

A GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION
AND CLASSROOM USE
NUMBER THE STARS
by LOIS LOWRY



ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1943 in Nazi occupied Denmark, ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen is asked to carry out a heroic deed and aid her Uncle Henrik in his efforts to smuggle Danish Jews across the sea to Sweden, where they will be safe. She has already lost her older sister, Lise, in the Danish Resistance, and now it appears that her best friend, Ellen Rosen, is in danger. The Johansens take in Ellen while her parents are aided by Peter Nielsen, Lise's fiancée, and relocated somewhere outside of Copenhagen. When it becomes apparent that the Danish Jews aren't safe, Mrs. Johansen takes her children and Ellen to Uncle Henrik's house on the coast. Until now, Annemarie has accepted the secrets and unusual silence of her parents, but when it falls upon her to deliver a mysterious packet to Uncle Henrik's fishing boat, she conquers her fears and learns the real meaning of courage.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

An introduction to the Holocaust is essential to understanding the events that occur in *Number the Stars*. As a class, view "Daniel's Story" on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website: www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/museum-exhibitions/remember-the-children-daniels-story/video. Ask students to respond to the movie by writing what they learned about the Holocaust from Daniel.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 4-6.9 – Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

Discuss the attitude of the Danes toward the Nazis. Why do the Danes destroy their naval fleet? Mrs. Johansen tells her husband that this action is sad. Explain Mr. Johansen's reply, "How proud." (p. 32)

Why is Mrs. Johansen so upset to hear that Mrs. Hirsch's button shop is closed? Explain why the Nazi impose a curfew on the city.

Compare and contrast Annemarie's and Ellen's families. What are their major differences? Describe the friendship between the two families.

Discuss the relationship between fear and bravery. Annemarie and Ellen encounter Nazi soldiers on their way home from school. Why do the girls think it wise to keep this encounter a secret? How is their decision related to fear? Kirsti is too young to understand about the soldiers, and when she gets home she reveals Annemarie and Ellen's secret. Describe Mrs. Johansen and Mrs. Rosen's reaction when Kirsti tells them about the soldiers. What is their advice to the girls?

When do Annemarie and Ellen first realize that Jews aren't safe in Copenhagen? Why do the Rosens feel they are safe? At what point do they realize that their lives are in danger?

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Peter Neilsen, Lise's fiancé, visits the Johansens. He brings an illegal newspaper called *The Free Danes*. Explain why the Johansens are interested in the newspaper. Why does Mrs. Johansen burn the newspaper after she and her husband have read it?

Foreshadowing is a hint about events that haven't yet happened. At the beginning of the novel, Peter brings Annemarie a seashell. Discuss what the gift foreshadows.

Explain the statement "It is much easier to be brave if you don't know everything." (p. 76) Debate whether this is why Peter didn't tell Mr. and Mrs. Johansen about Lise's involvement in the Resistance until long after her death. How is Peter Nielsen fearless and brave?

The Rosens leave Ellen with the Johansens when they flee Copenhagen. Why do they think Ellen is safer with the Johansens? Explain Peter's role in helping the Rosens to safety.

Ellen takes the identity of Lise Johansen, Annemarie's older sister who was killed while working in the Resistance. Describe the measures that the Johansens take to convince the soldiers that Ellen is their daughter.

Why does Annemarie rip the Star of David necklace from Ellen's neck? What is significant about where she hides it? How does the Star of David necklace symbolize hope? Explain why Annemarie wants to wear the necklace until Ellen returns.

What does Mrs. Johansen do to help her children conquer their fears and be brave? Discuss how the Johansens' bravery contributes to the courage of the Rosen family.

Mrs. Johansen takes her children and Ellen to Uncle Henrik's house in the country. At what point is it obvious that Mrs. Johansen and Uncle Henrik are working in secret to get the Rosens and other Jewish families to safety? Explain their carefully plotted out plan.

Ellen is reunited with her family and transported by fishing boat to Sweden. Annemarie feels that there is "less danger, but more fear" for those who are waiting. Explain this statement.

How do Uncle Henrik and Mrs. Johansen communicate their trust in Annemarie and instill in her a sense of responsibility?

How does she come face-to-face with danger and fear as she delivers the packet to Uncle Henrik?

