and still sleeping, showing the way in which they are privilege with warmth and free time. The disappearance of Shukhov's aches begins to show the way in which work connects to Shukhov's means of survival in the camp.*



Shukhov goes outside to fill a bucket of water to clean the floor. He sees the guards examining the thermometer. One of the guards, a hero of the Soviet Union, climbs up the pole to check the temperature. Another guard yells at him not to breathe on the thermometer because that will push the temperature up. The guard reports that the thermometer reads seventeen and a half degrees. It must be below negative forty for work to be canceled. Another guard complains that the thermometer is crooked and never tells the correct temperature. Shukhov fills the bucket and brings it back to the guardroom.

The Tartar is gone when Shukhov returns, but there are four guards in the guardroom arguing over how much food they will get in January. Food is scarce in the camp, but the guards have access to certain articles sold to them at discounted prices that are not available to the prisoners.

Shukhov decides to take his boots off to do the washing to avoid getting them wet. There wouldn't be another pair for him to change into when he returned. During the eight years he's been in the camp, he'd developed various ways of creating footwear. There were winters during which he'd made due with rope sandals or boots made of old tires. Things had grown better after Pavlo had provided Shukhov with a pair of boots big enough for a double layer of rags inside, and in December the valenki arrived. His good fortune, however, was stifled when the commandant made a rule that prisoners are only allowed to have one pair of footwear. Shukhov's boots were thrown into a common heap.

One of the guards berates Shukhov for using too much water. The guard asks him if he ever watched his wife wash the floors. Shukhov reveals that he has been imprisoned since 1941, and doesn't really remember his wife. He finishes the floor by simply wetting the surface to make it look clean, noting that when one works for the "knowing" one should do a quality job, but when working for a fool, one should give them eyewash. When he finishes he dumps the remaining water in the bucket on the guards' path and heads to breakfast.

Shukhov is pleased to find no crowd at the mess hall. Two or three men from each gang get the bowls of food for their group. Shukhov makes his way to the table quickly, and the narrator notes that standing in the aisle between tables, looking for food to wipe off of the plates of others is dangerous.

*The arbitrary rules around the cancelation of work only when the temperature is below negative forty shows the way in which power leads to unjustified oppression. The guards' conversation reveals their wish to have the day off from work. This wish connects the guards to the prisoners, showing that the oppressive powers that be effect all of the inhabitants in the camp, including the guards.*



*Although the guards enjoy many pleasures the Zeks are denied, they are hungry and worried about attaining food. The guards' concern leads to further oppression and competition for resources.*



*As an experienced Zek, Shukhov knows the challenges of camp life, which leads to his decision to remove his boots. Shukhov's resourcefulness is a part of his identity he is proud of, as shown by his mention of making boots. Pavlo's gift of boots shows the way in which the gang leaders provide for their men, but even this act of kindness is stifled by the oppressive and arbitrary rules in the camp.*



*Shukhov's inability to remember his wife shows the way that the camp disconnects the men from their pasts. Shukhov, who is later revealed to be a good worker, does a poor job on the floor because he is working for the guards, not for his gang or himself—it is not a job he can take pride in. Instead of protesting the unfair punishment, which would lead to more punishment, he dumps the water on the guards' path where it will freeze, a passive form of resistance.*



*Because the men compete for food, standing in the aisle looking for food to swipe can lead to retaliation from other Zeks.*



Shukhov notices a young prisoner at the table cross himself before beginning to eat. He notes that the habit will fade after some time in the camp. The rest of the men sitting at the table were already eating with their hats still on. They eat slowly, spitting fish bones onto the table. It is considered bad manners to spit them onto the floor. All of the prisoners look the same at the table, wearing identical clothing with white numbers painted on them, but there are great distinctions in the squad. Fetyukov, the lowest ranking member of the gang, gives Shukhov his food, telling him he almost ate it thinking Shukhov was in the cells.

Shukhov takes his **spoon**, which he calls “his baby”, from his boot and takes off his hat before he begins to eat. He eats slowly, as the only time a prisoner has for himself is while he is eating. His breakfast consists of *magara*, a grass-like, tasteless grain, and soup with cabbage and small fish—mostly bone and fin. Shukhov does not eat the fisheyes that have fallen out of the eye sockets, for which the other prisoners laugh at him.

After eating, Shukhov heads to the sick bay. Shukhov hides from the Tartar as he makes his way to the sick bay—it is against the rules to be seen walking alone in the camp. The prisoners must also take their hats off if a guard passes. Shukhov explains that some guards don't bother to enforce the absurd rules, but others stick to them strictly. As he nears the sick bay, Shukhov remembers that another prisoner had offered to sell him some tobacco he'd received. This could be his last opportunity to buy any for a month because **parcels** are only allowed once a month and the supply is limited. He decides to go the dispensary instead of getting the tobacco.

The sick bay's interior is completely white and makes Shukhov uncomfortable. The doctors are all still sleeping, but Shukhov discovers Kolya Vdovushkin, the medical assistant, sitting at a clean little table. Kolya is writing poetry, although Shukhov does not understand what he is doing. After Shukhov tells Kolya he is sick, he tells Shukhov that the clinic is closed. He asks why Shukhov didn't report sick the night before, since the sick report is filed in the evening. Shukhov explains that he was not sick then. Kolya is only allowed to exempt two prisoners from work a day, and the spaces had already been filled.

*The young prisoner will stop crossing himself because the camp is designed to stifle the Zek's beliefs, as religion was seen as a threat to the Soviet cause. Although the men live in terrible conditions, they maintain their dignity through small actions, such as spitting the bones onto the table, not the floor. The camp attempts to strip their identities by making them dress the same, but as Shukhov notes, they maintain their identities in other ways. Likewise, the men are ranked, showing that a hierarchy exists among the prisoners, which contrasts the camp's attempt to create a collective society.*



*As his only possession, Shukhov's spoon symbolizes the identity he works hard to maintain. Shukhov maintains his dignity through removing his hat, a respectful gesture he's maintained since being incarcerated. The other's laughing at Shukhov's refusal to eat the eyes shows that the camp has been effective in stripping their dignity.*



*The camp's absurd rules make a Zek's life especially difficult and show the extent of the oppression in the Zek's lives. Furthermore, there is no consistency in the enforcement of these rules, so a Zek is never sure when he will be punished. The control over the parcels is another form of oppression, keeping the prisoners disconnected from the outside world.*



*Shukhov's discomfort with the clean white space shows the way he has become acclimated to the squalor of the camp over the years. Kolya's focus on his poetry over Shukhov's sickness is a critique of art that ignores the suffering of real people. The fact that only two people are able to stay back sick is another arbitrary rule that reflects the abusive power and authority present in the camp.*



## SECTION 2 (KOLYA TAKES SHUKHOV'S TEMPERATURE TO VOLKOVY'S SEARCH)

Kolya hands Shukhov a thermometer. Shukhov puts the thermometer in his armpit, and while he waits, he notices the silence of the space. There are no mice scratching because the cat has killed them all. There isn't even a clock in the room. He reflects that prisoners are not allowed to carry watches—the guards tell the time for them. Shukhov dreams about being prescribed bed rest for two or three weeks, but knows this wish is futile since the new doctor, Stepan Grigorich, does not allow sick inmates to rest. Stepan believes that work is the best remedy for any illness. Shukhov knows, however, that if the doctor went out to work with the men, he'd quickly change his mind.

Shukhov watches Kolya as he continues to write, but is unaware that he is writing poetry. He wonders why the medical director is writing in such a strange way, starting each line with a capital letter. Kolya was studying literature in college before being arrested. The medical director advised him to describe himself as a medical assistant and taught him to give intravenous injections on the "ignorant prisoners", who would never know he didn't have a medical background. The doctor wanted him to write in the prison what he never had the chance to write in school.

Kolya tells Shukhov the thermometer reads 99.2 and that if it were 100 he would be able to exempt Shukhov from work. He tells Shukhov that if he wants he can wait for the doctor to examine him, but if the doctor does not excuse him from work, he will be locked up in the cells. Shukhov decides it's better to work sick than be punished in the cells, so he leaves.

Shukhov passes back through the camp, which is empty now. Everyone is waiting indoors for work, pretending that they will not be called out. The guards are in their warm quarters, but even they will be subjected to the cold once the workday starts. In barracks 7, where gang 104 resides, the prisoners lay on their beds waiting for the march to work. Pavlo is up writing something, and Alyosha is reading from a hand written copy the New Testament.

*The clean, white and quiet space offers a contrast to the sordid conditions of the camp, showing the privileges enjoyed by those in power. The lack of a clock represents the way time is taken from the Zeks, literally as a form of oppression in the camp, and symbolically in the fact that the men are serving "time". Shukhov's comment about the doctor's remedy shows the disconnect between the Zeks and those in power.*



*Shukhov's ignorance surrounding Kolya's poetry reveals his class and education level. Kolya's character keeps art alive in the harsh world of the Gulag system, and because of the oppressive forces in Russia, he must lie about his profession to continue maintaining his identity as an artist. Again, the role of art is critiqued, as Kolya's is set apart from the "ignorant prisoners" and his art distracts him from the real needs of the people he is supposed to care for.*



*Shukhov's temperature is close to providing him an exemption from work, but because of the arbitrary rules in the camp he does not qualify and must work in the cold.*



*This passage shows the way in which both the Zeks and guards are powerless over the larger oppressive conditions in Soviet Russia. Although the guards are warm before work, they will have to join the Zeks in the cold during the day. The way the prisoners spend the free moments before work speaks to their individual identities. Pavlo is writing, presumably doing work to assure that his gang is cared for, and Alyoshka is reading his bible, devoting his free time to God.*



Pavlo calls Shukhov by his patronymic, Ivan Denisovich, when he notices he wasn't sent to solitary confinement. Pavlo hands him his food rations for the day. Shukhov holds it in his hand estimating the weight. He decides his **bread** is half an ounce short, but is not surprised because it is always short. He decides to take half to work, putting it into his pocket, and sews the other half into his mattress. He must hide it because guards have been known to steal from the prisoners' lockers.

Shukhov overhears Alyosha reciting from the bible. He reads, "If you suffer, it must not be for murder, theft, or sorcery...if anyone suffers as a Christian, he should feel it no disgrace, but confess that name to the honor of God." Alyosha hides his bible in a chink in the wall, and the guards have never found it.

Tyurin calls the men out for work. He has been imprisoned for nineteen years, and never calls his squad out to work a moment before it is necessary. Shukhov puts his shoes and jacket on, and then fastens a length of rope around his waist—leather belts are outlawed in "special" camps. The worst time of the day for the Zeks is going out for morning count with a hungry belly, knowing you had the whole day of work before you. The gang is lined up in their usual spot, which signifies they have escaped the Socialist Way of Life Settlement for the day. One of the poorer squads will be sent to work there. A squad needed to provide salted pork to their leader and the planning board to escape certain work assignments.

One of the men from Shukhov's gang is staying back sick. The prisoners know he is not sick, but is being held back to squeal on others. The guards had made arrangements with the doctors to hold him back, and after the gangs go out to work they will pull him in to get information.

While waiting, Shukhov remembers that he needs to get the numbers on his jacket touched up. Faded numbers could lead to harsh punishment. He gets in line to have one of the camp's three artists repaint them. He watches the artists hand move, comparing his movements to a priest anointing a parishioner's brow.

*The Soviet Regime worked to eliminate patronymic names, as they suggested a class system the Soviets sought to eliminate. Pavlo's calling Shukhov by his patronymic is a small act of resistance, suggesting he has not surrendered to the Soviet power. Shukhov's lack of surprise at his short ration and the way he rations his own bread to last the day shows that he is an experienced Zek, and has learned what to expect and how to survive during his time in the camp.*



*Alyosha builds his identity upon his Christian beliefs, allowing him to view his time in the camp as a burden he bears for God. He hides his bible in the same way Shukhov hides his bread, suggesting that Alyosha's bible is a means of survival, his source of "spiritual bread".*



*Tyurin, a long-term inmate himself, is the squad leader, but unlike others in power he understands the struggles of being in the camp and lets the men stay in as long as possible. The Zeks suffer when thinking of any time but the present, which makes the morning especially painful because of the hours of work ahead. The men compete for job assignments, and the gang with the most commodities wins. Because Tyurin has pork to offer the officials, gang 104 escapes the Socialist Way of Life Camp.*



*Snitching on your comrades is one of the greatest sins in the camp, and the definition of the loss of dignity. Snitching is one way in which prisoners attain extra privileges, and the guards use these men to attain info that allows them to maintain their power over the prisoners.*



*By comparing the artist to a priest, Shukhov makes a connection between art and redemption. Note that unlike Kolya's art, which is removed from the real struggles of the Zeks, the artist is in direct contact with the prisoners. In fact, he is saving them from punishment by repainting their numbers.*



After his numbers are repainted, Shukhov goes back to stand with his gang. He notices that Tsezar is smoking a cigarette and the desire he feels for it is stronger than the desire for freedom itself. Fetyukov, “the jackal” as Shukhov refers to him, is eyeing the cigarette too. Shukhov, however, does not stare like Fetyukov. He would never lower himself to look at another man’s mouth. Fetyukov asks Tsezar for a puff of the cigarette, which bothers Tsezar because the request interrupted his thoughts. He turns and hands the cigarette to Shukhov, telling him to finish it.

