

# **One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich Book Notes**

**One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich by Aleksandr  
Solzhenitsyn**

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## Author/Context

Alexander (Sanya) Isayevich Solzhenitsyn was born in Kislovodsk, southern Russia, on December 11th, 1918. Solzhenitsyn's father died in a hunting accident six months before his birth. Growing up in the industrial city of Rostov with his mother, Solzhenitsyn was a gifted student, but his mother's failing health and a lack of money dashed his hopes of attending a university in Moscow. He decided to stay nearby at Rostov University, where he studied Mathematics and Physics. But his desire to be a writer drove him to take literature classes in Moscow while he pursued his studies in the Sciences. In 1940, Solzhenitsyn married his high school sweetheart, Natalya Reshetvskaya. Soon after his graduation in 1941, the Soviet Union was drawn into World War II, and Solzhenitsyn was conscripted into the army. There, he served bravely, earning several medals and a promotion to captain. But in 1945, he was arrested unexpectedly for writing anti-Stalinist comments in a letter to a friend. Solzhenitsyn was given an eight-year sentence.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a child of both the Revolution (1917) and the ensuing Civil War in the Soviet Union. His childhood was inevitably marked by the political upheavals of the time. Even during high school, Solzhenitsyn planned on writing an epic novel about the Revolution. But ironically, it was his imprisonment that became the inspiration for his novel about a day in the life of an uneducated peasant serving in a labor camp. Solzhenitsyn, in many ways, based the experiences of his protagonist, Ivan Denisovich, on his own prison experiences. Like Ivan Denisovich, Solzhenitsyn was also a bricklayer in the labor camps.

In 1956, after Khrushchev's denunciation speeches against Stalin, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's sentence was finally annulled. With his newfound freedom, Solzhenitsyn faced a different world than he previously knew--his wife had remarried while he was in prison--and the Soviet Union was undergoing political transition. In 1959, he composed *Shch-854*, the first version of what was to become *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Through the persistence of Alexander Tvardovsky, the editor of the liberal journal, *Novy Mir*, the manuscript was published in 1962 with Khrushchev's approval. The book's publication caused such an ideological controversy that it contributed to Khrushchev's fall from the Communist leadership. Although Solzhenitsyn won international fame almost overnight, the tide in his country began to turn on him, leading to struggles with the KGB and eventually, his exile.

In 1970, Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature but was unable to receive it until four years later. After his second marriage to Natalya Svetlova in 1973, the couple lived in exile in West Germany and Vermont. In 1994, three years after the fall of Communism and nearly twenty years in exile, Solzhenitsyn and his family returned to Russia. Regrettably, Solzhenitsyn has come to be known mainly as a political figure--the individual most responsible for toppling the Communist regime. However, he is foremost a writer, often compared to other immortal Russian authors such as Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Gorky. The accomplished Russian poet Yevtushenko calls Solzhenitsyn "our only living Russian classic." Solzhenitsyn's works



include *The First Circle*, *Cancer Ward*, and the *Gulag Archipelago*--all highly acclaimed by the literary world.

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# Plot Summary

At five o'clock in the morning, the reveille sounds and prisoner Ivan Denisovich Shukov is in bed wondering if he should get up. He is not one to oversleep, but this morning he is feeling ill. He remembers that his squad, 104th, might be reassigned to a different work location, one that does not offer any protection from the cold. Thinking that a lenient guard is on duty, he stays in bed. Another guard, however--the Tartar--makes him get up. But instead of taking him to the guardhouse, the Tartar makes Ivan Denisovich scrub the floors of an office. When he's done, he thanks the Tartar for not taking him to the cells and runs to the mess hall for breakfast. He then makes a visit to the dispensary but he is denied permission to take the day off. Back in the barracks, Ivan Denisovich hides a portion of his bread ration inside his mattress.

Tiurin, the squad leader of the 104th division, calls them out for roll call. It seems Tiurin has been able to bribe the authorities out of reassignment. In the cold, Tsezar, a young Muscovite filmmaker, smokes a cigarette. He gives the butt of his cigarette to Ivan Denisovich. As the prisoners go through the morning search, Lieutenant Volkvoi, who is feared by everyone in the camp, tells the guards to search for those wearing extra undershirts. During the search, Buinovsky, a former naval captain and a newcomer to the camp, protests against the search and offends Lieutenant Volkvoi. He gets ten days in the guardhouse. The prisoners are counted and led out to their respective workplaces. On the march, Ivan Denisovich's thoughts wander and he thinks about home. The prisoners reach the building site where they wait for the squad leaders to give them the day's work assignment. While he waits, Ivan Denisovich eats some bread he has brought with him.

The members of the 104th are sent to work on an unfinished building near the power station. Ivan Denisovich and his working partner, Kilgas, are assigned to build walls. Tiurin asks them to first insulate the machine room to make it warmer. They come up with a plan to "steal" the prefabs (prefabricated panels) from a construction site. After putting up the prefabs, the squad members talk around the stove. Ivan Denisovich's story is further revealed. Officially imprisoned for high treason, the real story is that he was captured by the Germans and somehow escaped. Upon finding his way back, he was accused of being a spy and given a ten-year sentence. If he had confessed, he would have gone to prison, if he didn't confess, he'd die. Ivan Denisovich chose to live.

For dinner, the prisoners get the good oatmeal. Ivan Denisovich, due to a cook's miscount, manages to swipe two extra bowls. At the table, Ivan Denisovich goes through the ritual of taking out his spoon, uncovering his head, and carefully concentrating on every bite. Pavlo, the deputy squad leader under Tiurin, gives one of the extra bowls to Ivan Denisovich and the other to Captain Buinovsky. After finishing his helpings, Ivan Denisovich takes a bowl to Tsezar. At the office, Tsezar and another prisoner are discussing the art of film. Ivan Denisovich finds the conversation impractical. On his way back, he finds a piece of hacksaw blade. At the building site, the rest of the squad warm themselves around the stove while Tiurin tells them the story of his early years before the camp. Then they start work again.



The members of the 104th work hard on building the walls. Der, the hated building foreman, comes and warns Tiurin that he will be punished for the stolen prefabs. Tiurin and the others threaten Der with his life. To save face, Der criticizes Ivan Denisovich's bricklaying. The end of the workday is near but Ivan Denisovich does not want to leave the wall unfinished. He and Senka, who is deaf, stay behind to work a bit longer. Before they leave, Ivan Denisovich looks over the wall and admires a job well done. When they get back, the assembled prisoners curse them for holding up the count. The count comes up one short because a prisoner had fallen asleep at the repair shops.

Upon entering the gates, the prisoners are searched again. Ivan Denisovich offers to save a place in line at the parcel's office for Tsezar. Just then, he remembers that he has a hidden piece of hacksaw blade. He manages to get by the search without getting caught.

Ivan Denisovich runs to the parcel's office to stand in line for Tsezar. Ivan Denisovich remembers how he used to receive parcels but then told his wife not to send them anymore. He has learned to do without them. Tsezar takes his place in line and tells Ivan Denisovich to have his portion of the supper. Ivan Denisovich fights himself into the mess hall. Supper is thin cabbage stew (as usual). As he eats his double portion, Ivan Denisovich observes prisoner U 81, an old man who has been in the camps for many consecutive terms. For Ivan Denisovich, this old man is the model prisoner--camp life has not robbed him of his dignity.

After supper, Ivan Denisovich buys two glassfuls of tobacco from a prisoner in another barrack. Back in his own barrack, Tsezar has the contents of his package laid out on his bunk. One quick glance and Ivan Denisovich knows it's a great package. But he does not envy Tsezar too much because a package goes quickly--everyone has to be given a bribe, or cut. While Tsezar and Captain Buinovsky are eating, a guard comes to take the Captain to the guardhouse--Lieutenant Volkvoi has not forgotten. Then, the prisoners are called outside for the evening count. Ivan Denisovich, feeling sorry for the hapless Tsezar, helps him hide his package. Before he turns in for the night, Ivan Denisovich talks with Alyosha the Baptist, a deeply religious prisoner who seems genuinely content with prison life. Alyosha tells Ivan Denisovich that he should pray for his soul. The conversation is disrupted by a recount. Before going to bed, Ivan Denisovich goes over the events of the day. He remembers that many good things happened and it's been almost a happy day--one out of 3,653 days.



