Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life

1. Identity card

Title: *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life*

Author: J. M. Coetzee

Date of publication: 1997

Genre: Autobiographical novel / Coming-of-age narrative

Historical and Cultural Context: Set in South Africa during the 1940s and 1950s, the novel takes place under the apartheid system. Through the childhood memories of its narrator, Coetzee explores identity, family, language and belonging in a society marked by racial segregation and social divisions.

2. Plot summary

In a nutshell: the novel recounts the childhood of John, a sensitive and introspective boy growing up in South Africa. As he struggles with family relationships, school life and his place in society, he becomes increasingly aware of the country's political and social inequalities. Through everyday experiences, John gradually develops his identity while questioning the world around him.

Key Moments:

- ➜ John struggles to fit in at school.
- ➜ He develops a close relationship with his mother.
- ➜ He experiences life on the family farm.
- ➜ He becomes aware of apartheid and social divisions.
- ➜ He begins to define his own identity.

3. Main characters

Name	Role	Symbol
John	narrator and protagonist	identity, self-discovery
John's mother	caring parent	love, protection
John's father	distant father	insecurity, authority
Eddie	family friend	admiration, influence

4. Major themes and links to the LLCER program

Première – Rencontres

How does the novel illustrate this theme?

- Childhood experiences shape John's understanding of others.
- Family and social relationships influence his development.
- Encounters reveal cultural and social differences.

Key examples

- John's relationships with his parents.
- His experiences at school.
- His interactions with people on the farm.

Terminale – Expression and construction of the self

How does the novel illustrate this theme?

- John gradually builds his identity through childhood experiences.
- The novel explores memory, self-awareness and personal growth.
- Identity is influenced by family, language and society.

Key examples

- John's reflections on himself.
- His sense of not belonging.
- His growing awareness of apartheid.

5. Key quotes and key words

"He lives inside himself as though behind a wall."

identity – childhood – memory – belonging – apartheid – family – self-discovery

6. Author's message

- Identity develops through childhood experiences.
- Family and society shape the way we see ourselves.
- Growing up means questioning the values of the world around us.
- Personal memories help us understand both ourselves and history.