When the count starts someone informs the gang they are stripping the prisoners’ undershirts. Shukhov is not surprised, as this is the life of a prisoner, but wonders why they are taking the undershirts since the camp commandant issued them. The reason is the camp disciplinary officer, Volkovoy, is doing searches this morning. Volkovoy is feared by the prisoners, the guards, and it is rumored, even the camp commandant. He used to carry a whip with him that he used to lash prisoners who got out of line, just to watch them bleed.

### SECTION 3 (VOLKOVY’S SEARCH TO THE STORY OF SHUKHOV LEAVING HOME)

The guards typically search the prisoners quickly, simply making sure they are not carrying extra rations to eat should they try to escape, letters, or unregulated clothing. In the past they’d taken everybody’s rations and put the food into a single box to be carried out to work. The Zeks would worry that their ration would be given to someone else, which caused great turmoil among the gangs, pitting even friends against one another. This stopped, however, after some prisoners stole a work vehicle and the collected rations during an escape. But today, since Volkovoy is present, they command the prisoners to lift their jackets and unbutton their shirts to search for extra clothing.

Shukhov welcomes the search knowing that he is not hiding anything. He notes that beneath his jacket is a human chest, and beneath that, his soul. They discover that Tsezar and Buynovsky are wearing unregulated clothing. When the guards mark him down, Buynovsky tells them it’s against article 9 of the Criminal Code. The guards don’t care what the code says, and tell him he doesn’t know the law. He tells the guards and Volkovoy they are not acting like communists. Volkovoy gives him ten days in the cells for the comment, which will start after the workday, as not to lose a laborer for the day.

*Fetyukov’s character represents the loss of one’s dignity in the camp. He is a scrounger and beggar, which Shukhov, as a rigorously principled man, detests. Shukhov’s strong principles, like never looking at another man’s mouth, preserve his dignity. Shukhov, the man who does not beg or stare receives the cigarette over Fetyukov, suggesting his principles are beneficial in the camp.*



*Volkovoy is the example of the way in which power leads to abuse, especially the abuse of those who are powerless. Volkovoy’s sense of power leads to a thirst for more power, which he generates through fear causes by his sadistic whippings.*



*The typical searches are quick, suggesting that the guards have the capacity to be lenient with the Zeks, but Volkovoy’s presence changes that, as the abuse of power is inherent in his character. Interestingly, the camp, which is designed to create a collective communist atmosphere, actually creates competition among the Zeks by establishing absurd rules, such as taking their bread in the morning, which completely backfires in the end.*



*Shukhov’s surrender to the search and mention of his soul suggests that his identity and dignity is something that the guards cannot take from him. Buynovsky’s retaliation after the guards marks him down shows that he is a novice Zek and does not understand the power the guards hold over him. The guards hold power in the camp, and their overt sense of power makes them exempt from the laws of the criminal code.*





After the search, the cold has gotten beneath the Zeks' clothing and is there to stay. Shukhov notices his back is aching and he wishes he could be in the camp infirmary covered in blankets. As the prisoners button up their clothing, the guard yells for them to begin moving. They move, "like a flock of sheep" and are halted by the first gate to be counted. The guards light a fire by the gate to keep themselves warm and provide light to count the prisoners. The prisoners are counted again at the second gate as well. None of the guards dare make a mistake, as that would mean they'd have to work with the Zeks for the day.

*The cold is an oppressive power in the lives of those in the camp, including the guards. The men are compared to "sheep" here and to other animals through out the novel, showing the way in which the camp removes their humanity and human dignity, making them more like animals. Although guards possess power in the camp, they, like the Zeks, risk punishment and work, suggesting that although they possess a feeling of ultimate power, there are conditions under which they are powerless.*



The prisoners begin marching with the guards surrounding them with guns, pointing guns in their faces. Some of the guards walk dogs that bear their teeth at the prisoners. The guards all wear sheepskin coats. Some wear long coats that were not claimed by those manning the watchtowers.

*The guards, too, are equated to sheep here, showing that they are not, in fact, all that superior to the Zeks. They are also "sheep" in the sense that they follow orders without question, even though their orders may be immoral.*



Buynovsky explains that the air is always coldest at sunrise. Buynovsky, who was a naval captain, is fond of explaining things. The narrator notes that Buynovsky is fading under the stress of the camp and it is visible in cheeks, which are sunken, but he has guts.

*Buynovsky's transformation shows the way in which the camp changes the prisoners' identities. Buynovsky was a respected naval captain, but his social standing outside of the camp is no good to him in the Gulag. He does, however, retain some of his identity and principles from his past life, which Shukhov notes give him "guts" and will be assets during his time in the camp.*



The chief escort guard recites the "morning prayer", as Shukhov calls it, while the group marches. The "prayer" is a list of marching orders, with a warning that any prisoner who steps out of line will be shot.

*Shukhov calls the marching orders a prayer, showing the way in which religious faith is replaced by the authority of the Soviet Government, which viewed religion as a threat to its cause.*



It hasn't snowed for a week and the path is flattened, which causes the wind to lash at the men's' faces. The prisoners tie thin pieces of cloth over their faces to provide a barrier from the cold. From time to time the guards yell at the prisoners, "U48, hands behind your back!" or "B502, Keep up!" As they carry on, however, the guards stop shouting because of the cold. The guards are not allowed to wear anything on their faces, and Shukhov recognizes that the guards' job is not easy either.

*Although the guards hold the most power within the camp, they experience oppression from other outside forces, such as the weather and the Soviet government. They, like the Zeks, are forced for follow absurd rules, like not wearing facemasks in the bitter cold, which, as Shukhov notes, make their lives difficult.*



The prisoners sink into their thoughts on the walk to work, and Shukhov notes that a prisoner's thoughts are imprisoned like the prisoners themselves. Shukhov's thoughts continue to go to the same places: would the guards find the food hidden in his mattress? Would he have any luck with the doctors that night? Would they put Buynovsky in the prison? He is hungry, and to draw his focus away from the ache, he thinks about a letter he will soon be sending home.

*Because a Zek is constantly competing for the things he needs to survive, he has no time to think about anything in the past or future. Their minds are incarcerated in the present as they work to survive. The present, however, is not kind either, as it holds the pain of hunger, so Shukhov moves his thoughts elsewhere, which offers some solace.*



## SECTION 4 (THE STORY OF SHUKHOV LEAVING HOME TO ARRIVAL AT THE WORK SITE)

The year is 1951, a new year, and Shukhov has the right to send two letters home. The last letter he sent was in July and he'd received a response in October. At the first camp where Shukhov was imprisoned, he was able to write once a month, but even so, he didn't write any more than he does now. He'd left home in 1941, and at that time, news of the war had come through those who traveled out of town for church on Sunday. There were no radios when Shukhov left home, but through the letters he'd received, he knew that there was a radio in every home.

*The camp separates the men from their families and communities by limiting the number of letters they can send. The mention of radios shows the way that the world has changed during the time Shukhov has been gone. Getting the news at church used to be an important part of Russian lives, but now everyone has a radio, which lessens the importance of religious practice in the community as it has been replaced by modern technology.*



Shukhov reflects that there is little reason to write home. Sending letters is like dropping a stone into a deep bottomless pool. They have little to write about since they can't write home about the squad or the squad leaders. While incarcerated, Shukhov has more to talk about with the other prisoners than his family.

*The isolation of the camp and the monotony of his days leaves Shukhov little to write home about. His analogy about letters being like stones dropped into a bottomless pool shows this isolation. Because of the isolation and disconnection from his family, the gang is more like a family than the people he was separated from.*



The letters he gets from his family also do little to inform him of what is happening outside of the camp. The Kolkhoz, a collective farm settlement where his wife and family live, is under new management, the farm has amalgamated with another farm, and the farmers are failing to meet their quotas. All of these things are not surprising to Shukhov, they have all happened before.

*Shukhov references the impoverished conditions present in Soviet Russia. His comments show the way in which over time the conditions of communism have not benefited the people stands as a critique of Stalin's ideologies.*



Shukhov does not understand how the population of the community has not grown, despite the push for communism. The young men and women have escaped to go work in factories, and the men who survived the war returned to the Kolkhoz, but work outside of the settlement on the side, working for themselves not the collective good. His wife had written that some of the men had discovered a new craft, "carpet dying". These men had brought stencils back from the war and painted on cheap cloth to make them into carpets. Shukhov's wife hopes he will take up the craft, but Shukhov finds this idea insulting. He feels that carpet dying is dishonest easy money, and he'd rather use his skill, work hard, and feel like he's made an honest wage.

*Shukhov's mention of the community's stagnant population shows the way in which the soviet project is failing. The men and women do not work for the collective good, but pursue jobs that benefit themselves outside of the community, a direct contradiction to the communist ideal. The carpet dying job is a capitalist venture, as it does no good for the state. Shukhov's pride in his work ethic and skills leads to his denunciation of the carpet dying job altogether.*



The men arrive at work just as the sun is rising in a red haze. Shukhov sees Alyosha smiling as he looks up at the sun. He wonders what Alyosha has to smile about, his face is sunken, he is living off or scraps for rations, and he earns nothing for his work. He spends his day off worshipping with the other Baptists in the camp.

Shukhov looks to Tyurin, the leader of the squad. Tyurin, is serving his second term, and knows the ways of the camp through and through. Tyurin takes pains to see that his squad has the best rations possible. In prison camps, a squad leader is everything: a good one means survival, but a bad one means death. Shukhov knew Tyurin in the first camp where he was detained. When the political prisoners were transferred under article 58, Tyurin picked Shukhov to be in his squad. The squad leader protects his gang, and in return the gang follows the leaders orders.

Shukhov wishes to ask Tyurin where they will be working today, but he does not want to interrupt Tyurin, as he is most likely thinking about the gang's percentages, which will determine the amount of **bread** the group will be allotted. Tyurin's face is pockmarked, and he walks into the wind without showing any sign of fatigue.

*Red is the national color of Soviet Russia, and the allusion to the color of the sun at the Zeks' arrival at work connects the men's work to Soviet project. Alyoshka's faith allows him to find happiness in his harsh conditions, which intrigues Shukhov. Although he doesn't understand it, he unconsciously connects it to Alyoshka's worship on Sundays.*



*Although Tyurin is in a position of power, he is a prisoner too, and understands the life of imprisonment. His time in the Gulag system allows him to make good decisions on behalf of his men. A sense of camaraderie has emerged between Tyurin and the gang because he cares for them. Tyurin's past friendship and knowledge of Shukhov's skills and work ethic led him to pick Shukhov when they were transferred.*



*While Shukhov is concerned about his own day and where they will work, Tyurin is thinking about the men in his gang, showing his dedication to them. Shukhov's description of Tyurin suggests he respects him as a hardy, but similarly damaged Zek.*



## SECTION 5 (THE ARRIVAL AT THE WORK SITE TO THE BEGINNING OF WORK)

When the prisoners arrive at the work site the guards line them up for another count. Inside of the camp the superintendent stands near the office with, Der, a civilian super intendant. Shukhov notes that Der is a true criminal, unlike other men in the camp who were wrongly accused. Der was assigned to be a foreman and treated the prisoners like dogs.

The Zeks enter the site, and each person picks up a scrap of firewood to bring back to the camp with them to burn that evening for warmth. The squad leaders go to the office to get their orders for the day. Tyurin calls Pavlo to go with him to the office, and Tsezar follows. Tsezar is well off, and had paid the authorities to give him a job as an assistant to the inspector.

*The count keeps the men in the cold as they wait for work, another excessive show of authority. Der's character shows the unjust nature of the camp. Although he is a true criminal unlike the other wrongly accused men, his is given a position of power, which he abuses and treats the men like dogs.*



*The resourceful Zeks pick up the scraps of wood, knowing that supplies are short and constantly being competed for. Tsezar attains his position through payment, showing the disregard for the soviet ideal of collectivization and the presence of capitalism in the camp.*



The moment between arrival and the leaders returning with the work orders belong to the prisoners. There had been talk of assigning the work orders the night before to save time, but this plan had fallen aside. The 104th go into the repair shop where the 38th is already at work pouring slabs of concrete. There is a fire inside the room, not to keep the prisoners warm, but to help the slabs set faster. The 38th are already surrounding the fire, and won't let any stranger get near its warmth, so Shukhov takes a seat by the wall.

Shukhov feels something sharp pressing against his chest and remembers he has hidden a piece of **bread** there. He always brought the same amount with him, but never touched it until dinnertime. His belly, however, is hungry and the pain moves into his legs, making him feel weak. He unwraps the bread, finding it has been kept warm by his body heat, and begins nibbling away at it.