## Major Characters

**Ivan Denisovich Shukhov:** The main character of the story, Ivan Denisovich is in the eighth year of a ten-year prison term. Imprisoned unjustly during WWII for treason, he has learned over the years not to be bitter, but live every day for itself. He is the consummate prisoner, with the know-how and optimistic attitude to get through the tortuous days. The story follows one day of his life in a Siberian labor camp, from the moment he wakes up to the moment he goes to bed.

**Fetiukov:** A former office worker of some rank (overseer), he is considered the lowest rank in the 104th hierarchy. No one in his squad respects Fetiukov because he is one to 'lick others' leftovers. He scrounges for anything he can get, not concerned about maintaining any degree of dignity and self-control. In the mess hall, Fetiukov often gets beaten up during fights over leftovers.

**Pavlo:** The deputy squad leader under Tiurin, Pavlo is a young West Ukrainian with good leadership skills. He serves his squad leader well. Robust and swarthy, camp life has not yet tired him out. He is a former forest sniper.

**Alyosha the Baptist:** Ivan Denisovich's top bunk neighbor, Alyosha is deeply religious and spends most of his time praying and reading the bible he has kept hidden in a chink in the wall. Alyosha is content with prison life because it gives him time to think about God and about his soul. Ivan Denisovich respects Alyosha because he works hard, serves everyone, and does not engage in the dubious survival tactics of the other prisoners. Before the prisoners go to sleep, Alyosha shares his faith with Ivan Denisovich.

**Tiurin (Andrei Prokofievich):** The squad leader of Ivan Denisovich's 104th division. As a nineteen-year veteran of the prisons, Tiurin is an adept and respected leader who understands how to manipulate the prison system. Having known Ivan Denisovich since their days at Ust-Izhma, Tiurin personally picks him to join his squad when they transfer to their current camp. Tiurin was arrested for being a son of a kulak.

**Tsezar Markovich:** A member of the 104th, Tsezar is a young Muscovite filmmaker of mixed nationalities (Greek, Jew, Gypsy, etc.). He is considered well-off because he receives two packages a month. Unlike most of the other members of the 104th, Tsezar works in an office, a position acquired most likely through bribes. Ivan Denisovich believes that Tsezar is an impractical intellectual who can survive only as long as he receives his packages.

**Lieutenant Volkvoi:** The security chief of the camp, he is feared by both the prisoners and the guards. Befitting his name--Volk is Russian for wolf--he looks like a wolf and only recently stopped carrying around a whip that he used to lash at the prisoners. Lieutenant Volkvoi gives Captain Buinovskiy ten days in the guardhouse for his vocal protests.



**(Captain) Buinovsky** : Ivan Denisovich's bottom bunk neighbor (prisoner S 311), he is a former naval captain who acts as though he is still a captain. Despite being imprisoned unfairly, he remains patriotic to the Communist authorities and genuinely believes in the Soviet regime. He is a relative newcomer to the camp. During the morning inspection, Buinovsky gets ten days in the guardhouse for speaking out against Lieutenant Volkvoi. Ivan Denisovich feels sorry for the captain because with his brash attitude, he will not survive the camp for long.

**Senka Klevshin**: A quiet, loyal member of the 104th, little is known about his background except that he has escaped from prisons three times and has been in the German concentration camp, Buchenwald. Ivan Denisovich feels sorry for Senka because he is deaf, but also considers him the smartest of all the prisoners because he understands everything even without words.

**Kilgas**: A member of the 104th, he and Ivan Denisovich are the top two workers in the squad and are often paired together. They 'steal' prefabs to insulate the machine room and they work together as masons. Kilgas has a reputation for being a joker. He is a ruddy fellow who eats well because he receives two packages a month. Although his name is Johann, Ivan Denisovich calls him Vanya.

**Gopchik**: The youngest member of the 104th, Gopchik is a young Ukrainian lad whom Ivan Denisovich takes a fatherly interest in. Imprisoned for taking food to a traitorous Soviet general during the war, Gopchik fawns on the members of the 104th. Ivan Denisovich notes that Gopchik has already learned cunning because he eats his packages by himself at night. He also believes that Gopchik has the abilities to get along well in the camp.

**(prisoner) U 81**: A tall, old man of the 64th division--his squad is sent to the 'Socialist Way of Life settlement' instead of the 104th. Knowing that the old man has come back from a cold, hard day of work, Ivan Denisovich is impressed to see that he sits upright at the mess hall while all the other, younger prisoners are hunched over. This old man has been in prison for many consecutive terms, but somehow has been able to maintain a cool, reserved dignity. For Ivan Denisovich, the old man is a model prisoner.

### Minor Characters

**Kuziomin**: A hard-bitten prisoner who has been in the camps for twelve years, he is Ivan Denisovich's first squad leader. Kuziomin preaches to his squad members an ethics of survival that includes not licking other's leftovers. Ivan Denisovich tries to live by Kuziomin's words.

**squealers**: Prisoners who resort to 'squealing' on fellow prisoners to the authorities in exchange for protection and better treatment. According to Kuziomin, squealers will not survive, but Ivan Denisovich feels that Kuziomin is wrong on this point--squealers seem to get by rather well in the prisons. However, there are incidents of squealers having their throats cut during the night.



**One-and-a-half Ivan:** A 'thin, weedy, dark-eyed' camp guard who is considered by many to be the most good-natured of the lot. Ivan Denisovich, before the morning roll call, decides to stay in bed a bit longer because he thinks One-and-a-half Ivan is on duty.

**Tartar:** A lean, authoritative camp guard who threatens Ivan Denisovich with three days' penalty in the guardhouse with work for not getting up in time. Instead of taking Ivan Denisovich to the cells, he makes Ivan Denisovich clean the floor of a guardroom.

**Lett (in Barracks 7):** A Latvian prisoner in Barracks 7 known to have good tobacco, Ivan Denisovich considers buying some from him. At the end of the day, after the evening supper, he buys two glassfuls from the Lett.

**Kolya Vdovushkin:** A medical assistant on duty at the dispensary when Ivan Denisovich drops by, Kolya is not trained in medicine, rather he is a writer who was given the job by the head doctor so that he would have time to write. Kolya does not grant Ivan Denisovich's request to be put on the sick list.

**Stepan Grigorych:** The doctor that runs the dispensary (infirmary), Stepan Grigorych is described as a fussy, loud-voiced fellow who advocates work as the best therapy. He institutes a rule that allows only two people a day to be on the sick list.

**Panteleyev:** A despised member of the 104th, Panteleyev is a squealer, one who spies on other prisoners and reports their activities to the authorities. He is often dismissed from work by the authorities because of the information he provides them.

**two Estonians:** Members of the 104th, they first meet in camp, but they stick together like brothers. They share everything, they look the same and Tiurin makes sure he never separates them. Ivan Denisovich notes that of all the Estonians he met, he's never seen a bad one.

**Der:** A Muscovite prisoner (B 731), who works as the chief building foreman, he treats his fellow prisoners worse than dogs. As the 104th is working, Der comes to confront Tiurin about the stolen prefabs. When Tiurin threatens to kill him if he reports it, he backs down and to save face, and perfunctorily criticizes Ivan Denisovich's bricklaying.

**Shkuropatenko:** Prisoner B 219, he is temporarily given the job of guarding the prefabs from the other prisoners. Ivan Denisovich and Kilgas are careful to avoid being caught by Shkuropatenko when they steal the prefabs.

**(prisoner) X 123:** An old prisoner, who works in the office with Tsezar, Ivan Denisovich overhears these two talk about the art of film. Ivan Denisovich considers their conversation too learned for him.

**Moldavian:** Prisoner K 460 of the 32nd squad (known to be a genuine spy)--he falls asleep during the workday and holds up the after-work count. As he joins the rest of the prisoners at the gate, he is booed, cursed, and even beaten by his own squad members.



**trusties:** Prisoners with soft jobs helping out the authorities. The prisoners who work outside consider trusties the lowest of the lows and vice versa. Trusties usually get their positions through bribery.

**Pyotr Mikhailych:** A fellow Muscovite whom Tsezar talks to while waiting in line for his parcel, Pyotr tells Tsezar about a film premier that he has read about in an evening newspaper. Ivan Denisovich observes wryly that Muscovites seem to be able find one another right away and that they talk fast, as if to outtalk one another.

