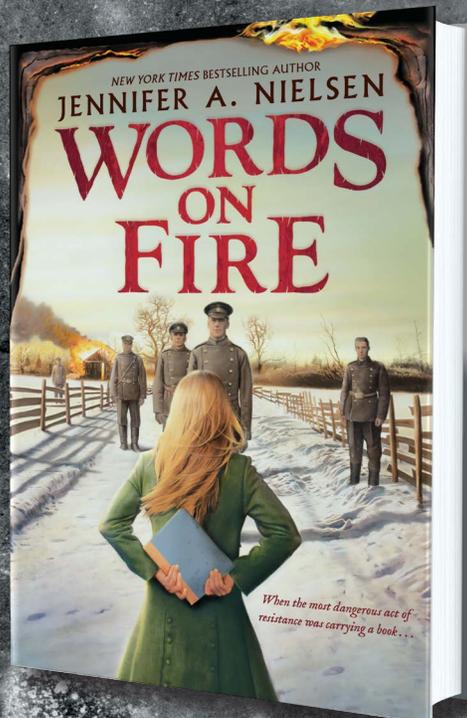
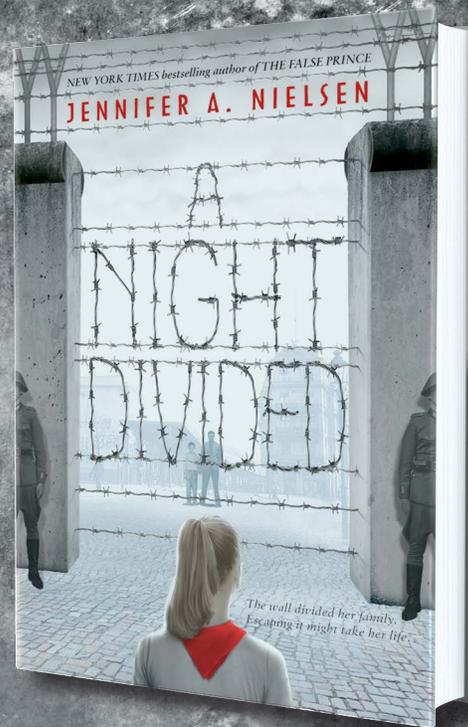
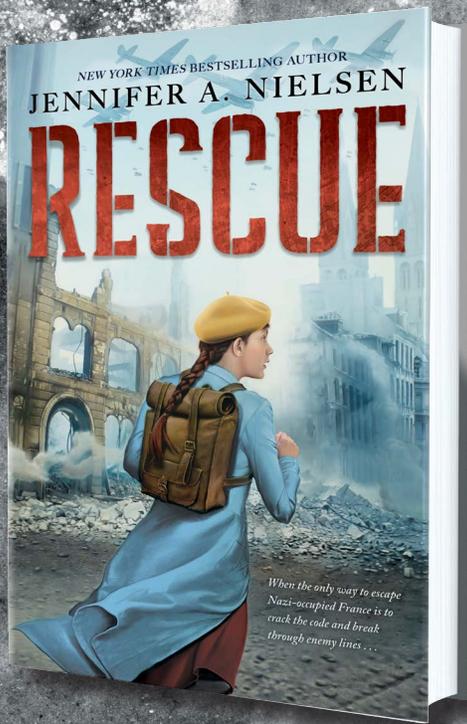
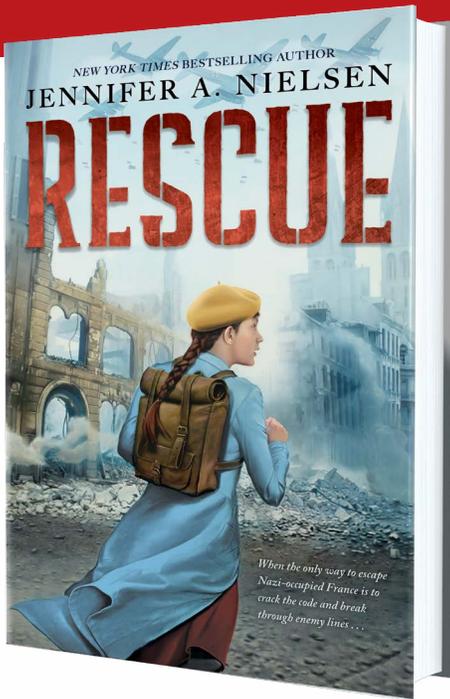