Shukhov recalls the way that he used to eat in his village before being incarcerated—pots of potatoes, pans of oatmeal, big chunks of meat, and plenty of milk. He'd learned in the camp, however, that that was not the way to eat. One should be mindful of his food while he eats. He reflects on how little he'd eaten over the last eight years, but quickly notes how much work he had completed.

He sits on the same side of the room as his fellow gang members and nibbles at his **bread**. The two Estonians sit beside him sharing a cigarette from the same holder. These two men are always together, they eat together, sleep adjacent to one another and talk to one another during the march.

As the prisoners sit around, Shukhov watches Fetyukov walk around collecting cigarette butts, which he breaks apart and rolls into a piece of paper. Fetyukov would even collect them out of the spittoon. His family had left him after he was imprisoned, and his wife had remarried, leaving with no help from outside of the camp.

Buynovsky tells Fetyukov to stop picking up the cigarette butts, that he is going to catch diseases that way. Buynovsky was a captain before being incarcerated, and he is used to barking orders at others. Fetyukov tells Buynovsky to wait until he had been imprisoned for eight years and see if he too wasn't scrounging for cigarettes.

*The way the plan to set work orders at night has fallen to the side suggests that the authorities value time just like they Zeks, as they are all oppressed. The fact that the stove is only burning to help the slabs set shows the way work is valued over the Zeks' wellbeing. The 38th's unwillingness to share the stove shows the intense competition in the camp.*



*The fact that Shukhov always brings the same amount of bread and never eats it before dinner reveals the strict principles that help him survive in the camp. This day, however, he eats it, showing that even the most principled Zek must sometimes submit to the hunger forced upon him in the camp.*



*His perception of his past eating habits shows the way that the camp has changed his identity over time. It has allowed him to appreciate the little he receives. By focusing on the amount of work he has done, he redeems his dignity, which is constantly threatened by his hunger.*



*The two Estonians show a sense of camaraderie based on their shared national identities, language, and customs. Their bond suggests that the camp has been unsuccessful in destroying their histories and identities.*



*Fetyukov's character shows the way in which the camp robs the Zeks of their dignities. The mention of the loss of his family allows the reader to sympathize with him as a man completely alone and disconnected from his past.*



*Buynovsky retains his identity as a captain, although it doesn't do him much good in the camp. Fetyukov tells Buynovsky that time in the camp will destroy his dignity, just as it has destroyed Fetyukov's.*



Senka, who is deaf, speaks up, thinking the men are talking about Buynovsky's bad luck that morning when Volkovoy caught him with extra layers on. He tells Buynovsky that he shouldn't have shown so much pride as to tell Volkovoy he wasn't acting like a Soviet. If you show too much pride, he says, you are done for. In the camp, it is better to submit, for if you resist the guards will break you.

The 104th continues waiting for Tyurin and Pavlo to return. Someone mentions that they haven't gotten a snowstorm yet that winter. The squad sighs, wishing one would come. The men do not go out to work during snowstorms, not because of the danger of someone freezing to death, but because it's an opportunity for prisoners to escape. Some had escaped during storms, but had never made it far. The snowstorms, while they provide a day off from work, trap the prisoners in the barracks without heat and with little food. Either way, the days of work they missed were made up on Sundays.

## SECTION 6 (THE BEGINNING OF WORK TO NEWS OF THE MURDERED STOOL PIGEONS)

Tyurin returns with a gloomy look on his face. The men immediately know they have been transferred to work on a half completed power station—the work had been halted on the building in the late autumn. He splits the gang into groups, one group to get boxes to mix the mortar, another to get the tools, and others are sent to get the stove started, and get sand and water for the mortar. The only two left after Tyurin's assignments are Shukhov and Kildigs, who are the skilled workers in the squad. He tells them they will be laying blocks after dinner. In the meantime, they were to figure out how to keep the room warm. He would have said more, but before he can finish, Gopchik approaches and tells Tyurin that another gang is hogging the boxes and there is an argument going on over it. Tyurin leaves with Gopchik.

Shukhov and Kildigs look at one another. They had come to respect one another because they were both skilled tradesmen. Finding materials to block the windows in the power plant is no easy matter, but Kildigs tells Shukhov he has hidden a role of roofing felt that would work. Kildigs is a Latvian, but he speaks Russian very well. He'd learned as a child by a group of "Old Believers" that lived near his childhood home.

*As Senka suggests, Buynovsky's identity and pride is not necessarily an asset in the camp. Buynovsky's outward pride is dangerous, as the guards work to beat pride out of the prisoners, while maintaining an inward pride and dignity is essential for survival.*



*The reason work is canceled during snowstorms is not for the safety of the Zeks, but because the authorities don't want people escaping, showing the authorities disregard for the wellbeing of the prisoners. Even though snow days are not pleasant, the Zeks wish for one. This wish is based on their attention to the moment. They are not concerned about making the day up later in the week, they only wish they did not have to work that day.*



*The fact that the men are assigned to work on a power station is fraught with irony. Not only will the men pour their own energy into the power station and reap no benefits from their work, they are also powerless over the guards and political system that force them to work on the power station in the first place. Because of their skills, Shukhov and Kildigs receive a better assignment than the other men, showing that one's skills are beneficial when it comes to the workday. Gopchik's news of the other gang hogging the boxes shows the way that the gangs compete for resources, even while they are supposed to be working for the good of the state.*



*A sense of camaraderie develops between Shukhov and Kildigs based on their shared identity as skilled workers. The competition for resources makes their task difficult, but as an experienced Zek, Kildigs has hidden materials in advance. Kildigs was taught Russian by a group of "Old Believers", who were a group of Russian Orthodox individuals who resisted the push to align Russian beliefs with Greek Orthodox traditions. This link to Kildigs past connects him to a tradition of resistance toward the homogenizing powers, which is reflected in his resistance to the Soviet Regime.*



Before going to get the felt, Shukhov goes off to retrieve a trowel he'd hidden at the last worksite. After work each day, the Zeks are supposed to return the tools used during the workday, but Shukhov had fooled the guard at the workhouse and had kept the best trowel for himself.

Shukhov and Kildigs walk to where the felt is hidden. The sun is up, but hidden behind thick clouds. Two rays of light fall toward the earth on either side of it. Shukhov tells Kildigs they look like poles. Kildigs replies they are not the kinds of poles they need to worry about, unless they put barbed wire between them. Kildigs is known for making jokes, and is popular among the gang because of it.

As Shukhov and Kildigs cross the work site, they see the men from the 82nd trying to dig holes in the frozen ground. Some of the men stare at the ground, discouraged by their inability to break through the frozen earth, but they are stuck there, forbidden to move. Discouraged, the men go back to work, which is the only way to stay warm. Kildigs tells one of the men to light a fire over the ground to help it thaw, but the man tells him it's not allowed, that they have no firewood. If the guards had any compassion, they wouldn't have the men pounding at the frozen earth in the first place.

As they approach the place where the felt is hidden, Shukhov notes that he likes working with Kildigs. The only bad thing about him is that he doesn't smoke, so he never has any tobacco. They find the felt right where Kildigs had hidden it. They are not concerned with the guards seeing them with the felt, the guards only care about prisoners who are escaping, plus the guards would be looking around for whatever they could scrounge just like the prisoners. The only people they needed to worry about were Der and Shkuropatenko. They decide to wrap their arms around it and carry it vertically so it will remain hidden.

They arrive back at the power station to find the mechanical lift is broken, the motor had burned out and no one had bothered to repair it. The power station had stood unfinished for two months, but with the 104th working on it, the building had come back to life. Tyurin sends Shukhov to fix the stovepipe so a fire could be kindled. The other men are sent to repair the mixing box. Lacking the supplies, they take the handrail from the ramp up to the second story.

*Shukhov's experienced and cunning identity allows him to survive in the camp and do better than many of his fellow prisoners as they compete for resources.*



*The image of the sun's rays as poles and Kildigs jest about stringing them with barbed wire depicts the overpowering sense of imprisonment the men experience in the isolation of the camp. Kildigs is identified as a comedian. His sense of humor is a major part of his identity, which both gains him respect and allows him to survive his destitute situation.*



*The Zeks' futile attempts to break the frozen ground work as a metaphor that depicts the futility of their existence. In a counterintuitive way, their work, which is their punishment, becomes their only means of survival, leaving them stuck with no choice but to continue. The comment about the guards at the end depicts the lack of compassion the guards have for the Zeks.*



*Even though Shukhov enjoys working with Kildigs, he notes that Kildigs does not smoke, and is unable to give him tobacco. This comment shows that while camaraderie does exist, Shukhov, like the other Zeks, is primarily concerned with his own needs. The guards only care about prisoners escaping because they will be punished for it—they too are only worried about themselves. Der is the only one the Zeks need to worry about because his sense of power leads him to enforce his authority the way other guards don't.*



*The broken lift shows metaphorically how the Soviet project is failing. If the authorities and Zeks truly cared about the project, the lift would have been repaired, but they are only interested in what affects them personally. Tyurin gives Shukhov the most important job, warming the site, showing Shukhov's valuable role in the gang.*



The narrator ponders why the men in the camp should work so hard, considering they were not being paid for their work. The narrator then explains that the camp is arranged so that men egg each other on, for their rations depend on the amount of work completed. Also, the men are forced to work in order to warm themselves up in the cold.

Shukhov begins working on the stove. The correct tools are not available, but he has a hammer and an ax and makes due. He hides his trowel in the wall again, knowing that although he is among his own men, one of them might swap it for his own, and that included Kildigs. As he works his memories and worries fade as his mind focuses on the single task at hand—fix the pipe. On the other wall, another stove burns in order to dry the sand to make the mortar. Fetyukov and Buynovsky are bringing wheelbarrows of sand to dry on it. The narrator notes that jobs such as this one were given to men who had been in positions of authority before entering the camp.

Fetyukov and Buynovsky edge up to the stove to warm up. Tyurin drives them off and the narrator notes that you only have to show a beaten dog a whip for it to cower. Tyurin tells Pavlo to keep the men working while he goes to check on the percentages, which will determine their rations for the day.

The narrator mentions that more depends on the work report than the work itself. A good squad leader knows how to make the reports look good and the site ratings to go up. The squad leader needs to be in good with the inspectors, and grease their palms to get ahead. The workers, however, do not benefit from their work, the camp does. The camp gets extra money for higher ratings, but this money goes to the higher-ups, while the Zeks got an extra six ounces of **bread**, at best.

Gopchik, a young prisoner, approaches Shukhov with some new aluminum wire asks Shukhov to teach him to make a spoon with it. Shukhov is fond of Gopchik. His own son had died young and his daughters are all grown up. Gopchik had been arrested for bringing milk to a Russian rebels in the forest, and had been given an adult's term for his crime. He was young, but had already learned to survive in the camp, eating his food packages alone at night without sharing.

*The role of work is counterintuitive, and reflects the way the camp conflicts with the soviet ideal. Because the men are given food based on the amount of work they do a capitalist sense of competition exists. Likewise, work is essential to stay warm, which means work is intrinsically connected with survival. Similarly, some Zeks take pride in their work, leading to a sense of dignity.*



*Shukhov's ability to fix the stove despite the lack of tools reflects his ability to survive in the camp. He takes pride in his resourcefulness, which allows him to maintain his dignity. Work also serves as a respite from the thoughts of his lost past and bleak future. He hides his trowel, because competition exists within the gang even in the presence of camaraderie. Fetyukov and Buynovsky working side by side shows that a Zek's social standing outside of the camp means little inside.*



*Tyurin exerts his power as he sends away Fetyukov and Buynovsky, and his authority over the men is revealed by the narrator's comment. At the same time, he sends the men back to work so the percentages will be good, showing that his intentions are not cruel.*



*The disconnection between the work report and the actual work done represents the disconnection between the authorities and the Zeks. The authorities are not concerned with the laborers, but with making themselves look good. They guards are the ones that benefit in the end, not the Zeks. The squad leaders job is to make sure his men get what they can from their labor, even if it's a simple six ounces of bread.*



*Gopchik is like a younger version of Shukhov. Shukhov's mention of his own son furthers this idea. Gopchik, like Shukhov, is resourceful, astute, and principled—qualities that Shukhov admires. Gopchik's sentence for such a minor crime shows the steadfast cruelty of the Soviet Regime.*



Shukhov sends Gopchik up to hang the stovepipe. Gopchik climbs the ladder nimbly and positions himself on the beams to hang the pipe. Shukhov puts a bend in the pipe, knowing that it would keep the stove from smoking when there was wind. He remembers that he is taking this extra measure because it would benefit himself and the gang.

*Gopchik, like Shukhov, is a hard worker and shows potential as a Zek, which leads to Shukhov's fondness of him. Shukhov uses his knowledge to fit the stovepipe correctly, and takes pride in it because it is for the gang not the authorities.*



The men continue working until the trucks arrive with the blocks to build the wall. Alyoshka brings in a shovel full of coal. Some men tell him to dump it on the fire, others tell him to wait, and so he stands there confused about whom to obey. Fetyukov had found a cozy corner and had his boots up to the heat of the stove. Eventually, Buynovsky orders him to haul sand. Buynovsky is still in the mindset he had during his time aboard ships—if you were told to do something you did it.