**camp commandant:** The head of the prison camp, the camp commandant is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the camp. Many of the stupid rules to curb prisoners' freedom are attributed to the camp commandant.

**Limper (Khromoi):** The mess orderly, whose name is Khromoi but is called the 'Limper' because of his lameness, he has a birch club that he uses to hit the 'down-and-outs' who come up the mess hall without his permission. He also has an assistant.

**mess chief:** Described as a fat pig with a head like a pumpkin, he respects no one and the prisoners fear him because he has the authority to determine who eats and who doesn't.

**Old Whiskers:** The name the prisoners use to refer to Stalin. While Ivan Denisovich buys some tobacco from the Lett in Barracks 7, two prisoners talk about Stalin.

**Snubnose:** A guard who is no more than a mere boy. Before the evening count, he takes Captain Buinovsky to the cells for his morning outburst.

**barracks commander:** The overseer of Ivan Denisovich's barracks, he respects no one and everyone fears him because he is known to take down prisoners' numbers to pass to the guards. A real thug, he is one among a handful of true-life criminals in a camp reserved for political prisoners.

**priest (in Polomnya) :** Ivan Denisovich, in his conversation with Alyosha, tells him about a priest in his former parish in Polomnya, whom he considers a hypocrite. Alyosha the Baptist responds that the Orthodox Church has departed from Scripture.



## Objects/Places

**'Socialist Way of Life' settlement:** A new work location that the 104th squad is rumored to be assigned to. Ivan Denisovich dreads the thought because it is an open area without any protection from the cold. Tiurin, the 104th's squad leader, manages to avoid being reassigned there.

**dispensary:** The prison infirmary, where the rules of the camp allow for only two prisoners to be placed on the sick list per day. In the beginning of the story, Ivan Denisovich tries unsuccessfully to get on the sick list.

**S 854:** Ivan Denisovich's prison number; the authorities address him by his number only. A prisoner's dilemma is that if his number is too visible, it is easy to be called upon by the guards and if it is not visible enough, one can be sent to the guardhouse.

**guardhouse:** The brick building where prisoners are sent for punishment. Captain Buinovsky is given ten days in the guardhouse for insulting Lieutenant Volkvoi. Ten days in the cells can ruin your health for the rest of your life; fifteen days and you face certain death. The members of the 104th know the guardhouse well because they built it.

**valenki:** Russian word for knee-length felt boots for winter wear, a valenki is almost a necessity. When a shipment of valenki arrives, Ivan Denisovich has to choose whether to keep his leather work boots or the valenki. He chooses the latter.

**Ust-Izhma:** Ivan Denisovich's former labor camp, he constantly refers back to his experiences there in comparison with the current 'specials' camp.

**magara:** Referred by the prisoners as 'Chinese oatmeal' because it is said the authorities got the idea of serving it from the Chinese, it is less filling than real oatmeal. The prisoners are given magara in the morning for breakfast.

**spoon (Shukhov's):** The spoon that Ivan Denisovich keeps in his valenki. He cast it himself out of aluminum wire and engraved it with the words 'Ust-Izhma 1944.' He takes great pride and joy in this spoon.

**New Testament:** Referring to the bible, Alyosha the Baptist keeps a copy hidden in a chink in the wall next to his bunk and it has survived every search. He is constantly reading it, many times out loud so that Ivan Denisovich can hear.

**salt pork:** The most common form of bribery, squad leaders often use salt pork to 'grease the hands' of the officials in order to receive favors. It is an unwritten rule that squad members give up some of the salt pork they get to the squad leader for bribery purposes.

**P.P.D.:** Stands for Production Planning Department, it is the office that hands out the daily work assignments. To get the good work assignments, squad leaders usually bribe the department officials. Tiurin goes to the P.P.D. to fix up a favorable work report.



**morning prayer:** Rules and regulations that the chief of the escort guard recites every morning before the prisoners go to work. All the prisoners are sick of hearing it.

**Temgenovo:** Ivan Denisovich's home village; he became a mason partly because there was a need in Temgenovo for bricklayers. He tries not to waste his time thinking about his home.

**kolkhoz:** Reference to the process of forcible collectivization, Ivan Denisovich learns about the state of the kolkhoz from his wife's letters. Since many of the men have abandoned the village kolkhoz, the women run it.

**carpet painting:** The new craft that many villagers of the kolkhoz undertake to make money. Ivan Denisovich's wife wishes that after he gets out, he'd work as a carpet painter and make a lot of money. Ivan Denisovich, however, feels that carpet painting is degrading work for someone with a good pair of hands.

**GULAG:** A general term for the Soviet camp system. Tiurin is considered a 'true son of the GULAG' because he knows the soviet camp system well.

**power station:** The work site that the 104th is assigned to, where they work on finishing a half-completed building located within the power station.

**prefabs (prefabricated panels):** The roofing felt that Ivan Denisovich and Kilgas 'steal' in order to warm up the machine room of the building that they are working on. Der, the chief-building-foreman, confronts Tiurin for stealing them.

**work report:** Paperwork detailing the conditions of work wages and output, it is more important for squad leaders to fix up a good work report than the squad's actual work. Tiurin gets in a good mood because he fixes up a favorable work report.

**specials:** The name given by the prisoners for the harsher labor camps reserved for political criminals, the story takes place in such a camp. No one is purported to have served out his term in a special.

**canteen :** A shack with a kitchen and a stove, the canteen is the place where the squads working near the power station get dinner. Ivan Denisovich swipes two extra bowls of kasha there.

**hacksaw blade:** Ivan Denisovich finds a piece of hacksaw blade during the evening search; he is nearly caught with it, but manages to get it through by hiding the piece in his mitten. He intends to turn it into a small blade.

**trowel:** Ivan Denisovich keeps a favorite trowel hidden in different places (such as a chink in a wall) so that he can use it whenever he works. When the workday is over, Ivan Denisovich is able to continue because his trowel is not listed like the other tools.



**parcels office:** The office where prisoners line up to receive their parcels. Ivan Denisovich offers to hold a place in line for Tsezar so that he can get something in return. Everything that comes to the office is closely checked and examined.

**ten days:** The name Tsezar uses to refer to Ivan Denisovich's penknife (in reference to how many days in the guardhouse one can get for having one), it is shorter than half a finger, but able to cut salt pork. For Ivan Denisovich, lending his penknife is another opportunity to earn some favors.

**appeals:** The formal process of making camp requests, most of the appeals are never replied to and the others are flatly rejected. Ivan Denisovich tells Alyosha the Baptist that he believes prayers are like the appeals.



## Quotes

Quote 1: "Here, men, we live by the law of the taiga. But even here people manage to live. The ones that don't make it are those who lick other men's leftovers, those who count on the doctors to pull them through, and those who squeal on their buddies." pg. 4

Quote 2: "Work was like a stick. It had two ends. When you worked for the knowing you gave them quality; when you worked for a fool you simply gave him eyewash. Otherwise, everybody would have croaked long ago. They all knew that." pg. 12

Quote 3: "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." pg. 14

Quote 4: "How can you expect a man who's warm to understand a man who's cold? The cold stung. A murky fog wrapped itself around Shukhov and made him cough painfully. The temperature out there was -17; Shukov's temperature was 99. The fight was on." pg. 19

Quote 5: "Every nerve in his body was taut, all his longing was concentrated in that cigarette butt--which meant more to him now, it seemed, than freedom itself--but he would never lower himself like that Fetiukov, he would never look at a man's mouth." pg. 24-25

Quote 6: "Alyosha , who was standing next to Shukov, gazed at the sun and looked happy, a smile on his lips. What had he to be happy about? His cheeks were sunken, he lived strictly on his rations, he earned nothing. He spent all his Sundays muttering with the other Baptists. They shed hardships of camp life like water off a duck's back." pg. 36

Quote 7: "In camp the squad leader is everything: a good one will give you a second life; a bad one will put you in your coffin." pg. 36

Quote 8: "There was truth in that. Better to growl and submit. If you were stubborn they broke you." pg. 41