Explain how "secrets" and "silence" are survival weapons for the Danes during the time that the Nazis occupy Denmark. How does Annemarie learn this from her mother and Uncle Henrik?

How are Annemarie, Ellen, and other children in Nazi-occupied Denmark robbed of their youth? Discuss why her family waited so long to tell her how Lise died. How does the truth about Lise's death contribute to Annemarie's passage into a grown-up world?

Define *patriotism*. The Danish people seemed especially patriotic during the Nazi occupation of their country. Discuss how they demonstrate patriotism. How does Mr. Johansen instill patriotism in his children? Amid the celebration at the end of the war, Annemarie is still grieving Lise's death. Debate whether she eventually accepts Lise's death as a heroic act of patriotism.

How does Lowry use chapter titles to build suspense in the story?

Explain the title of the book.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 4-6.1 – Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text, RL. 4-6.2 – Determine a theme of a story from details in the text; summarize the text., RL. 4-6.3 – Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story,

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drawing on specific details in the text; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 4-6.1 – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade level topics, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly, SL. 4-6.3 – Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 4-6.1 – Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking; Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.3 – Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

REACHING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Ask students to write a paper that draws a parallel between "Little Red Riding Hood" and Annemarie's journey through the forest to Uncle Henrik's boat. Who is the wolf in Annemarie's story?

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 4-6.9 – Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics and pattern of events in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures; Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-6.4 – Produce clear and coherent writing to which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; Language: Knowledge of Language L. 4-6.4 - Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

Write a letter that Ellen might write to Annemarie that describing her journey to Sweden on Uncle Henrik's fishing boat. Try to capture the sounds, smells, and emotions that she experienced.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.3- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences

Annemarie's journey to adulthood isn't gradual, but abrupt. As a class, discuss scenes in the novel that symbolize her transformation into adulthood. Then have students write a short paper from Annemarie's point of view titled "How I Grew Up." Make specific references to the novel. Encourage peer editing for clarity, spelling, and grammar.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.3 – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 4-6.5 – With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.

Ask students to take information garnered from the novel and write a brief description of the way the Danes lived under Nazi occupation.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading: Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 4-6.1 – Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text; Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.2 – Write informative/explanatory text to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

Uncle Henrik works in secret to get Jewish families to Sweden. It's possible that his heroism is celebrated after the war. Write a feature article about Uncle Henrik that might appear in the Copenhagen newspaper. Include an interview with him, Mrs. Johansen, and Annemarie. Remember to include who, what, when, and how.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.3 - Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

The Rosens make it safely to Sweden in the novel,

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but readers don't know what happened to them from that point. Have students read some personal stories of Jewish children who survived the Holocaust on the following website: www.museumoftolerance.com/site/c.tmL6KfNVLtH/b.5759983/k.6B50/Children_of_the_Holocaust/apps/nl/newsletter2.asp.

Then have them imagine Ellen Rosen's life after the war, and write a profile of her for the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.3 - Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

Divide the class into small groups and assign them a chapter or a section of the novel to write and perform as a play. Each member of the group should have a role in the play—character, narrator, bystander, etc.

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 4-6.3 - Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 4-6.4 – Report on a topic or text, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

The vocabulary in the novel isn't difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words and define them taking clues from the context. Such words may include *contempt* (p. 3), *obstinate* (p. 4), *impassive* (p. 10), *curfew* (p. 22), *disdainfully* (p. 29), *belligerently* (p. 31), *submerged* (p. 32), *dismay* (p. 34), *imperious* (p. 39), *intoned* (p. 39), *distorted* (p. 55), *dismay* (p. 71), *staccato* (p. 83), *accented* (p. 83), *condescending* (p. 84), *encased* (p. 89), *implored* (p. 116), *caustic* (p. 118), *deprivation* (p. 133), and *sabotage* (p. 136).

Correlates to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Language: Vocabulary Acquisition & Use L. 4-6.4 – Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade level reading and content.

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/permanent/resistance

This fishing boat is much like Uncle Henrik's and is part of the permanent exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

www.historylearningsite.co.uk/danish_resistance.htm

This site offers a brief explanation of the Danish Resistance Movement.

www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/denmark.html

This official site of the Jewish Virtual Library includes a map of Denmark and Sweden, and pictures of the fishing boats that were used to ferry the Danish Jews to Sweden during World War II.

www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10008043

This story about King Christian X relates his role in the Resistance in Denmark.