*Alyoshka's religious beliefs make him willing to work obediently, but his meekness is not necessarily an asset as shown by his confusion. Fetyukov, who is known for his selfishness, does not think about the fact that he is working for the good of the gang, which leads to his laziness. Buynovsky, however, still possesses the sense of responsibility he gained while working aboard ships, which leads to his comments to Fetyukov and his own drive to work.*



Shukhov, Pavlo and Kildigs set out to find a way to get the blocks to the second story landing. The stairs are icy, and lack a railing for support, so the men decide to place someone on the landing and heave the blocks to him. Shukhov looks up at the sky and gasps—the sun had almost risen to the point denoting dinner hour. He notes how time flies when working, but the years never do. Shukhov notes that the sun is at its highest point, which must mean it is noon. Buynovsky jokes that the sun is highest at one, as declared by the Soviet government.

*The men work together to problem solve, and through their collaboration, a sense of camaraderie develops. Working distracts Shukhov from his miserable situation. Focusing on misery makes the time move slowly, but it moves faster once he focuses on the job at hand. Buynovsky's joke about the Soviet government decree regarding the time reflects the ultimate power of the Soviet Government—a power great enough to influence nature.*



Pavlo tells Shukhov, Kildigs, and Senka to take a break before dinner. The men warm their hands beside the stove, but not their feet, because the heat will cause leather boots to crack and valenki to become sodden or burn holes right through them, leaving you without another pair until springtime. Shukhov takes one of his boots off and the men joke that Shukhov's term is nearly up, and his one bare foot is almost home. Shukhov enjoys hearing this, but he has his doubts about it. Most of the Zeks who finish their sentence are sentenced again “pending special instructions”, or else they are exiled and unable to go home anyways.

*The shortage of boots and the competition among the Zeks for clothing causes the men's concern about their boots cracking. When the men joke about Shukhov's release being close, he enjoys a moment of joy, but he joy is short lived, as he knows that his sentence will likely be extended. Shukhov is powerless over the authorities' ability to keep him incarcerated.*



Shukhov tells Kildigs not to worry about his twenty-five year sentence. He says that his eight years served, however, are a fact. The narrator explains that, “When you're flat on your face there's no time to wonder how you got in and when you'll get out.” According to Shukhov's dossier, he'd testified against himself for high treason, even though the nature of his crime could not be explained. He'd known that if he pleaded innocent he would be shot, so he plead guilty, knowing it was his only chance at survival.

*Because the future is unknown, the length of time left in one's sentence is not important. What matters is the time one has been inside, which is a fact. The oppression from the Soviet power keeps the men from dreaming about getting out. Fearing death, Shukhov was forced to testify against himself, showing the fear tactics the Soviet regime uses against Soviet citizens. Based on Shukhov's experience, it can be assumed that many of the Zeks were subjected to similar injustice.*





The narrator reveals Shukhov's crime of treason. In 1942 Shukhov was in the Russian army on the Northwest Front, starving, and surrounded by the German army. After being captured, Shukhov escaped with a group of soldiers, and as if by a miracle reached the Russian front. Upon reaching the Russians, however, a machine gunner shot two of the men and another later died of his wounds. They said they were POW's and had escaped, but because there were only two of them they were accused of lying and tried for treason.

*Shukhov's story shows the depth of injustice committed by the Soviet Regime. The fact that Shukhov was fighting in the Russian Army suggests that he was a loyal Soviet citizen, but upon being captured his service is not recognized, and to the extreme opposite, he is accused of being a traitor. The murder of his comrades by their own men shows metaphorically the Soviet power's betrayal of their own people.*



## SECTION 7 (THE NEWS OF THE MURDERED STOOP PIGEONS TO TYURIN'S STORY)

Senka, though he is deaf, catches wind that the men are talking about escape and reveals that he escaped from the Nazis three times before being arrested for smuggling arms. Little is known about Senka, besides his crime and that the Germans punished him by tying him up and whipping him.

*Senka is a sort of mysterious hero in the gang. The other men only know a little about him, but what they do know of him are his heroics in escaping from the Nazis. His deafness and mysterious nature represents the way in which Zeks struggle to communicate with and understand one another.*



Kildigs responds to Shukhov's comment about his time served by claiming that Shukhov's eight years had been easy, as they had not been served in "special" camps where there were no women and you had to wear numbers. Shukhov remembers hauling logs for three years at the last camp. The chief of the camp had made a rule that any squad that didn't meet their quota had to stay in the forest after dark. Shukhov says that life at the "special" camps is easier since you go home once your shift is over, plus prisoners received more **bread**.

*Kildigs' attempt to diminish the time Shukhov has served suggests a sense of resentment and competition. Shukhov's experience, however, suggests that the other camp was even more oppressive, as the men forced to make quotas, unlike their present camp where work reports are exaggerated. Either way, no matter the camp where a Zek does his time, he is oppressed by the Soviet power.*



Fetyukov chimes in, asking Shukhov if he thinks having your throat slit in your bunk is a quieter life. Pavlo speaks up, claiming that the men who were killed were not men, but "squealers". The narrator reveals that two men had been killed in their bunks, and another had been killed after being mistaken for another prisoner. A fourth had run to the guards for protection.

*When it comes to "squealers" the Zeks take the power into their own hands, turning to murder as punishment for the crime. Squealing is one of the worst sins in the camp, leading to a complete loss of one's dignity and, as suggested by Pavlo's remark, makes a Zek less than human.*



Just then, the dinner whistle blows. They should have gotten to the canteen earlier since there are eleven squads and only room for two men in the canteen at a time. Pavlo tells Shukhov and Gopchik to follow him and tells Kildigs to bring the other men when he sends for them. As they walk out side, Shukhov notes that it has grown warm enough to lay bricks. He looks up at the sun, thinking about Buynovsky comment about the soviets decree that the sun is highest at one.

*Pavlo, Shukhov, and Gopchik go to the mess hall to secure their spot in line, as the other Zeks working at the site will be competing for a good place in line. Ruminating on Buynovsky's comment shows that there is some truth in his comment, which reminds Shukhov of the Soviet power under which he is imprisoned.*



The mess hall is a shanty with a partition separating the canteen from a tiny eating room. Two men—a cook and a sanitation inspector—run the kitchen. Each morning the cook draws an issue of grits from the main kitchen. The cook doesn't like to carry the grits to the work site, so he hires a prisoner to carry it and pays him with extra rations. He also finds men to carry the firewood, water and other cooking supplies, and other men to guard the canteen and carry the bowls. All of these “helpers” are paid with extra food, all of which comes from the bowls of the other Zeks. The cook's job was to pour the grits into the pot and add salt and fat. He keeps the good fat for himself and puts the rancid fat into the Zek's food. The sanitation inspector's job is to sit and watch the cook. Then the deputy-squad leader arrives and has a taste of the food to decide whether it's “good enough” for the Zeks, receiving a double portion.

When the whistle blows again the squad leaders line up for their helpings. The narrator tells that no matter how hard a Zek works the land raising food, he is only afforded what the guards give him. The Zek's are constantly getting robbed, and the biggest insult is that them men robbing them don't even work for the food.

Pavlo and Shukhov walk into the canteen with Gopchik bringing up the rear. The room is packed, and the men of gang 82 are finished eating, but not moving. Shukhov and Pavlo elbow their way into the room. The cook yells for bowls, and Shukhov begins collecting them, not to get extra food, but to get his food quicker. Behind the partition, Shukhov sees men washing dishes for extra food. Pavlo sends Gopchik to fetch the rest of the men.

Shukhov is glad to see that they are serving real oatmeal. Shukhov reflects on a time when he used to feed oats to horses, and it had never occurred to him that a time would come when he would yearn for a handful of them.

The 104th arrives and gets into line. Shukhov's job is to get into one of the tables, send away the remaining Zeks from the other squad, and clear room for the bowls. When this task is finished, he helps Pavlo move them to the table, being vigilant to keep count of them so no one swipes any.

*Because of the scarcity of food, competing for food is a Zek's primary focus. The importance of food places the cooks in a position of power. The cooks, as the overseers of the rations, exploit their power to make their own lives easier, which comes at the expense of the other men's rations. The cook is also able to secure the best food for himself and those in power, which contrasts the ideal of a collective society.*



*The narrator's comment shows a fundamental flaw in the communist system. A collective society still requires a power at the top, which is reflected in the guards at the camp. The people are exploited by the power in the same way the guards rob the prisoners without having to work.*



*The 82nd are competition for the 104th, as they are occupying seats that the 104th need in order to eat. Shukhov is careful to note that he is collecting bowls not to get extra food, showing that he is too dignified to do extra labor for food he has already worked for, and he looks down upon the men working behind the partition because they are doing extra work.*



*His reflection on the oats he used to feed his horses shows that his time in the camp has changed him.*



*The gang must work together to secure the table and the food, depicting a sense of camaraderie to overcome the competition.*



The gang receives fourteen bowls, but the kitchen runs out additional bowls. The cook places two more full bowls on the counter, making sixteen, but as he turns to call for more empty bowls to fill, Shukhov swipes them, and brings them to the table. When the cook turns back around, Pavlo tells him they have only received fourteen. The cook turns and notices they are gone, and yells to Shukhov. Shukhov stealthily passes the bowls to the two Estonians in the squad who hide them. Shukhov tells the cook to count the bowls, and when he does finds fourteen.

Shukhov begins eating, knowing that Pavlo will give one of the bowls to him, but not until he finished his first. He takes out his **spoon**, removes his hat, and begins eating. Shukhov grows nervous as he sees Fetyukov standing in front of Pavlo, eyeing the extra bowls. He takes out the piece of **bread** he'd stored in his pocket that morning and cleans the edge of his bowl with it. Pavlo takes his time to eat, licks his spoon, and crosses himself, drawing out Shukhov's wait. Then he touches two bowls, indicating they are for Shukhov.

Buynovsky is sitting near Shukhov. Having finished his food, he is trying to warm up before going back to work. He, like the Zek's from the prior gang, is taking up space that is no longer his, as he is supposed to move back out into the cold to make room for the next gang. The narrator notes that Buynovsky is a newcomer, and doesn't understand the life of a Zek yet. Moments like this one are important, as they are transforming him from a confident naval officer, into an inert Zek, and his inertness will be essential to his survival over his twenty-five year sentence.

Pavlo hands Buynovsky one of the extra bowls. The narrator notes that Buynovsky, a man who has sailed the world, looks at the bowl of oatmeal as if it is something miraculous. Fetyukov shoots an angry look at Shukhov and Buynovsky, and leaves. Tsezar's bowl of oatmeal is on the table, waiting to be delivered to the office where he works. Shukhov eyes it, hoping Tsezar will give him his bowl. He notes that it's unlikely since Tsezar hasn't received a **parcel** for more than two weeks.

*Although Shukhov will not do extra work for food he has already earned, he has no problem stealing food, as he feels he has worked hard enough to deserve it. The gang works as a team to secure the food by duping the cooks.*



*Despite his hunger, Shukhov takes the time to remove his hat before he begins eating, showing his strict principles. Although he knows he has earned the extra bowls, Fetyukov is a source of concern as he is also competing for the food. Pavlo, who is also a principled man, eats slowly and crosses himself, showing that the camp has not destroyed his dignity or religious beliefs.*



*Buynovsky does not understand the ways of the camp yet, which is why he does not understand that he is supposed to move when he is done eating. As the narrator suggests, in time he will learn to be inert, which will be essential to his survival. In the camp, the Zeks have no option but to sit still, and move inward to maintain a sense of identity and dignity.*



*Pavlo's decision to give Buynovsky the bowl shows the way in which the experienced men of the gang look out for newer members. Buynovsky's reaction to the food depicts the way in which Buynovsky is losing his identity as a captain and assuming the identity of a Zek. Fetyukov does not receive the bowl because he is a known scrounger, which leads to the loss of respect from his fellow gang members. Although Shukhov will not outwardly show his yearning for food like Fetyukov, inside he longs for Tsezar's extra rations. By hiding his longing, he protects his dignity.*



Shukhov takes the bowl to the office where Tsezar works. When he walks in, he notes that it is as warm as a bathhouse. The light comes through the windows playfully, and the smoke from Tsezar's pipe looks like incense in a church. The superintendent is bemoaning the waste caused by the Zeks at the work site: dry cement blowing away and materials being stolen to burn as firewood.

Shukhov approaches Tsezar's desk and finds him debating Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* with another prisoner. Tsezar claims Eisenstein is a genius, but the other man claims that the film is so artsy it is no longer art, that art's true purpose is to nourish the soul. Tsezar asks what other interpretation Eisenstein could have gotten away with, to which the other man replies that Eisenstein should be called an "ass kisser" not a genius, for true geniuses don't make art to suite the taste of tyrants. Tsezar states that art isn't about what, but how. The other man claims that it isn't worthwhile unless it arouses a feeling within him. Tsezar then puts his hand out for his bowl, without even acknowledging Shukhov, so Shukhov quietly leaves.