Quote 9: "Shukov looked up at the sky and gasped--the sun had climbed almost to the dinner hour. Wonder of wonders! How time flew when you were working! That was something he'd often noticed. The days rolled by in the camp--they were over before you could say knife. But the years, they never rolled by; they never moved by a second." pg. 53

Quote 10: "He 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. And only in that inertness lay the chance of surviving the twenty-five years of imprisonment he'd been sentenced to." pg. 65



Quote 11: "But Shukov wasn't made that way--eight years in a camp couldn't change his nature. He worried about anything he could make use of, about every scrap of work he could do--nothing must be wasted without good reason." pg. 88

Quote 12: "Why can't you understand? The stars fall down now and then. The gaps have to be filled." pg. 90-91

Quote 13: "Who's the zek's main enemy? Another zek. If only they weren't at odds with one another--ah, what a difference that'd make!" pg. 101

Quote 14: "He had less and less cause to remember Temgenovo and his home there. Life in camp wore him out from reveille to bedtime, with not a second for idle reflections." pg. 107

Quote 15: "And now Shukov 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, till it's over." pg. 117

Quote 16: "D'you mean to say you think Old Whiskers will take pity on you? Why, he wouldn't trust his own brother. You haven't a chance, you ass." pg. 122

Quote 17: "When you thought about it, you couldn't help feeling sorry for him. He wouldn't live to see the end of his stretch. His attitude was all wrong." pg. 125

Quote 18: "Ten days. Ten days hard in the cells--if you sat them out to the end, your health would be ruined for the rest of your life. T.B. and nothing but hospital for you till you kicked the bucket. As for those who got fifteen days hard and sat them out--they went straight into a hole in the cold earth. As long as you're in the barracks--praise the Lord and sit tight." pg. 129

Quote 19: "You should rejoice that you're in prison. Here you have time to think about your soul." pg. 136

Quote 20: "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; the squad leader had fixed the rates well; he'd built a wall and enjoyed doing it; he'd smuggled that bit of hacksaw blade through; he'd earned a favor from Tsezar that evening; he'd bought that tobacco. And he hadn't fallen ill. He got over it." pg. 139

Quote 21: "A day without a dark cloud. Almost a happy day. There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days like that 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. The three extra days were for leap years." pg. 139



# Topic Tracking: Authority

## Section 1

Authority 1: In the labor camp, a prisoner must learn to abide by the authorities. Their presence is everywhere. Early on, Ivan Denisovich remains in bed because he thinks that a lenient guard is on duty. He is wrong and it almost lands him in the guardhouse. Such is the life of a prisoner; the course of his day can be easily determined by the whims of the guards and authority figures. A wise prisoner knows who to avoid and how much he can get away with. Some guards are notorious for cracking down on prisoners who do not follow even the most insignificant rules and regulations. Ivan Denisovich is careful not to confront any of these authorities.

## Section 2

Authority 2: Lieutenant Volkvoi is the security chief of the labor camp and the most feared authority figure for both the prisoners and the guards. His name stands for "wolf" and appropriately enough looks and acts like one. He is known to have carried around a whip that he used when sneaking up on prisoners. The Lieutenant is the epitome of the ruthless authority figure whose menacing presence puts the prisoners in their place. When Captain Buinovsky voices his protests, Lieutenant Volkvoi, without hesitation, gives him ten days in the guardhouse. Also, every morning the chief of the escort guards reads the "morning prayer" that outlines the rules and regulations of marching such as: "A step to right or left is considered an attempt to escape and the escort has orders to shoot without warning." The prayer is recited daily to instill in the prisoners the rules of the authorities.

## Section 3

Authority 3: As a former naval captain, Buinovsky is used to being an authority figure. He acts like he is still a captain. He rebukes Fetiukov for picking up other people's cigarette butts. Fetiukov retorts that Buinovsky, too, will soon give in to groveling. Senka, who is deaf, thinks that they are talking about the Captain getting ten days in the guardhouse for insulting Lieutenant Volkvoi. According to Senka, a prisoner cannot afford to be prideful before the authorities. It is the accepted philosophy to "growl and submit" because if you are stubborn, they will eventually break you. Captain Buinovsky, being a newcomer, has not yet adopted this survival approach.

## Section 4

Authority 4: Unlike the camp authorities, who are hated and feared, a good squad leader is considered a prisoner's lifeline. Tiurin, the squad leader of the 104th, commands the loyalty and obedience of his members because of his know-how and experience. They are more than willing to do whatever he says because they know their lives depend on his leadership. Even a tough prisoner like Pavlo, a former forest sniper, goes out of his way for Tiurin.



### **Section 5**

Authority 5: Prisoners who are given positions of authority serve as go-betweens between the camp authorities and the prisoners. Der is a prisoner who serves as the chief building foreman. Although the camp authorities do not expect him to do any real work, he tries to exercise his position by confronting Tiurin about the stolen prefabs. After getting a death threat from the members of the 104th, Der backs down. In order to save face, he criticizes Ivan Denisovich's bricklaying. Der is an example of a prisoner who tries to be an authority figure even at the expense of his fellow prisoners. He is said to have served in some ministry before his imprisonment.

### **Section 6**

Authority 6: The Soviet authorities have the power to determine the official story, often overlooking the facts. In Captain Buinovsky's case, he is branded as a spy and imprisoned because he gets a gift from a British admiral. It is useless to argue against the authorities. The Moldavian who is found sleeping in the repair shops is retained by the authorities and given time in the guardhouse. The official reason: attempting to escape.

### **Section 7**

Authority 7: For the prisoners, the authorities are always scheming to make life more miserable for them. They try to control and suppress every aspect of the prisoners' lives. For instance, Ivan Denisovich finds out that there will be work again on Sunday, their usual day off. Ivan Denisovich is able to endure this oppression by claiming small physical, mental, and emotional victories throughout the day. During supper, he forgets about the negatives and focuses only on his food.

### **Section 8**

Authority 8: Ivan Denisovich does not envy Tsezar too much because he knows that much of the parcel will go to the authorities. The list of authorities with their palms out is endless. A person with a parcel must make sure that all the important authorities get their cut.



# Topic Tracking: Survival

## Section 1

Survival 1: In the labor camp, survival is the prisoner's most immediate concern. Some prisoners manage better than others do. Ivan Denisovich is a prisoner who has survived the camps for more than eight years. He has endured because he heeds the advice of his first squad leader, Kuziomin, who tells his men that those who do not make it are ones who lick other's plates, depend on doctors, and squeal on fellow prisoners. Ivan Denisovich is a consummate survivor because he has a positive attitude, practical skills, and a strong sense of moral and ethical integrity.

Survival 2: There is a clear distinction between the camp experiences of those who work for the authorities and those who work on the outside. Kolya Vdovushkin is an example of a prisoner given a favorable job without much work or struggles. He does not have to deal with the survival concerns of cold, hunger, and labor that Ivan Denisovich goes through on a daily basis. Ivan Denisovich knows that he cannot rely on those on the "inside" to pull him through life in the camps. Even though he's feeling ill, he knows he must endure another hard day of labor in the freezing cold.

## Section 2

Survival 3: Ivan Denisovich observes the difference between Alyosha the Baptist and his squad leader, Tiurin. Ivan Denisovich does not understand how Alyosha the Baptist can be happy, nevertheless survive, even though he does not earn anything, subsists on only his rations, and spends most of his time in prayer and reading the bible. In contrast, Tiurin is a "true son of the GULAG" who knows the ins and outs of the labor camp system, including bribery and fixing the work reports. He knows how to get the best for his squad. Ivan Denisovich understands the importance of a squad leader: a good one will give you life; a bad one will send you to an early death.

## Section 4

Survival 4: Captain Buinovsky is a relative newcomer to the labor camp so he does not yet know that to survive his twenty-five year sentence, he cannot remain the same confident, brash naval captain. Every prisoner learns his sense of survival by being wary of his surroundings and conditions. A prisoner who is self-absorbed like Captain Buinovsky does not last in the camps. Pavlo gives the Captain the extra bowl of kasha so that he can survive long enough to learn the ropes of survival.

## Section 5

Survival 5: Squads that work together, survive. The members of the 104th work hard because they depend on one another to get their assignments done. This is essential for a squad. When Der confronts Tiurin about the stolen prefabs, several members of the 104th support Tiurin in scaring him away. In his conversation with Captain



Buinovsky, Ivan Denisovich explains that God crumbles up the moon to make stars because the gaps need to be filled. The authorities do not care about the survival of the prisoners because their spaces can be easily filled. Therefore, each squad member must help fill each other's gaps.

### **Section 7**

Survival 6: As Ivan Denisovich drinks the thin soup, all his complaints and concerns disappear. His mind is focused on filling his stomach. Food is an essential element of survival and Ivan Denisovich devotes most of his skills and ability to keeping his stomach well fed. While eating, he observes prisoner U 81. This old man has been imprisoned for many consecutive terms, yet has maintained a certain dignity, even in the way he eats. Ivan Denisovich is duly impressed.

### **Section 8**

Survival 7: As Fetiukov enters, bloodied from fighting over leftovers at the mess hall, Ivan Denisovich feels sorry for him because he probably will not survive the camps. Fetiukov does not have any sense of dignity; he is willing to connive, steal, beg, and grovel to get by. This self-serving attitude makes him despicable in the eyes of the other squad members and therefore, he never receives any help. Another person unlikely to survive is Captain Buinovsky because he is too proud. Prisoners must learn to submit, otherwise they are severely punished. Captain Buinovsky is given ten days in the guardhouse for insulting Lieutenant Volkvoi. The guardhouse is the most dreaded place for a prisoner because ten days will ruin your health, fifteen days usually means certain death.

Survival 8: Although Ivan Denisovich starts out the day feeling ill, he not only survives it, he makes the most of it. Many good things happen throughout the day, which makes it an almost happy one. However, it is only one day out of 3,654. Ivan Denisovich, over the course of his sentence, must survive 3,653 such days.



# Topic Tracking: Work

## Section 1

Work 1: Work is the main activity in the life of Ivan Denisovich and the rest of the prisoners and therefore, an important theme. The setting of the story is a Siberian labor camp where the bulk of the prisoners' time is devoted to doing work. Ivan Denisovich is especially occupied with work, always busy with odd jobs here and there to "earn" food or favors. Instead of being burdened by work, Ivan Denisovich actually considers it a way to pass time and occupy his mind. However, he also knows that to last in the labor camps, he must be able to discern when to work hard and when to take it easy. Ten years in a labor camp can easily wear out even the strongest of workers.

## Section 2

Work 2: As the prisoners march to their work sites, Ivan Denisovich thinks about his home village where he has learned that the men have abandoned working in the collective farms and many have turned to a new craft, carpet painting. He finds it hard to believe that they would give up the traditional work of farming and carpentry for a gaudy trade, no matter how profitable. Although his wife wants him to take up carpet painting when he is released, Ivan Denisovich feels that he should work with his hands as a carpenter or repairman. For him, work should make you feel that you earned your wages.

Work 3: Ivan Denisovich has learned over the eight or more years he has been in the labor camps how to take advantage of every little thing--even eating. Food is an important element in the story because it provides fuel for the prisoners to work. Prisoners are fed well at breakfast so that they can work hard during the day. Supper is usually thin stew because the prisoners are concerned more with sleep than food. Ivan Denisovich remembers how much he used to eat in his village in comparison to the camps. But he has done so much more work in the labor camps because he has learned to maximize the nutrients of even the paltry food he gets.

## Section 3

Work 4: Work is intimately related to life. The half-completed building is said to come to life because the 104th resumes working on it. The work reports that the squad leaders haggle over are important because they determine how much work the labor camp produces, which is related to how much the camp gets paid. This filters down to the prisoner's bread ration, which for him is life. In addition, work allows the prisoners to get through the day. Work makes the days go by quickly.

## Section 4:

Work 5: When Tiurin, the squad leader of the 104th, calls the men back to work, they all get up quickly to take their positions. A squad is like a family and in order for work to get



done, every member needs to contribute. Ivan Denisovich is considered one of the best workers in the squad because he is always ready to do his job. But even the unwilling ones must work hard because getting things done entails teamwork and cooperation. Squads that work well together are the successful ones.

### **Section 5:**

Work 6: Ivan Denisovich is considered one of the best workers because he has a positive attitude toward his work. He remains to finish the day's work on building the walls and before he leaves, looks it over to examine its quality. He takes great pride in a job well done. It is also his nature to make the most out of everything and not waste anything. This makes him persistent and energetic in everything he does.

### **Section 7:**

Work 7: Ivan Denisovich has accepted his condition in life and therefore, he is the consummate labor camp prisoner. As long as he is able to eat, sleep, and carry on, he is content with his situation, no matter how unfair. And he is not envious of the trusties, who have easy office jobs. Rather, he identifies with the old prisoner, U 81, who has been working hard labor for years, but has maintained a cool, reserved dignity. For Ivan Denisovich, this old man is the model prisoner.

### **Section 8**

Work 8: Ivan Denisovich buys tobacco with the money he earns from doing odd jobs for wealthy prisoners, such as making slippers or patching up clothes. All these skills allow Ivan Denisovich to get by in the camp without the need of packages. In contrast, Tsezar, the intellectual, can only get by because he receives two parcels a month. According to Ivan Denisovich, in a labor camp, the ability to work and do various things is more valuable and honorable than greasing palms and relying on others.



## Section 1 (pg. 3-21)

At five o'clock in the morning, the reveille sounds and prisoner Ivan Denisovich Shukov lies in his bunk, wondering if he should get up. Usually he is not one to oversleep; there are always errands he can do to earn a little something. This morning, however, he is feeling ill. Ivan Denisovich is an old-timer in the prison camp and although he does odd jobs here and there to earn food or favors, he maintains a level of personal integrity. Ivan Denisovich lives by the words of his first squad leader Kuziomin, a hard-bitten zek (prisoner) of twelve years, who tells a group of newcomers one day about what it takes to survive in the labor camps:

*"Here, men, we live by the law of the taiga. But even here people manage to live. The ones that don't make it are those who lick other men's leftovers, those who count on the doctors to pull them through, and those who squeal on their buddies." pg. 4*

Topic Tracking: Survival 1

Ivan Denisovich agrees with everything except the part about the squealers (prisoners who rat on their fellow prisoners). They get by all right, although at the cost of other prisoners.

Ivan Denisovich remembers that his squad, the 104th, might be relocated to a different work site, the "Socialist Way of Life" settlement, where there is no protection from the cold. Shuddering at the thought, he decides to visit the dispensary, the camp hospital, to see if he can get the day off. Thinking that the good-natured guard, One-and-a-half Ivan, is on duty, he remains in bed. But another guard, the Tartar, calls him by his number, S 854, and lays down the penalty for oversleeping--three days in the dreaded guardhouse with work. Ivan Denisovich, however resentful, is glad that the penalty is with work because it means hot food and no time to think. This is more bearable than being in the cells without work.

Instead of taking him to the guardhouse, however, the Tartar gives Ivan Denisovich a job of cleaning the guardroom floor. Not wanting to get his valenki (boots essential for winter) wet, Ivan Denisovich takes them off, then sloshes the water onto the floor. One of the guards gets mad at him and yells, "How much water are you going to use, idiot? Didn't you ever watch your wife scrub the floor, pig?" (p. 11) Ivan Denisovich smiles, revealing gaps in his teeth, the result of a bad case of scurvy at Ust-Izhma, his former labor camp. "I was taken away from my wife in forty-one, citizen chief. I've forgotten what she was like," he replies. (p. 12) The guard tells him to wash over lightly and get out.

Ivan Denisovich is well aware of how things function in the camp. A prisoner has to learn when to work hard and when to take it easy:



*"Work was like a stick. It had two ends. When you worked for the knowing you gave them quality; when you worked for a fool you simply gave him eyewash. Otherwise, everybody would have croaked long ago. They all knew that." pg. 12*

Topic Tracking: Work 1

After scrubbing the floors, Ivan Denisovich runs to the mess hall where Fetiukov, the jackal, is keeping his breakfast of vegetable stew and magara, the unsubstantial "Chinese" oatmeal. Fetiukov is considered the lowest in the hierarchy of the 104th. Sitting down, Ivan Denisovich goes through the ritual of taking his spoon (his little baby) out of his boots, removing his cap, and carefully concentrating on every bite. Ivan Denisovich takes eating seriously because mealtime is important to a prisoner: "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." pg. 14

After breakfast, Ivan Denisovich makes his way to the dispensary, careful to avoid the Tartar and other authorities. With the introduction of new regulations, some guards vigilantly look to catch prisoners breaking a rule. On his way he ponders whether to buy tobacco from the tall Lett in Barracks 7, but decides to go to the dispensary first.