As he walks back toward the station, Shukhov finds a piece of a broken hacksaw blade. He picks it up and decides to keep it to make a knife out of it. When he reaches the power station, he retrieves his trowel and heads for the machine shop where gang 104 is warming up before starting work again.

*The warm atmosphere of the office contrasts Shukhov's cold, harsh work conditions, and reflects Tsezar's privilege. The comparison of Tsezar's pipe smoke to church incense, suggests this privileged space is sacred. The superintendent's complaints stem from the concern that he will be punished for the waste. He never recognizes that the waste is due to the harsh environmental elements of the camp and the Zeks struggle to survive.*



*Tsezar's conversation continues the critique of art that ignores the people. The other prisoner thinks Eisenstein's film as "too artsy", claiming he is only concerned with its artfulness, and as a result, does not make him feel anything. Tsezar's other comment speaks to the oppression of art by the Soviet government—especially art revealing the struggles of real Soviet people. When Tsezar ignores Shukhov to continue his conversation about art, the argument is enacted in a literal way. The conversation about art leads to Shukhov being ignored.*



*Shukhov's decision to keep the piece of metal reveals his identity as a resourceful Zek. He sees possibility in the shard of metal, and knows if he can smuggle it back into camp it will be profitable.*



## SECTION 8 (TYURIN'S STORY TO THE END OF THE WORK DAY)

When Shukhov returns from the office, he finds the men of Gang 104 warming up around the stove. The men are in good spirits because Tyurin had been successful in fixing the work report so their numbers looked good, even though the gang hadn't accomplished much that morning. A good work report means five days of good rations, although one day's worth of the food would be taken by the guards.

*As a good squad leader, Tyurin knows how to fix the work reports so they look good, which benefits his gang. The news of his success brings joy to his men, as they will be given good rations for their "work". Just like the cooks who control the food, Tyurin plays a major role in the gang's attainment of food, giving him a powerful role in the gang. But he is still unable to prevent the authorities from taking their cut.*



As the men sit around the fire, the narrator says the gang is like one big family. Tyurin begins telling some of the men his story. He has taken his hat off to eat, and the narrator notes how many grey hairs he has. He tells that when he was twenty-two, serving in the Red army, he was excommunicated because he was the son of a Kulak, a wealthy peasant class in Russia that Stalin vowed to eliminate. The authorities had been looking for him for two years before they found he was hiding his identity.

In November the Red Army kicked Tyurin out. Before they sent him away they took his winter clothes and gave him a summer uniform, and didn't give him rations or a train pass. In 1938, at the deportation point, he met his former squadron commander, who tells him the men who excommunicated were shot and killed. Tyurin crossed himself and acknowledged that God must exist, that God's patience "is long suffered, but [he] strikes hard."

In the middle of Tyurin's story, Shukhov asks one of the Estonians for a cigarette until the next day, promising he will repay him. The Estonian turns to his brother, these two men share everything. They mutter something in their native tongue, and then give Shukhov enough for a single cigarette. As Shukhov lights the cigarette, he notices Fetyukov glaring at him from across the room. He reflects that he might have given him a drag, but he had already seen Fetyukov conniving during dinner, so he decides to give some to Senka instead.

Tyurin continues his story, talking calmly, as if he were telling someone else's story. After being kicked out of the army, he sold what rags he had and bought some **bread** "under the table" as the government had already started rationing. He was unable to buy a train ticket because the government required special identification, so he jumped a wall and hid in a public restroom. When he realized no one is after him, he left the restroom and saw a group of people fighting to fill their kettles from a public faucet. He noticed a girl standing there, unable to push herself through. He handed her the bread and offered to fill her kettle. As he filled it, the train started leaving, and the girl began crying. Tyurin ran from the faucet and hoisted the girl onto the train. He then pulled himself up, surprised that the conductor mistook him for a soldier, and didn't throw him off.

*As the narrator notes, during Tyurin's story, the gang comes together gang like a family. Tyurin's story of injustice connects him to his men. Although he is in a position of power, he is one of them and his "crime" of being a kulak shows he too has been subjected to the oppressive power of the Soviet regime. In a sense, Tyurin is freer in the camp than he was before his incarceration. Inside the camp he no longer needs to hide his identity the way he did in the army, and is able to cultivate his identity as a leader.*



*The way the Army sent him away without food or proper clothing shows cruelty of the Soviet regime. His comment about God shows that even in his despair, he has faith in God and believes those who do wrong be punished, even if it happens in God's time.*



*The Estonians consult with one another about the cigarette because they share a sense of camaraderie based on their shared history and operate as a single unit. They give Shukhov the cigarette because they know he is honorable and will pay them back. Shukhov disrespects Fetyukov because he is a scrounger. Despite his constant hounding, Fetyukov receives little from his fellows, showing the way in which the loss of one's dignity makes camp life challenging. Senka, on the other hand, receives the end of Shukhov's cigarette because he does not beg, and maintains his dignity.*



*The way Tyurin tells his story as if it were someone else's shows the way in which he is disconnected from his past. Tyurin buys bread under the table because the Government had begun rationing, showing the way in which Stalin's regime had begun exerting their oppressive power over the Soviet people. Tyurin's act of good will toward the girl, shows the morality of his character, and ultimately leads to his success hopping the train. This situation suggests that individuals who show good morals and strong principals are rewarded with good fortune.*



Tyurin found himself in a room with six girls from the university in Leningrad. When they asked him what coach he was in, he told the truth, that he was heading toward death in a labor camp. The girls are struck by the severity of his situation, and hide him under their raincoats all the way until Novosibirsk. Tyurin notes he was able to help one of the girls later when she too was incarcerated: he got get a job at a tailoring shop.

*Tyurin's response to the girls shows the severity of his future under the authority of the Soviet regime. By hiding him, the girls reveal the attitude of the people toward Stalin's rule. If they were loyal to Stalin, they would have turned him in. Tyurin is later able to repay one of the girls after she is incarcerated, showing his virtuous character and the camaraderie he feels with the girl after she helps him.*



Pavlo asks Tyurin if they should begin mixing mortar, but Tyurin ignores him and continues his story. He says that after he got off the train, he went to his house and fetched his brother. He took his brother to Frunze and left his brother with a group of road workers. He never saw his brother again after that.

*By ignoring Pavlo, Tyurin suggests that sharing his identity and story with his men is more important than slaving for the authorities, who are working to strip it away. The loss of his brother shows the way in which the Soviet regime affects everyday people and families.*



When Tyurin finishes his story, he puts the men to work. The work signal has not been sounded yet, but the narrator notes that Tyurin is a good squad leader and his men will get right to work for him. A guard, on the other hand, could tell them to work and they wouldn't budge. The squad leader is the one that feeds them, and will never make them work for nothing.

*Because the men respect Tyurin, they are willing to work, knowing that his orders are given in the men's best interest. In this way, Tyurin is more powerful than the guards, as the Zeks resist their orders while following Tyurin's orders without complaint.*



Shukhov jumps up to work, but Kildigs looks at him funny. Kildigs doesn't have to worry about working because he receives **parcels** that help him survive. Eventually Kildigs gets up because you can't keep the gang waiting for you. Kildigs offers to go with Shukhov, and Shukhov notes that was the other reason he got up first—he wanted to get the plumb before Kildigs did. Then Pavlo offers to help. Pavlo doesn't have to help, but he is willing to work for Tyurin.

*Kildigs looks at Shukhov funny because they do not share the same principals. Kildigs survives by his parcels, while Shukhov survives by maintaining his identity, principals, and dignity. Shukhov's desire to get to the plumb before Kildigs reveals the competition among the gang members. Pavlo's willingness to work shows his respect for Tyurin and the other men, and reveals the way in which work levels the hierarchy within the group.*



The men decide to work in pairs so the mortar doesn't freeze. Before he begins work, Shukhov notices the expanse of the camp from the second story where he is set to work, but when he begins working his thoughts center only on his work. The spot where he begins working was full of mistakes made by the last mason working on the wall, but as Shukhov begins working, he treats the wall as if it were his own. He plots how to make the men work more effectively, and how he can help the others accomplish their tasks.

*The expanse of the camp represents the immensity of Shukov's oppressive situation, but as he moves into his work, his thoughts are not consumed by it. Through work, Shukhov is able to cultivate his identity and dignity, which help him survive. He is also able to take ownership over his work, which is immensely important for a man who owns nothing.*

Shukhov sets the plumb string, and begins laying bricks. The gang works with great efficiency so the mortar doesn't freeze, some men carrying bricks, others mixing mortar, and the rest laying bricks. Shukhov makes no mistakes, working hastily, but with incredible finesse. Every so often, Tyurin yells for more mortar, and intermittently, Shukhov yells the same thing, noting that when you are working as a group each man is the squad leader to the next.

*As the men work a true sense of camaraderie emerges. The men view this collective effort as labor they are doing for the good of the gang, not the good of the state. Shukhov shines while he works, and his skill puts him on an even level with Tyurin, as shown by his command while working.*



Buynovsky and Fetyukov are assigned to carry mortar. Buynovsky goes slowly at first because the ramps are steep and icy, but grows more efficient with each trip. Fetyukov, however, gets lazier with each climb up the ramp. Buynovsky grows frustrated with Fetyukov, and refuses to work with him any longer. Tyurin sends Fetyukov to move blocks and tells Alyoshka to help Buynovsky with the mortar. Buynovsky agrees without hesitation. The narrator notes that Alyoshka is a quiet man, and will follow anyone's orders.

*The discrepancy in Buynovsky and Fetyukov's reaction to the work speaks to their individual characters. Buynovsky adjusts to the work, showing his potential as a Zek, which gains him the respect of the gang. Fetyukov's laziness, in contrast, earns him a more difficult job assignment. Alyoshka's willingness to follow Tyurin's orders stems from his religious beliefs that he is in the camp to grow spiritually. His obedience, however, is not always an asset as he lacks the ability to stand up for himself.*



A mechanic arrives to fix the mechanical lift to haul the blocks and mortar. Along with the mechanic, the building-foreman, Der, arrives and climbs the ramp. Kildigs jokes with Shukhov to let him know if Der falls off the icy ramp so he can watch. Der stands behind Shukhov and Kildigs watching them work. Shukhov hates men like Der. Once Der had tried to show Shukhov how to lay bricks, which had given Shukhov a good belly laugh. Shukhov thinks "a man should build a house with his own hands before he calls himself an engineer". In the village where Shukhov lived prior to his incarceration there were no brick buildings, but the camp needed masons, so he learned the trade.

*Kildig's joke about Der shows the lack of respect and hatred the men have for Der. Shukhov hates Der because he critiques his work without possessing any skill himself. Individuals gain Shukhov's respect by gaining and using their skills to work hard. In this way, Shukhov is a model Zek. When the camp needed masons, he learned the skill, even though he'd never worked as a mason before entering the camp. Der is the opposite of Shukhov, as his identity as an authority figure is not backed by any experience.*



Der begins to yell at Tyurin for using the roofing felt for covering the windows. He threatens Tyurin with a third term for the offense. As Shukhov listens, he worries about losing Tyurin because he is like a father to the gang. Tyurin steps up to Der, and Pavlo backs him up, shovel in hand. Then Senka steps up beside Pavlo, placing his hands on his hips. Tyurin tells Der his time for giving terms has passed, and he will be killed if he says anything. Der becomes frightened and backs down. He asks Tyurin what he should tell his superior about the roofing felt. Tyurin tells him to tell his superior they found it that way. Before he leaves, Der picks on Shukhov, asking why he is using so little mortar. Shukhov tries to explain that in cold weather the bricks require extra mortar, but Der tells him not to question a foreman's orders.

*Lacking a true understanding of the work, Der berates Tyurin for using the felt, when the job could not be completed without warming the space. The way the gang comes together to protect Tyurin shows the camaraderie among the men. In this moment the power shifts, and the Zeks take the authority over the situation. Der's response to the men shows that he too is afraid of those who hold power over him. When Der picks on Shukhov before leaving, it shows the way that those who are oppressed turn to those who are weaker than them to regain a sense of power.*



The men continue to pick up their pace as they work, even though the mechanic deemed the machine beyond repair. As the wall gets higher with each row of bricks the work becomes easier since they don't need to bend down to work. As they begin laying the fifth row of bricks, Gopchik reports that the men of Gang 82 are handing in their tools. Tyurin tells him to mind his business and continue working. Shukhov notices the sun is setting, but since he has begun the fifth row, he thinks it best to finish it.

*The fact that the work becomes easier as the men do it symbolically shows the importance of work for the Zeks. It not only grows physically, but also becomes a place where the men gain a sense of power and dignity. Gopchik's concern shows the competition among the gangs to be the first back to the camp after work, but Tyurin understands that the gang's true competition is the authorities that determine their rations. Shukhov's desire to continue working shows his principals—he is devoted to doing a good job because he feels ownership over his work.*



Shukhov commands the men to place the bricks on the wall to keep the pace up. Buynovsky would have agreed, but he lacked the strength. Alyoshka, on the other hand, happily agrees and continues working. Shukhov notes that Alyoshka and the other Baptists had something in their way of life, that if a man asks for help, he should be helped. Shukhov notes that if everyone in the world were like that, he'd act accordingly.