Topic Tracking: Authority 1

At the dispensary, a young medical assistant, Kolya Vdovushkin, is writing something. He is not a medical trainee; he is a writer, given the job by the head doctor, Stepan Grigorych, so that he can write in his spare time. Stepan Grigorych is a loud-voiced doctor who believes that work is the best therapy for illness. Ivan Denisovich's temperature is 99.2 degrees, so Vdovushkin rejects his request for a work exemption. Ivan Denisovich walks out, knowing he has to tough out another day.

*"How can you expect a man who's warm to understand a man who's cold? The cold stung. A murky fog wrapped itself around Shukhov and made him cough painfully. The temperature out there was -17; Shukov's temperature was 99. The fight was on." pg. 19*

Topic Tracking: Survival 2

Back in the barracks, Pavlo, the deputy squad leader of the 104th, gives Ivan Denisovich a ration of bread. After weighing the portion, he puts half of it in his jacket, the other half he stows into a slit in his mattress to prevent anyone from stealing it. Meanwhile, Alyosha the Baptist, his top bunk neighbor, reads from the New Testament (audibly so that Ivan Denisovich can hear). Alyosha has kept his bible hidden in a chink in the wall and it has survived every search.



## Section 2 (pg. 22-40)

Tiurin, the respected squad leader of the 104th, calls the men out for roll call. Tiurin has been imprisoned for nineteen years and knows all the ins and outs of the Soviet camp system. It seems he has been able to bribe the officials out of reassignment. All the squad leaders use salt pork to "grease the hands" of the P.P.D. (Production Planning Department).

At roll call, there are twenty-four men from the 104th, including the squad leader, Tiurin. The only one missing is Panteleyev, the squealer of the group, who works in a soft, cushy office job. Ivan Denisovich, after getting the number on his jacket touched up by a camp artist, comes across a fellow squad member, Tsezar Markovich, smoking a cigarette. Although Ivan Denisovich longs for a smoke, he is subtler about his desire than Fetiukov, the jackal, who bluntly begs Tsezar for a puff:

*"Every nerve in his body was taut, all his longing was concentrated in that cigarette butt--which meant more to him now, it seemed, than freedom itself--but he would never lower himself like that Fetiukov, he would never look at a man's mouth."* pg. 24-25

Tsezar, annoyed at Fetiukov for disturbing his thoughts, gives the butt of his cigarette to Ivan Denisovich. Just then, there is word that the guards are checking for something. At the command of Lieutenant Volkvoi, the hated security chief, the guards search the prisoners for any extra clothing. Tsezar is written up for wearing a vest as is Buinovsky, a former naval captain, who protests, "You're not behaving like Soviet people; you're not behaving like communists." (p. 28) Lieutenant Volkvoi does not take kindly to Buinovsky's comments and he gives the Captain ten days in the guardhouse. The Lieutenant is hated for good reason; he is known to have carried a whip around. After being carefully counted, the prisoners march to their work sites. The chief of the escort guards recites the morning prayer, the rules and regulations of marching. The prisoners trod along, lost in their thoughts.

Topic Tracking: Authority 2

Ivan Denisovich's thoughts lie in his hometown of Temnenovo, where he learns from his wife's letters that the men of the village are abandoning the kolkhoz, or collective farms. They have all but given up on the traditional work of farming and carpentry; instead many have taken up a profitable new craft--carpet painting. Ivan Denisovich is perplexed that the men of his village would abandon their honorable work for this new craft, no matter how profitable. He feels that even if given his freedom, he would prefer to work with his two capable hands.

Topic Tracking: Work 2

Meanwhile, just before entering the gatehouse, the prisoners line up in columns. While waiting to go through, Ivan Denisovich observes two people, quite different from one



another. One is Alyosha the Baptist, who seems content and quite oblivious to the misery of the cold and the long day of work ahead:

*"Alyosha, who was standing next to Shukov, gazed at the sun and looked happy, a smile on his lips. What had he to be happy about? His cheeks were sunken, he lived strictly on his rations, he earned nothing. He spent all his Sundays muttering with the other Baptists. They shed hardships of camp life like water off a duck's back." pg. 36*

The other person is Tiurin, who looks morose and hardened. Tiurin is a "true son of the GULAG," the name for the Soviet camp system. He knows the system thoroughly, and thus works to ensure the best for his squad. Ivan Denisovich has known Tiurin since their days in Ust-Izhma and in transferring camps, Tiurin personally chose Ivan Denisovich for his squad. "In camp the squad leader is everything: a good one will give you a second life; a bad one will put you in a coffin." pg. 36

Topic Tracking: Survival 3

While the authorities and squad leaders plan for the day's work assignments, the prisoners have some free time. Ivan Denisovich eats the half ration of bread he brought with him. As he chews, he remembers how he used to eat in his village--so much food that he never fully appreciated. Ivan Denisovich has learned in camp how to take full advantage of every little thing, even eating. He remembers how back home in the farms he would stuff himself with food. In the camp, his hunger is rarely satisfied, but even with so little food he has done much work.

Topic Tracking: Work 3

The two Estonians are sitting next to Ivan Denisovich. They look alike and share everything together. They had, in fact, met in camp, but they are like brothers. Tiurin never separates them. Ivan Denisovich observes their quiet, deliberate manner and concludes that of all the Estonians he has known, he has never met a bad one.



## Section 3 (pg. 41-57)

As the 104th wait for Tiurin to come with their work assignment, Fetiukov scrounges for cigarette butts. Buinovsky barks at him to stop and warns him that he'll get a disease smoking other people's ends. Fetiukov counters that soon enough, the Captain will be doing the same. Senka Klevshin, who is deaf and not following the conversation, chimes in by saying that the Captain should not have shown his pride too much. He thinks that they are talking about the incident that morning when the Captain got ten days in the guardhouse. Denisovich thinks, "There was truth in that. Better to growl and submit. If you were stubborn they broke you." pg. 41 Captain Buinovsky, being a newcomer and used to giving commands, does not yet know to fear the authorities.

Topic Tracking: Authority 3

Kilgas, a Lett with a reputation for joking, wonders when they will get another snowstorm. Prisoners long for snowstorms because they do not have to work. Just then, Tiurin walks in with the day's work assignment; the 104th is assigned to the half-completed building at the power station. Every member is given his task.

Although abandoned for over two months, now that the 104th is working on it, life comes back to the building. Ivan Denisovich and Kilgas, the two best workers in the squad, are ordered to find a way to board up the windows of the machine room in order to make it warmer. They scrounge up some prefabs (prefabricated panels) from a construction site and carry it away unassumingly, so as not to be caught by the superintendents Der and Shkuropatenko. Tiurin is pleased with the find. After fixing the stove, Ivan Denisovich puts up the prefabs, while Tiurin heads to the office to settle the work report. One of the most important jobs of a squad leader is fixing the work report to make the squad seem productive. It is more important than the work itself because rations are handed out based on how much work is reportedly done.

Gopchik, the youngest member of the 104th, asks Ivan Denisovich to help him cast a spoon out of some aluminum wire that he finds. Ivan Denisovich takes a fatherly interest in Gopchik because he has never had a son, only two daughters. Gopchik fawns on everyone in the squad, and is quickly learning the ropes of camp survival. Ivan Denisovich notices that it is almost time for dinner and that they had only begun to start working:

*"Shukov looked up at the sky and gasped--the sun had climbed almost to the dinner hour. Wonder of wonders! How time flew when you were working! That was something he'd often noticed. The days rolled by in the camp--they were over before you could say knife. But the years, they never rolled by; they never moved by a second."* pg. 52-53

Topic Tracking: Work 4

While the others haul sand and move blocks, Ivan Denisovich, Kilgas, and Senka--the chosen masons for the day--talk around the stove. They joke about how close Ivan



Denisovich is to the end of his sentence. The story of Ivan Denisovich's imprisonment is revealed. Although officially charged with high treason, the real story is this: During WWII, he was captured by the Germans and somehow managed to escape. Upon reaching his own lines, he was charged with being a spy and given the choice of either confessing or death. He chose to live.