*As an inexperienced Zek, Buynovsky does not have the endurance to continue, although he would if he could. Shukhov's mention of the Baptists shows that he sees some value in their way of life. In the constant competition of the camp, however, he does not see giving freely of himself as logical or even possible.*



## SECTION 9 (THE END OF THE WORK DAY TO THE ARRIVAL AT THE CAMP)

The guard signals the end of work by clanging a length of rail. Gang 104 is caught with a box full of freshly mixed mortar. The men continue working, knowing that if they leave the mortar behind they will be punished for it in the morning. Pavlo begins laying bricks to finish off the freshly mixed mortar. Shukhov pushes Senka out of the way to lay the corner himself because he knows haste leads to sloppy work, which will cost him time in the morning. Buynovsky delivers the last load of mortar, and Shukhov compares him to a horse, reflecting on a horse he'd once owned that had been worked to death after collectivization.

*The men once again face a catch 22 because of the authorities. Because of their dedication to the work they are stuck with the remaining supplies and face punishment. Shukhov takes Senka's place because he takes pride in his work and wants it done right. Stepping in will also save him time in the morning, which means a better work report and more rations. By comparing Buynovsky to a horse, he speaks to the way in which the camp dehumanizes the men, working them like animals. The connection between the horse's death and collectivization shows the destructive force of Communist ideologies.*



The men from the other gangs have begun turning their tools. Tyurin examines the work completed that day, and satisfied with their progress, tells them to throw the rest of the mortar over the wall and turn in their tools. Kildigs, Senka, and Shukhov continue using the rest of the mortar. Shukhov tells Kildigs to bring the trowels and he will finish since his trowel is not accounted for. The other men rush toward the count, as being late means solitary confinement.

*Shukhov, Senka, and Kildigs' decision to finish the mortar shows their dedication to doing a good job despite the risk of punishment by the authorities for being late. That they would be punished for doing good work is ironic, as their selfless devotion to the work seems to fit with the Soviet ideal, and yet this camp meant to make them into true Soviets punishes them for it.*





Tyurin tells Shukhov to hurry to the count, but Shukhov tells him not to wait, to go with the other men to the count. He refers to Tyurin as “foreman” instead of his more official title. Tyurin leaves, and Shukhov is left at the site with Senka. They continue laying bricks, even though Tyurin had told them to throw the rest of the mortar out. Shukhov notes that he wasn't made that way, and eight years in the camp couldn't change him.

Eventually Senka bails, leaving Shukhov alone at the power station. Shukhov runs to the back of the wall and checks to make sure their work is solid. Before going to count, Shukhov runs to the machine shop and hides his trowel. As he hides it, he feels frightened, not because of the dark, but because the space is empty and if he misses the count he will be beaten and put into solitary.

Shukhov darts toward the count and meets Senka, who had stopped to wait. Senka would rather wait for Shukhov and share the punishment than make Shukhov suffer alone. When the approach the camp, the other Zeks boo them. Shukhov is not worried, knowing that Tyurin had explained for them.

The guards begin telling the gangs to line up. While waiting, Shukhov nudges Buynovsky in the ribs and asks him what science says about where the moon goes after it sinks below the horizon. Buynovsky tells Shukhov is question is stupid, that it just isn't visible. Shukhov rejects Buynovsky's scientific explanation, explaining that the people in his village believe God crumbles the moon and turns it into stars. Buynovsky calls Shukhov's beliefs savage.

The Zeks catch wind that someone is missing during the count. They make the men line up again to redo the count, which infuriates the Zeks because they are losing precious time. There would still be another search at the camp before getting in. The first gang back was “the top dog” for the evening because they had free reign on the mess hall, parcel room, barber, and baths. The narrator notes that the guards too are in a hurry to get back because their lives in the camp are full of work and little free time.

As the guards count again, Shukhov notices that they'd worked so late that none of the men had gathered any firewood. Each night the men would gather whatever twigs and chips of wood they could find. Most of it would be confiscated by the guards upon entering the camp, but the Zeks knew that if everyone brought a few pieces of wood, they would be able to get some in.

*Referring to Tyurin as “Foreman” instead of his official title shows the way in which work levels the hierarchy among the Zeks. Shukhov continues laying the mortar because he was raised with principals. Shukhov maintains his identity by holding onto the principals he was given before being incarcerated.*



*Taking extra time to check the wall shows that Shukhov's dignity is more important than the risk of punishment. The guards can take his freedom, but not his dignity. He hides his trowel so that no one will find it and take it from him. Having adjusted to the lack of privacy in the camp, Shukhov feels afraid when he is alone.*



*The fact that Senka risks being late for Shukhov shows the camaraderie they share. Their trust in Tyurin to explain for them shows Tyurin's dedication to his men.*



*During their conversation, Shukhov and Buynovsky represent the contention between the logic of the soviet state and the beliefs of the Russian people. Shukhov holds onto the beliefs that he grew up with, which act as a subtle resistance to the Soviet regime's attempts to strip the Zeks of their religious beliefs. Holding onto these beliefs allows Shukhov to maintain his identity, and survive in the camp.*



*The missing man angers the Zeks because the extra counts waste their precious free time. The count also puts the gangs at a disadvantage as they compete with gangs from other work sites to get back to the camp first. When it comes to free time, the guards are also oppressed like the prisoners, showing the way in which all of the camp inhabitants are oppressed by the Soviet regime.*



*By working late, gang 104 was unable to gather firewood, showing the way that the limited time the men are afforded forces the men to constantly make sacrifices that affect their wellbeing. The way the guards take the Zeks' wood to warm themselves shows the way they exploit their power for their own benefit.*



Tsezar joins the group from the office where he'd worked all day. He asks the men how the work went, and the narrator notes that a man who's warm can't understand a man who's freezing. Buynovsky tells Tsezar he worked so hard he can no longer stand up straight. Tsezar give him some tobacco. Buynovsky is the one person who Tsezar sticks to in the camp because the two men can relate to one another.

The Zeks find out a Moldovan man from Gang 32 is the one missing. The missing man is known in the camp as a "real" spy. The narrator says that there are at least five men in each squad who are imprisoned as spies, but most of them are just Ex-POW's who were wrongly accused. Shukhov is one of these men. The crowd begins to fly into a rage. The weather is growing colder, and the men's anger continues to escalate.

The Zeks begin to postulate that the man has escaped. The narrator explains that if a man escapes, the guards are punished, forced to hunt the prisoner down without food or sleep until the prisoner is found. At times the guards would become so enraged they'd kill the prisoner before bringing him back. Meanwhile, Tsezar and Buynovsky continue their conversation about Eisenstein's films.

Finally, the missing prisoner emerges from the repair shop where he'd fallen asleep in the warmth. The prisoners curse at him. A guard approaches and notes the man's number. He then he raises the butt of his rifle to him. The Zeks continue cursing the man. The deputy squad leader of Gang 32 approaches and hits the man in the face and neck until he falls to the ground. As the Moldovan reels back, a Hungarian man from his own squad leaps out and kicks him hard from behind. The assault continues until the guards call for another count.

As the guards recount, Shukhov notices that the back group has four men in it, meaning there will be another miscount, which means an additional count. He notices that Fetyukov was out of line bumming a cigarette from another Zek. The guard strikes Fetyukov in the back of the neck for being out of line, and Shukhov thinks it serves him right. The count turns out correct, and the men leave the work site.

*Tsezar is disconnected from the gang because of his privilege. By giving Buynovsky some tobacco it shows a sense of camaraderie between the two men. Their friendship is based on their backgrounds as educated men, showing the way that among the Zeks, one's character before entering the camp is still present, despite the camp's attempt to strip the men of their identities.*



*The small number of men in the camp who are actual spies shows the injustice of the soviet power. The Zeks become so enraged because their time is their most precious possession and the man is essentially stealing from them, making it even more difficult to survive.*



*The fact that the guards are punished by the denial of food and sleep shows that they are oppressed in ways similar to the Zeks. Their time is precious too, and taking it from them could cost a Zek his life. The continuation of the conversation about art distracts Tsezar and Buynovsky from the severity of the situation; furthering the critique that art distracts individuals from the real world.*



*The assault by his own men shows the severity of the Moldovan's crime and the way in which camaraderie fades when it comes to wasting the time of the gang's individual members. Although camaraderie exists within the gangs, each man is still concerned with his own needs.*



*Fetyukov's selfishness leads him to get out of line despite the fact he is risking wasting the time of the other men. The assault he receives from the guard shows the way in which scrounging carries the risk of real physical harm as well as harm to one's dignity.*



On the walk back to the camp, Shukhov listens to two former naval officers talk about their service. Shukhov ponders the irony of decorated naval officers working alongside men like Fetyukov. The Zeks continue to walk at a steady pace as the guards yell at them to “step lively”. Shukhov remembers he’d planned to go to the sick bay that morning, but notes that it is funny that he’d forgotten about his aches and fever during the work day. He decides that going to dinner would be a better idea.

As the men approach the camp, they begin to move faster. As they come over the top of the hill, they see gangs from other work sites rushing in groups toward the camp. The men begin running in hopes of arriving at the camp first. Even the guards run alongside the Zeks, and the narrator notes that as they rush toward the camp, they began to see the guards as friends and the gangs from the other work sites as their foes. The men are determined to beat the engineers working at the machine shop, as these men are searched slowly because they are suspected of smuggling in the weapons that were used to slit the throats of the snitches. Gang 104 rejoices when they discover they have beaten the engineers to the camp.

*To the authorities, one’s social standing outside of the camp does not matter in the eyes of the authorities, which leads to decorated men having to work beside scroungers like Fetyukov. After putting a full day in at work, the Zeks no longer listen to the guards telling them to hurry, as work gives them men a restored sense of power. Work has also made Shukhov feel better; showing that working hard has a redeeming effect on him.*



*As they rush back to the camp, the guards become comrades and the competition becomes the other gangs. Both Zeks and guards are competing for the same thing—food, warmth, and time—so the hierarchy among them is diminished. Getting back before the machine shop laborers is of the utmost importance, as they are searched thoroughly for weapons, which takes time from the other gangs. A sense of camaraderie emerges when the gang realizes they have beaten the engineers.*



## SECTION 10 (ARRIVAL AT THE CAMP TO TSEZAR’S ARRIVAL AT THE PARCEL ROOM)

Before the gates, the guards demanded the prisoners drop the wood they’d brought back. Some men would have liked to keep a few pieces, but their fellows told them to drop it as not to hold up the count. The narrator notes that a Zek’s greatest enemy is a fellow Zek, but if they could get along it would make a huge difference in their quality of life.

At the gates, the guards come outside from their quarters where they were already getting warm. They command the prisoners to unbutton their coats and jackets. The narrator notes that unbuttoning your jacket isn’t so bad when you are “going home”. Everyone calls the camp “home” because there is no time to think about any other home.

As the search begins, Shukhov tells Tsezar he will go wait at the parcel room and save his place in line. Tsezar tells him that there may be no **parcel**, but Shukhov offers to go anyway—if Tsezar has no parcel he can sell his place in line to another Zek. Tsezar agrees and tells Shukhov to wait no more than ten minutes for him.

*The men are forced to choose between holding onto the wood and wasting more time, which speaks to the extent of their oppression. The men are constantly competing against one another, but if they could work together, they have the potential to be a greater power than the authorities in the camp.*



*The authorities are privileged with extra time to warm up before the count. The men call the camp home because they are completely disconnected from their pasts and their families. Their strict work schedules leave them no time to think about anything but their present situations in the camp.*



*It appears Shukhov is offering to wait in line out of camaraderie, but his self-seeking motives suggest otherwise. He is offering his service in hopes of receiving payment.*



Shukhov steps fearlessly up to be searched, believing he has nothing on him. Out of habit, he reaches into his pocket, just to make sure there is nothing there. He discovers the piece of metal he'd found at the work site. He quickly decides it's better to keep the blade and risk the ten-day punishment for being caught. The blade, should he smuggle it through, will be very profitable for him, it would be as good as **bread**. He slips it into his right mitten.

Shukhov takes off his mittens and unbuttons his coat, stepping forward more willing than usual in attempt to appear innocent. The guard pats his jacket down, and grabs the empty mitten and crushes it in his hand. In a panic, Shukhov says a desperate prayer, "Oh Lord, save me. Don't let them send me to the cells." Just as the guard reaches out for the second glove, his chief yells for him to hurry up, and he pushes Shukhov along.

Shukhov runs to catch up with the rest of the members of his gang who had lined up in a corridor, like "horse stalls in a market", to wait for another count. While they wait, the guards call out the Moldovan who'd fallen asleep. They are going to charge him with attempting to escape, which entails a severe punishment. The count before entering the camp at night was the hardest for the Zeks. They are freezing and famished, and know a bowl of soup awaits them, and that bowl of soup is "dearer to them than freedom, dearer than life itself, past, present, and future."

After passing through the count, Shukhov hurries off to the parcel room. Tyurin must stay behind to report the day's work. Tsezar walks calmly toward the notice posted in the camp alerting prisoner whether they'd received a package. The line at the parcel room is long, and Shukhov suspects it will be an hour wait, which means Tsezar will receive his **parcel** just in time to go to bed.

Upon entering the parcel room, Shukhov imagines someone coming up to tell him that a **parcel** has arrived for him. Even though he had decided to tell his wife to stop sending parcels to save the money to take care of his family, his heart aches knowing there is nothing there for him. He notes that even if he did receive a parcel, the guards would take their cut right away leaving him with only a tiny portion of its original contents.

*By forgetting the piece of metal, Shukhov's limitation is relieved. Although he is a strictly principled and disciplined man, he is still capable of making mistakes. He decides to attempt to smuggle it in because the food it would provide for him outweighs the threat of punishment.*



*Although Shukhov often disregards Alyoshka's religious beliefs, he prays as the guard checks his glove, suggesting that he does have some faith. As if by divine providence, the guard is called away. This occurrence suggests that there is power in prayer and belief in God.*



*Shukhov's description of the corridor depicts the way in which the Zek's are treated like animals in the camp. The fact that the guards are going to charge the Moldovan man with attempting to escape when he had simply fallen asleep shows the abuse of power by those with authority. The importance of the bowl of food shows the way in which the attainment of food is a Zek's primary focus, and limits their ability to think about anything else, past, present or future.*



*Although Tyurin is in a position of power in his gang, he must spend his evening reporting to the authorities. Tsezar has a different kind of privilege because he receives commodities to pay his way into power, which is shown by his calm strut toward the parcel list. He doesn't have to worry about eating, or attaining other rations, because he lives off of his parcels.*



*Parcels are a connection to the outside world, and Shukhov's wish for a parcel reveals his desire to have some connection to his past. His decision to tell his wife to stop sending parcels shows that he cares about his family, and feels guilty about his inability to care for them. He knows that receiving parcels is wasteful because the guards keep most of the contents by the time they have taken their cuts. Just as Shukov sacrifices for his work gang, he sacrifices for his family.*



In line, Shukhov overhears some other men saying that they will be put to work on Sunday. The narrator explains the guards hate seeing the prisoners napping after breakfast on Sundays. Other Zeks come into the parcel room and elbow their ways to the front of the lines, they are privileged because they have “indoor jobs” and the prisoners who work outdoors are lesser than them.

*The guards abuse their power by forcing the men to work on their days off. Their hatred of seeing the Zeks at rest suggests they exert their power simply because they can, showing the way in which a sense of power leads to the oppression of the powerless. The men who have indoor jobs are privileged because they can afford to pay off the guards, which conflicts with the communist ideal. This is just another way that this camp meant to turn men into good communists in fact does the opposite.*



## SECTION 11 (TSEZAR’S ARRIVAL AT THE PARCEL ROOM TO THE PURCHASE OF THE TOBACCO)

Tsezar arrives at the parcel room wearing a new fur hat that had arrived from the outside. Shukhov notes that he must have bribed the guards into allowing him to have it. Tsezar hears that another prisoner has a newspaper and begins talking with him. Shukhov notes that the prisoners from Moscow always recognize each other right away, and talk rapidly in Latvian or Romanian. Eventually Shukhov butts in and asks Tsezar if he can leave. Tsezar tells him to go. Before leaving, Shukhov asks if Tsezar wants him to bring his dinner to the barracks. Tsezar tells Shukhov he can have it, which is what Shukhov wanted in the first place.

*Although the camp attempts to instill the Soviet ideal of a class free society, class markers and privilege still exist within the camp, as shown by Tsezar’s fur hat. The men also form friendships based on their pasts, as indicated by the Muscovites’ recognition of one another. Shukhov, who is not privileged or wealthy in terms of the camp’s society is ignored by the men, showing the way that classism is still present as well. Shukhov’s motives are finally revealed once Tsezar gives him his meal, Shukhov had expected the bowl of food, which was why he volunteered to wait in the parcel room in the first place.*



Shukhov begins walking toward the barracks, being careful to make sure he takes his hat off when he passes the guard. The camp commandant had recently passed a rule that no prisoner was to walk around the camp alone. This rule was an attempt to shred the prisoners’ last bit of freedom. The new rule made the Zeks’ lives particularly difficult because each man wants to do his own chores during his free time without depending on others.

*The oppressive rules are designed to strip the Zeks of every bit of freedom, and prevent them from using their free time constructively.*



When he arrives in the barracks, the place is in an uproar. Someone’s **bread** ration had been stolen during the day. Shukhov hides the piece of metal he’d taken from the worksite and is relieved that the bread he’d sown into the mattress was still there. Then he heads to the mess hall.

*While the Zeks are at work, the guards at the camp have time to search the Zeks’ possessions for hidden rations, and those who do not effectively hide their goods are robbed.*



Upon reaching the mess hall, Shukhov finds a group of men on the front porch. “The Limper”, a disabled Zek who guards the mess hall with a birch stick, is standing on the porch with them. The men are restless, attempting to break through to get their nightly meal. “The Limper” knows who to hit with his stick and who not to. He only hits those who will not hit back, and the narrator notes that he once hit Shukhov. He is keeping the men from entering the mess hall.

The narrator explains that the mess chief is a “fat pig”. He is a privileged prisoner who wears a white lambskin hat without a number on it and a matching jacket with numbers smaller than a postage stamp on the front, and no numbers on the back. The Zeks are afraid of him, as he holds the lives of the other prisoners in his hands. One time, a group of prisoners had tried to assault him, but his cooks stepped up to protect him.

Shukhov makes his way onto the porch looking for the 104th, knowing that if he missed them he would not be let in. The men in the back are pushing those near the door forward, which infuriates “The Limper.” He puts his stick across his chest and pushes back against the men. He is full of strength because he has eaten plenty that day. The Zeks scream at “The Limper”, who yells back for the Zeks to form groups and they will get into the mess hall when he says they can enter.

As “The Limper” lets Gang 27 into the mess hall, Shukhov sees Pavlo standing near the door. The mob of Zeks is blocking Shukhov from the 104th, and Shukhov forces his way through, catching a punch in the ribs in the process. “The Limper” calls the 104th to enter, hitting a man from another gang in the back of the neck with his birch club.

Shukhov enters the mess hall and begins looking for space for his squad. He notices that S208, a man from another gang, is carrying a tray with only five bowls on it, meaning it was the last tray he would need for his gang’s food. Shukhov asks the man for the tray, but S208 tells him someone else had already claimed it. Shukhov tells him to let the lazy bastard wait. Shukhov grabs the tray from S208 after he unloads it. The man, who’d been promised it, ran over and tried to grab it, but he is smaller than Shukhov, so he shoves him away.

*The control of food is the primary way the authorities exert their power over the Zeks. “The limper” serves as a barrier between the Zeks and their rations, acting as an extra layer of control. “The Limper,” however, is not a truly powerful individual, as shown by his attention to whom he abuses—the weak. He seeks to feel strong by abusing those whom he can get away abusing. Although Shukhov is not a weak man, he is wise enough to know the futility of striking back against a person in authority. He would rather take the abuse and stay collected than spend time in the cells, which would ruin his health.*



*The mess chief is one of the most powerful men in the camp because he controls the food and, therefore, the Zeks’ lives. His power allows him the privilege of owning a lambskin coat without numbers on it, which suggests his identity is not stripped to the same extent as the other Zeks. His power also provides him protection in the camp. As a leader, his cooks look out for him the same way Gang 104 looks out for Tyurin.*



*The struggle on the porch depicts the symbolic struggle the Zeks face each day to attain food from the authorities. Despite their struggles, the Zeks do not receive any food until they submit to the orders of the authorities.*



*The chaos at the door demonstrates the intensity of competition for food, and the jab Shukhov receives in the ribs shows that this competition is often hostile. Ultimately, the gangs are under the control of the authorities, and despite the fervor with which they compete against one another, the guards call the shots.*



*As an experienced prisoner, Shukhov is able to tell by the number of bowls on the tray that the tray is up for grabs. Shukhov despises laziness, as shown through his contempt of Fetyukov, and as a result believes he is entitled to the tray before the man who had claimed it. Shukhov is not afraid to fight for the tray when the man attempts to take it from him, showing that he is willing and able to compete.*



Shukhov finds Pavlo at the counter. He is happy to see Shukhov has a tray. They see Gopchik approaching with another tray, and Shukhov notes that he will make a good Zek after a few years in the camp—he is well on his way. When the bowls are full, Shukhov notes which ones were full of food, and which ones are just broth ladled from the top of the pot. He makes his way to the table, yelling at Zeks in the crowded room to make way as he goes carefully through not to spill any food. He places the tray on the table so the best bowls are facing him. Kildigs arrives with a tray of **bread**, which is distributed based on the amount of work the men completed. Some are given six ounces, others nine, and Shukhov is given twelve.

The other men arrive, and Shukhov distributes the bowls. Fetyukov arrives, but leaves quickly to go scrounge for leftovers. He puts Pavlo and Tyurin's supper to the side, making sure they are "thick bowls" with plenty of food with the broth. Everyone grows quiet as they begin to eat, the narrator stating that the "sacred moment" had come.

Shukhov takes off his hat and drinks the broth from his first bowl of soup. Then he dumps the cabbage and fish from it into the second. While he eats, he complains about nothing, and forgets the length of his stay. His only thought is, "we'll survive, God willing, till it's over." He looks to his neighbor's bowl, noticing that it is little more than water, and calls the servers snakes for the tricks they play on their fellow Zeks. He saves his **bread** for the morning, although he is still hungry, noting that a Zek's stomach is a demon that doesn't remember how well it was treated the day before, that each day it cries out for more.

Shukhov notices a man sitting at another table across from him named U81. His hang had been sent to the Socialist Way of Life camp that day. U81 sits up straight at the table, and does not lean forward toward his bowl, but brings his **spoon** all the way up to his mouth. U81 places his **bread** on a clean piece of rag instead of the dirty table. Shukhov notes that he is a man who has never had an easy job in the camp, his hands are blackened and cracked, and he has lost all of his teeth, but he will not let the camp break him.

*Gopchik is connected to Shukhov in this scene as they both bring empty trays to the counter. Shukhov sees something of himself in Gopchik, and respects him for his eagerness to become an effective prisoner. He is sure that Gopchik will become a good Zek in time. The way Shukhov evaluates the bowls shows that although he respects his men, he will look out for himself when it comes to food. Shukhov gets twelve ounces of bread because of his hard work. Although a collective society would mean equal rations, the rules of the camp actually force men not to operate according to the communist ideal.*



*Fetyukov receives poor rations because he doesn't work hard, but makes up for it by scrounging, which costs him his dignity and respect. Although Shukhov takes hearty bowls for himself, he saves two for Pavlo and Tyurin, showing the amount of respect he has for them. Because all of a Zek's time is focused on survival in the present, eating becomes the sacred consummation of all of his efforts.*



*The care with which Shukhov eats shows how important food is to him, and saving his bread for the morning despite his hunger reveals his discipline and principals. Like the Zeks themselves, their stomachs live in the present. The food they eat in the past or will receive in the future does not calm the demon. Because a Zek spends all of his time trying to attain food, nothing else, including the length of his stay, matters during the moment when he finally gets to eat. Shukhov's mention of God's will suggests that he does have some kind of faith in God, even though he recognizes that God may will something other than his survival.*



*Shukhov identifies with prisoner U81. Even though U81 worked at the Socialist Way of Life Camp that day, he sits up straight and eats in a dignified way. Even though he has been incarcerated for many years and the camp has been hard on his body, the camp has not destroyed his inward sense of identity and dignity.*



Having finished his supper, Shukhov goes to visit the Latvian prisoner who has tobacco for sale. The tobacco in the camp is cheaper than on the outside, as the economy in the camp is local and based on the amount of money the Zeks have, which is very little. When Zeks receive money from the outside, they are not given physical money, instead it is put on their “account”, and they are only able to buy from the camp commissary. Because Shukhov does not receive money, he does jobs in the camp for other Zeks, including repairing torn jackets and making mittens.

*The economy within the camp furthers the idea that it is a symbolic microcosm of the Soviet Union. The way that the guards hold all of the Zeks' money reflects the overt power of the Soviet Union inside and outside of the camp. Shukhov uses his skills to attain goods, showing the way in which he survives without having to lose his dignity.*



## SECTION 12 (THE PURCHASE OF THE TOBACCO TO SHUKHOV'S GOING TO BED)

Shukhov enters Barracks 7 and approaches the man with the tobacco. He is careful not to reveal why he is there, as the barracks is small and everyone is listening. He begins with small talk about the weather before asking for the tobacco. Shukhov tells the man to stuff it into a glass container for him, using the word “stuff” on purpose because the man is known to drop it in loosely.