Senka, sensing that they are talking about escapes, yells, "Three times I escaped, and three times they caught me." (p. 56) Senka is known to have been in the concentration camp, Buchenwald. Ivan Denisovich compares his experiences in the camp up north with his life now in the specials, the harsher camps reserved for political prisoners. He thinks that life in the specials is quieter, but Fetiukov, entering the conversation, reminds them that in the specials, squealers are known to have their throats cut. The whistle for dinner blows.



## Section 4 (pg. 58-76)

The squads working around the power station head for the canteen, a shanty built around a stove, where they eat dinner. They are served the good, filling kasha, or oatmeal, not the magara they had in the morning. At the serving window, the cook keeps count as he hands out the bowls. Noticing the cook's confusion over the count, Ivan Denisovich takes advantage by tricking him of two extra bowls. He quickly finishes his portion and waits patiently for Pavlo to decide who will get the extra bowls he has swiped. Pavlo rightfully gives one to Ivan Denisovich and the other to Captain Buinovsky, who has been lingering around after finishing his bowl. He sits, unaware that other prisoners are waiting for his spot:

*"He 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. And only in that inertness lay the chance of surviving the twenty-five years of imprisonment he'd been sentenced to." pg. 65*

Topic Tracking: Survival 4

Ivan Denisovich agrees with Pavlo's decision to give the bowl to Captain Buinovsky. The Captain does not yet know how to manage on his own. Until then, he will need help. Fetiukov leaves the canteen, angry that he does not get a share of the extra bowls.

Ivan Denisovich takes a bowl of kasha for Tsezar, who is working at the office of the rate inspector. Tsezar is smoking a pipe, arguing with prisoner X 123 about the art of film. Ivan Denisovich listens to their conversation, not wanting to interrupt "such a learned conversation." Tsezar takes the bowl without acknowledging his fellow squad member's presence. Ivan Denisovich leaves quietly. Walking back, he finds a piece of hacksaw blade and decides to keep it for later use.

At the power station, Tiurin is in a good mood because he has been successful in drawing up a favorable work report. The usually reticent squad leader tells stories of his life to those sitting around the stove. They learn that he was discharged from the army for being a son of a Kulak, or peasant. As Tiurin tells his stories of evading authorities, getting help from female college students on a train, and parting with his younger brother, Ivan Denisovich listens, smoking some tobacco he has borrowed from one of the Estonians. Tiurin finishes his stories and calls the men back to work. The men obey right away because they always work hard for their squad leader. And every member keeps up so as not to hinder the progress of the entire squad. Ivan Denisovich, Kilgas, Senka, and Tiurin prepare for the bricklaying, while Pavlo works on getting the mortar ready. Ivan Denisovich gives all of himself to his work, treating the wall as if it is his handiwork.

Topic Tracking: Authority 4

Topic Tracking: Work 5



## Section 5 (pg. 77-96)

In the cold weather, a mason must set the bricks correctly before the mortar freezes. Ivan Denisovich, with all his years of experience, makes no mistakes. All the masons work at a steady rhythm. The Captain and Fetiukov haul the mortar up the ramp. But Fetiukov gets lazy and Tiurin assigns him the job of lifting blocks. Alyosha replaces Fetiukov and the Captain immediately orders him to work faster. Alyosha, who does whatever anybody tells him, obliges.

Both Ivan Denisovich and Kilgas are on their third row when Der, the hated chief building foreman, confronts Tiurin and threatens him with another prison term for the stolen prefabs in the machine room. Tiurin and the other members of the 104th crowd around Der. Tiurin, shaking uncontrollably, says softly, but loud enough for everyone to hear, "Your time for giving terms has passed, you bastard. If you say one word, you blood-sucker, it'll be your last day on earth. Remember that." (p. 82) Der gets the message. He tries to maintain a semblance of dignity befitting an authority figure by criticizing Ivan Denisovich's bricklaying. Der goes away, having received a death threat for trying to put on airs. Although the authorities do not expect him to do any real work and he gets good rations and separate living quarters, he tries to exercise the authority of his position, even at the expense of fellow prisoners. Before his imprisonment, Der is said to have served in some government ministry.

Topic Tracking: Authority 5

The members of the 104th work feverishly on the wall again. The end of the workday is near and the other squads are turning in their tools and lining up at the gate. Not wanting to have Tiurin penalized for handing in the squad's tools too late, Ivan Denisovich calls the other masons to hand in their trowels while he continues working with his, which is not on the tool list. It is his own trowel that he has kept hidden in different work areas. Tiurin commends Ivan Denisovich and tells him that the squad will not be able to live without him when his term is over. The others hurry to get in line since latecomers get the guardhouse. Ivan Denisovich sends everyone away except for Senka. Although Tiurin tells them to throw the extra mortar over the wall, Ivan Denisovich works double time to finish it off. Senka takes off but Ivan Denisovich looks the wall over--a job well done.

*"But Shukov wasn't made that way--eight years in a camp couldn't change his nature. He worried about anything he could make use of, about every scrap of work he could do--nothing must be wasted without good reason." pg. 88*

Topic Tracking: Work 6

Before heading back, Ivan Denisovich finds a big stone to hide his trowel. He catches up to Senka, who has slowed down. When they reach the gate, the hundreds of prisoners already lined up give them a hard time for being late. The prisoners then form fives for the count. Ivan Denisovich, being in a content, silly mood, asks the Captain



where the moon goes when it's not visible. Mocking his question, the Captain asks where *he* thinks it goes. Ivan Denisovich answers that in his village, they say that God crumbles up the moon into stars. The Captain asks if he believes in God. Ivan Denisovich answers yes. The Captain then asks why God crumbles the moon into stars. Ivan Denisovich replies, "Why can't you understand? The stars fall down now and then. The gaps have to be filled." pg. 90-91

Topic Tracking: Survival 5

The prisoner count comes up one short. After a recount, word goes around that the dark little Moldavian, known to be a real spy, is missing. Ivan Denisovich's thoughts, however, are on the firewood that they had forgotten to collect. Every night after work, the prisoners would pick up some kindling, and even though most of it is confiscated, some would usually make its way through. Just then, Tsezar shows up from his office job and asks the Captain how things are going. The Captain complains about the day's hard work. Tsezar, who has a special liking for the Captain, gives him a smoke. While Tsezar and the Captain discuss film, three figures come out of the repair shop. The Moldavian is found--he has been sleeping on the job. Back in line, everyone curses him and his squad leader and another member of his squad hit him. The head escort counts again.



## Section 6 (pg. 97-105)

The count finally comes out right. The prisoners wait to be led to the evening search. Ivan Denisovich overhears Captain Buinovsky explain how he has ended up in prison. As a liaison officer on a British cruiser, after the war, he received a gift from the British admiral and this was enough to brand him a spy and a political criminal. The escort, meanwhile, tries unsuccessfully to hurry the prisoners. The prisoners march grudgingly, as there is no incentive for them to go faster. Usually, they would hurry in order to beat the other column for first dibs to the mess hall, the showers, barbers, etc. But they figure the other column is already in before them. Ivan Denisovich's thoughts linger on the possibility that Tsezar might receive his overdue package.

Suddenly the prisoners break into a quicker stride; the other column from the machine works has been held back as well. The prisoners from the machine works have been subject to a more rigorous search ever since zeks have been found with their throats cut. Ivan Denisovich has heard rumors that knives have been brought inside volleyball poles. A guard brings the prisoners to a halt before the gate and tells them to put down their firewood. Some are hesitant, risking the possibility for others to sneak in some kindling, and the situation makes Denisovich think: "Who's the zek's main enemy? Another zek. If only they weren't at odds with one another--ah, what a difference that'd make!" pg. 101

The guards begin frisking the prisoners. Ivan Denisovich asks Tsezar if he can hold a place in line for him at the parcels office. Just as he is about to be frisked, Ivan Denisovich remembers the hacksaw blade he found. He quickly hides it in his mitten. During the search, he prays to God that he will not be caught. Luckily, he makes it through. Ivan Denisovich notices that the Moldavian is held back--penalized with time in the guardhouse for sleeping in the repair shop and holding up the count. Officially, he is charged with attempting to escape.

Topic Tracking: Authority 6



## Section 7 (pg. 106-119)

Ivan Denisovich runs to get in line at the parcels office while Tsezar makes his way to the boards where the names of those who have parcels are listed. There are at least fifteen people already waiting in line with their bags and sacks. Every parcel is opened and its contents checked. Ivan Denisovich has received parcels before, but has since told his wife not to send them. Although every once in a while he still longs for someone to tell him that he has received a package, for the most part, he has learned to live without them. He does not need another thing to remind him of home. It is just an added burden, those parcels: "He had less and less cause to remember Temgenovo and his home there. Life in camp wore him out from reveille to bedtime, with not a second for idle reflections." pg. 107

In line, he finds out that there would be work on Sunday.

Topic Tracking: Authority 7

Some of the trusties bully themselves in front of the line. They are prisoners with soft office jobs. Those who work on the outside consider them lowest of the lows and vice versa. The trusties are a gang of their own and they have the guards on their side. Tsezar shows up and heads for a fellow Muscovite, Pyotr Mikhailych, who is reading a newspaper article about a theatre review. Muscovites seem to be able to detect each other. They are known to talk fast, as if trying to outtalk each other. Before giving his place in line to Tsezar, Ivan Denisovich asks if he can bring him his supper, fully expecting Tsezar to offer it to him. Tsezar complies with his wishes.

Ivan Denisovich runs back to his barracks to avoid seeing any guards. There is a rule issued by the camp commandant that no one is to go around alone. Although it is an unenforceable law, Ivan Denisovich is always cautious. Reaching his bunk, he is glad that everything is in good order. His bread is still sewn inside his mattress; the guards have not been snooping.

After taking off his winter clothes, Ivan Denisovich runs to the mess hall where the Limper (the mess orderly) and the mess chief are holding back the crowd of zeks fighting to get in. Another questionable rule from the camp commandant is that prisoners must enter the mess hall with their squads, in double file. The mess chief, the Limper, and all the cooks only look out for their own interests. They are a gang of their own. The Limper wields a big stick that he uses to control the flow of zeks. The mess chief is feared because he has power over the zek's food. Ivan Denisovich manages to fight his way in along with his squad members. Ivan Denisovich's quick eye allows him to cut in front of another prisoner for a serving tray. Gopchik, with his cunning, obtains a tray as well. It is noted again that he will do well in camp life. The 104th receives twenty-four portions (excluding Pantaleyev, the squealer's). Ivan Denisovich makes mental note of which bowls contain the thick stew and maneuvers the tray in a way as to sit opposite them. With his two bowls of stew (one being Tsezar's), Ivan Denisovich drinks the warm broth--the moment he has been waiting for: "Goo-ood."



*"And now Shukov 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, till it's over." pg. 117*

Ivan Denisovich eats his supper without bread. The bread is handed out in accordance to the work they had done that day. Ivan Denisovich gets the maximum cut, twelve ounces. Since two helpings and bread is too much, he saves the bread for tomorrow since the belly will be hungry tomorrow. The day has been good to Ivan Denisovich--two helpings for dinner and two for supper. As Ivan Denisovich eats, he notices prisoner U 81, a tall old man from the 64th unit, sit opposite him. The 64th has been sent to work in the Socialist Way of Life settlement instead of the 104th and Ivan Denisovich knows that the site offers no protection from the cold. Yet, this old man is unlike all the other zeks. He sits upright and brings his spoon up to his lips. He does not put his bread on the dirty table, but on his clean rag. Somehow, even through countless years of prison life, he has maintained a sense of dignity.

Topic Tracking: Survival 6

Topic Tracking: Work 7



## Section 8 (pg. 120-139)

After supper, Ivan Denisovich heads to Barracks 7 to buy some tobacco from the tall Lett. He purchases two glassfuls with money he has earned from doing odd jobs for other prisoners. A prisoner in the barracks yells, "D'you mean to say you think Old Whiskers (reference to Stalin) will take pity on you? Why, he wouldn't trust his own brother. You haven't a chance, you ass." pg. 122 In the specials, a prisoner can let off steam. At Ust-Izhma, a minor complaint can put a prisoner in the guardhouse.

Ivan Denisovich runs back to Barracks 9 where Tsezar sits gloating over his parcel. He restrains himself from looking too eager for his cut. But one quick glance and Ivan Denisovich can tell its contents--a real good one this time. Tsezar tells Ivan Denisovich to keep his portion of the bread. He now has Tsezar's six ounces, his twelve ounces, and the bread in his mattress. Ivan Denisovich does not feel too envious of Tsezar because he has to inevitably "grease some palms" and give all the important authorities their cut.

Topic Tracking: Authority 8

Topic Tracking: Work 8

Ivan Denisovich climbs into his bunk and figures out a way to hide the hacksaw blade. He will turn it into a little knife, good for shoe repair and such. Fetiukov enters the barracks, his lips bloodied--most likely from fighting over leftovers at the mess hall. Ivan Denisovich sees him go straight to his bunk, burying his teary, bloodied face in his mattress. People like Fetiukov are not fit for survival in the camp. "When you thought about it, you couldn't help feeling sorry for him. He wouldn't live to see the end of his stretch. His attitude was all wrong." pg. 125

Captain Buinovsky enters, cheerful because he has a pot of real tea. Tsezar borrows Ivan Denisovich's ten days, a small penknife good for cutting salt pork. Ivan Denisovich knows that he'll get a slice for lending it to Tsezar. Ivan Denisovich returns a pinch of tobacco to one of the Estonians, the same amount he borrowed. While the Captain and Tsezar enjoy tea and snacks, Snubnose, a young guard, comes in to take the Captain to the guardhouse for the morning outburst. All his squad members feel sorry for the Captain. He too, like Fetiukov, will not survive if he does not change his ways. The members of the 104th know well the harsh conditions of the cells because they built them:

*"Ten days. Ten days hard in the cells--if you sat them out to the end, your health would be ruined for the rest of your life. T.B. and nothing but hospital for you till you kicked the bucket. As for those who got fifteen days hard and sat them out--they went straight into a hole in the cold earth. As long as you're in the barracks--praise the Lord and sit tight."* pg. 128-129

Topic Tracking: Survival 7



It is time for the evening count. The barracks commander, a true-life criminal (in a camp of political prisoners), calls the men out. Everyone fears his orders because he is not afraid to take their numbers, which means time in the guardhouse. Ivan Denisovich gives Tsezar advice on how to save his parcel from getting stolen during the count. The authorities count the prisoners two or three times. They count no better than "an illiterate herdsman." All their training seems to have done them no good. After the count is squared away, Ivan Denisovich hurries back to secure Tsezar's parcel. Another favor earned.

Before going to bed, Ivan Denisovich offers up a quick prayer. He listens to Alyosha the Baptist read the New Testament. "There you are, Ivan Denisovich, your soul is begging to pray. Why don't you give it its freedom?" (p. 139) pleads Alyosha. Ivan Denisovich compares prayers to appeals, the formal complaint or suggestion process in the camp. They are always either rejected or returned. Alyosha continues to share his faith but Ivan Denisovich tells Alyosha about a priest back home, whom he considers the biggest hypocrite. Alyosha counters that the Orthodox Church is corrupt. Alyosha tells Ivan Denisovich why he is able to be happy in camp: "You should rejoice that you're in prison. Here you have time to think about your soul." pg. 136

There is a call for a second count. Ivan Denisovich helps out Tsezar one more time, hiding his parcel in his top bunk mattress. No one would look in his bunk for anything worthwhile. After he gets back, Ivan Denisovich hands a biscuit to Alyosha and eats a piece of sausage, all courtesy of Tsezar. Ivan Denisovich goes to bed recounting all the good things that happened to him: "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; the squad leader had fixed the rates well; he'd built a wall and enjoyed doing it; he'd smuggled that bit of hacksaw blade through; he'd earned a favor from Tsezar that evening; he'd bought that tobacco. And he hadn't fallen ill. He got over it." pg. 139

For Ivan Denisovich, it is a good day. But no matter how good, there are many more such days. 3,653 days in total:

*"A day without a dark cloud. Almost a happy day. There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days like that 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. The three extra days were for leap years."* pg. 139

Topic Tracking: Survival 8