*Shukhov's care when asking the man for tobacco reveals the competition within the camp. Possessing goods makes an individual a target, and revealing too much about oneself makes one a target for Zeks looking to snitch to the authorities for extra privileges and rations.*



As Shukhov waits for the Latvian to fill the container he hears other prisoners talking about “old whiskers” a name they use for Joseph Stalin. Shukhov notes that one good thing about the “special camp” is that you could talk openly about Stalin, while at other camp that would land you in the hold and add ten years to your sentence. When Shukhov had received his tobacco he pays the Latvian two rubles and leaves.

*In some ways, the men are liberated in the camp in ways they are not on the outside, as shown by the talk about Stalin. Further, the freedom to talk about Stalin shows that even the authorities within the camp are resentful about their situation.*



Shukhov hurries back to barracks 9 so he doesn't miss Tsezar's arrival with his **parcel**. Tsezar has already arrived, and has the contents of his parcel out on his bed. Shukhov tells him he brought his **bread** back for him, careful not to ask whether he got the package, as that would reveal his desire to receive some of its contents, and even eight years in the camp had not made him a jackal. His “hawk like” eyes, however, examine the contents, which include sausage, fish, bread and tobacco. Tsezar tells Shukhov to keep the bread.

*Shukhov is careful not to ask about Tsezar's parcel, as asking would reveal his desire and blemish his dignity, and even his time in the camp has not taken his dignity. His eyes, however, suggest that inside he really does long for Tsezar's goods.*



The narrator explains that one would expect a man to be overjoyed at the arrival of a **parcel**, but before even opening it a Zek is already scheming on how to get more. By the time a Zek pays off the officials, the mailroom clerk, the squad leader, and anyone else who deserves a cut there isn't much left for himself. Shukhov knows this, so he doesn't envy the men who get parcels, he doesn't open his belly to things that are not his.

*Shukhov knows that the competition for resources limits the joy a Zek feels upon receiving a parcel. After paying off the authorities and those who assist in getting a parcel safely back to the barracks, a Zek has little for himself. Because of this, Shukhov does now allow himself to envy others, as he sees the futility in envy.*





Shukhov climbs onto his bunk and pulls out the piece of metal, figuring it will take a few days to turn it into a good knife. Fetyukov returns to the barracks sobbing with his face speared with blood—he'd been beaten for scrounging bowls of food. Shukhov feels bad for him, knowing that he won't see the end of his term, as he doesn't have the right attitude.

*Fetyukov's assault shows that losing one's dignity is not only figuratively harmful to the Zeks, but can result in actual physical harm. Shukhov knows that the only way to survive is to have the right attitude, which means maintaining one's identity, principles, and dignity.*



Just then, Buynovsky returns delighted because Tsezar has given him tea to make for them. Shukhov ignores the men, not wanting to upset himself, but he knows the men need his knife to prepare their food, which entitles him to a cut. Shukhov repays the Estonians for the cigarette they'd given him earlier, but waits to roll another, knowing the count would be coming soon.

*Tsezar and Buynovsky share a sense of camaraderie based on their backgrounds, which is shown by the sharing of Tsezar's goods. Shukhov, coming from a different background, is not part of their friendship, but will share in the goods because they need him. Shukhov's repaying the Estonians without needing to be asked shows his upstanding character and dedication to maintaining his dignity.*



As Shukhov waits for the count, a guard called "snub nose" enters the barracks. He tells Tyurin he is there to ask why signatures from Buynovsky and Tsezar for wearing extra clothing that morning had not been turned in. Tyurin tells him that it's difficult to get signatures from uneducated men, plus the guards had taken away their pens and ink. The guard then asks for Buynovsky, who is enjoying sausage and tea with Tsezar, and tells him that he is going to the cells for ten days for his crime that morning.

*Just as Buynovsky and Tsezar begin to enjoy the contents of the parcel, the authorities step in and ruin their pleasure. Buynovsky and Tsezar are both educated men capable of writing their names, but Tyurin attempts to prevent their punishment by lying about their ability. Buynovsky's pride in telling Volkovoy he was not acting like a Communist lands him ten days in the cells. He has not yet learned to passively resist the authorities like Shukhov and other experienced Zeks. Yet, it's worth noting, that Buynovsky was also right, and is being punished for his attachment and devotion to the tenets of communism!*



The call for the evening count rings out. Buynovsky wonders whether he should bring his coat and tobacco to the cells. He hadn't prepared for his sentence, as he'd been wishfully hoping that Volkovoy would forget about his crime that morning. Tsezar slips him a few cigarettes as he leaves. He bids his gang farewell, and some of the men tell him to keep his chin up, but they know where he is going, and they know it is not good.

*As an inexperienced Zek, Buynovsky has not prepared for his stint in solitary. Tsezar and the rest of the gang sympathize with Buynovsky, showing a sense of camaraderie that stems from their shared oppression. By telling him to keep his head up, they mean to tell him not to let the punishment destroy his dignity.*



The barracks commander tells the men to get up and out for the count. Shukhov notes that he is one of the biggest bastards in the camp. He is an actual criminal, unlike so many others in the camp who were wrongly accused. He doesn't think twice about telling on the other Zeks, so the men leap up and begin to get dressed.

*The barracks commander, who is a Zek, is a man with power despite the fact that he is a true criminal unlike the others. Shukhov suggests that he maintains his power by snitching on his fellow Zeks. His character shows the way in which some Zeks do sacrifice their dignity to attain power.*



As Shukhov gets his valenki on, notices the contents of Tsezar's **parcel** are on his bunk. Shukhov notes that he should have taken the items directly to the storehouse before count, as now the contents are exposed and easy for other men to steal as they make their way back in after the count. Shukhov tells him to hide the parcel by the bunk, and stay back with the items telling the guards that he is sick. Shukhov volunteers to rush to be the first one out and therefore the first one back in to protect the items. He then pushes his way to the front of the line.

Outside, the Zeks who were in line are shouting at the latecomers for moving slowly. Tsezar emerges shivering, pretending to be sick. He is sent to the rear of the column. The guards begin yelling at the men to form groups of five, and when the men don't budge they begin hitting people, but only the meek ones who won't strike back.

When the count is finished the men go back inside, happy to finally be free for the night—unless, of course, there is another count. Shukhov is not the first back in, but he watches for anyone messing with Tsezar's **parcel**. He quickly puts his boots near the stove and goes back to his bunk, yelling at anyone who tries to move his boots. When Tsezar appears, he thanks Shukhov, and Shukhov pulls himself into bed for some **bread** and a cigarette before sleeping.

Not yet tired, Shukhov makes his bed, noting that it he hadn't slept on sheets since 1941. He no longer sees a need for them, noting that laundering sheets is just extra work. Getting back into bed he prays, "Glory be to you, oh Lord. Another day over. Thank you I'm not spending the night in the cells. Here it is still bearable." After the prayer, he sees Alyoshka on the adjacent bunk reading his bible.

Alyoshka hears Shukhov's prayer and turns to him. He tells Shukhov that he heard his soul begging, and asks why he doesn't give his soul freedom. Shukhov tells him prayers are like a Zek's appeals, either they don't get through, or they are returned with a rejection scrawled across them. Alyoshka tells Shukhov his prayers go unanswered because he prays too rarely and with insufficient faith. He tells Shukhov he should not pray for earthly things but only for "his daily **bread**." Shukhov asks if he means his ration, but Alyoshka explains he is talking about the bread that feeds the spirit.

*In this moment Shukhov's relationship with Tsezar changes. Through the story, Tsezar has disregarded and ignored Shukhov, but now he needs Shukhov to help him protect the contents of the parcel. Shukhov does not necessarily do this out of a sense of camaraderie, but because it means Tsezar will have to pay him for it.*



*The Zeks are frustrated with the others for wasting their time by moving slowly. Tsezar follows Shukhov's direction by pretending to be sick, showing the way in which he needs Shukhov in this moment to protect his possessions. The fact that the guards are hitting the meek prisoners shows that those who are in power abuse those who are powerless, and also suggests the danger in being meek as a practice in spirituality.*



*The continual threat of additional counts keeps the Zeks from enjoying the time that is supposed to be theirs. Shukhov's need to bark at others for moving his boots reveals the competition in the camp. Shukhov does not demand Tsezar pay him for helping him protect his goods, as this would diminish his dignity.*



*The length of Shukhov's stay in the camp has changed his perception of life outside the camp, and the amount of work he does daily has led to his disregard of any unnecessary work. Shukhov prays, showing that he does have faith in God, even though he does not practice his faith in his daily life.*



*Although Shukhov prays, he has no faith, and his understanding of God does not grant him the same happiness and freedom Alyoshka experiences. His lack of faith is shown by his description of prayer as unheard messages or requests returned with rejections. Alyoshka's suggestion to pray only for his spiritual bread is a radical idea. As a man living in an environment where he must obsess and compete over the attainment of food, clothing and supplies—material bread—Shukov does not understand.*



Shukhov attempts to rebut Alyoshka's message by telling him about a priest in his village who was the richest man in town. Alyoshka tells Shukhov he is not interested in the priest, as the Orthodox Church has departed from scripture. Shukhov tells Alyoshka that he does believe in God, but does not believe in heaven or hell, that the Baptists' preaching about such matters bothers him. Shukhov continues by noting that no matter how much one prays, it will never shorten one's sentence. Alyoshka tells Shukhov he should not pray for that either. He explains that the distractions of the free world will block and individual from God. He tells Shukhov he should rejoice that he is in prison.

Unable to respond, Shukhov stares at the ceiling. He doesn't know any longer whether he wants freedom or not. Even if he was released, he knew he'd be exiled. Freedom means one thing to Shukhov—home—and he would never be able to go back. Shukhov knows that Alyoshka is speaking truth, his attitude and actions proved it, but Shukhov is unable to submit to the idea that he is in the camp on behalf of Jesus Christ.

Kildigs interrupts saying that it seems like there won't be another count that night. Shukhov agrees and decides to go to bed, but as soon as he rolls over, the guards call another count. Shukhov curses the guards, and as he does, Tsezar hands up two biscuits, two limps of sugar and a piece of sausage. Shukhov thanks him and tells him to hand up his **parcel** to hide in Shukhov's bed.

The count goes smoothly, and Shukhov returns to bed. He hands Tsezar's **parcel** back to him. As Alyoshka enters the room Shukhov notes that his problem is that he is impractical, that he does everything for free without asking for anything in return. Shukhov hands a biscuit to Alyoshka, who takes it and eats it. Then Shukhov eats the piece of sausage Tsezar gave him, and goes to bed.

*Shukhov misses Alyoshka's point, and continues to focus on the material world by telling about the priest's wealth. Alyoshka sees the Orthodox church as another power like the Soviet regime, and discards Shukhov's rebuttal. Shukhov is unable to accept the Baptists' ideas of heaven and hell because he is trapped in the present by his circumstances, and heaven and hell are destinations in the future. Alyoshka continues his radical message by explaining that prison is the best place to experience spiritual liberation, as the material world offers too many distractions. This view allows Alyoshka's gratitude for being imprisoned.*



*Shukhov's silence suggests that Alyoshka's message has impacted him. He knows that he will never be released from prison because he will never go home. The competition and oppression in the camp, however, prevent Shukhov from fully accepting Alyoshka's way of life. He does not see it as a viable means of survival.*



*The irony of Kildig's comment, followed immediately by another count shows the depth of the men's oppression—they can never predict what will happen. Tsezar pays Shukhov for helping him protect his goods and Shukhov thanks him, showing that a sense of camaraderie can emerge, even though Shukhov's motives were selfish.*



*Shukhov does not see Alyoshka's way of life as practical, and in fact he understands the dangers of being meek in the camp. By giving Alyoshka a piece of bread, however, he proves himself wrong. Alyoshka does not need to beg, steal, or connive to survive in the camp. By giving Alyoshka a piece of bread without expecting anything in return, Alyoshka's way of life suddenly becomes viable. Shukhov's action likewise shows that he has been influenced by Alyoshka's message, and may be open to changing his worldview.*



Shukhov goes to bed that night feeling fully content. His day had been a lucky one, he'd procured himself food, worked hard and enjoyed it, bought tobacco, and smuggled a piece of metal back into the camp. He'd fallen ill that morning, but had overcome it. The narrator explains that it was an "almost happy day", but concludes by noting that there would be three thousand six hundred and fifty-three more to go. Three extra days for the leap years in-between.

*Shukhov's day was successful because the camp did not strip his identity or devastate his dignity, and through his work he was even able to increase these things. Although it is not explicitly stated, his altruistic act of giving to Alyoshka seems to have added to his contentment—instead of feeling he has lost something through giving, he feels contented. The narrator's final comment quickly brings the reality of Shukhov's situation back to the forefront. The narrator reminds the reader that all of the struggles of the novel occurred in a single day, and Shukhov must endure thousands more before being released. This final moment reveals the enormity of the situation these men endure and the immense struggle for freedom from the powers that oppress them. And the focus on the three extra days for leap years emphasizes just how difficult getting through each single day is.*





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