DISCUSSION GUIDE

Action and Adventure in Historical Fiction with JENNIFER A. NIELSEN





Meg Kenyon’s father left their home in France to fight for the Allies in World War II, and Meg fears he’s been imprisoned and will never return. All she has left of him are the codes he placed in a jar for her to decipher, an affectionate game the two of them shared. But Meg discovers an injured British spy who was supposed to escort a family of German refugees to safety in exchange for freeing her father. The spy is too injured to continue, so Meg decides to complete the missions, along with one final code from her father—perhaps the most important, and most difficult, riddle yet. Meg faces danger and uncertainty at every turn, and as she unravels the code, it reveals secrets costly enough to risk the mission and even her own life. Can Meg solve the puzzle, rescue the family, and save her father?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is Meg the person leading the escape? What knowledge and qualities make her a good leader for it? How do the other three treat her?
2. Why does Meg head for Switzerland instead of Spain, and how does she convince the others to follow her? Discuss times she shows courage and ingenuity. How does the trip change her?
3. Where is Meg’s father? Why did he leave home? Discuss why chapter one opens, “I hadn’t seen my father in 657 days” (p. 1) and the final chapter closes, “Days since I’ve seen Papa: 0” (p. 376). What role does Papa’s coded letter to Meg play in the plot?
4. When does Meg first meet Lieutenant Becker? When else does he appear in the story? Why is he suspicious of her? Explain why he tries so hard to make sure Meg and the others don’t escape.
5. Who is Captain Stewart? How does Meg meet him and how can she tell he’s not a pilot? When do the items from his backpack help Meg? When does his spy manual prove useful?
6. Describe Jakob’s personality and background. What happened to his parents? Discuss his role in some of the dangerous actions such as sabotaging Nazi vehicles, retrieving the necklace, and traveling through the mountains.
7. What does Meg think of Albert when she first meets him? Talk about Albert’s background and the strengths and weaknesses he brings to their attempt to flee. How does Meg’s opinion of him change by the end of the story, and why?
8. What is the story that Liesel gives about her background? When is she useful on their journey? What clues lead Meg to distrust her? Talk about Liesel’s motivations and how she ends up saving the others.
9. Initially, Meg views Germans as despicable. She’s surprised to learn that Jakob used to sabotage Nazi food supplies. Discuss Jakob’s comment that, “We are not all the same” and Albert’s that, “All we ask is that you look at us for who we are now trying to be” (p. 143). How does Meg react?
10. Why is Meg uncertain who to trust? Explain why she thinks, “During a war, friendships were far too dangerous,” and then adds, “Possibly Albert’s was the most dangerous friendship of all” (p.185).

RESCUE



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS, CONT'D.

11. Captain Stewart says Meg is the perfect person to help with the escape because “the Germans will not suspect a child, especially about something so important” (p. 92). Does that turn out to be true? What other young characters show courage?
12. During the eclipse, Albert says, “Remember this always . . . There is nothing so dark that light cannot find its way back . . . There is nothing so lost that time cannot return it to us again” (p. 171). Relate his comments to the novel and its ending.
13. Choose an exciting scene, such as skiing through the mountains, and describe it in detail. Discuss how the author builds tension, conveys excitement, and creates vivid images.
14. In trying to escape, Meg and her companions do a lot of problem solving. Find a time when they consider different ideas about what to do and even argue about it. Whose idea prevails? How do they solve the problem? What skills or equipment do they need?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Many chapters open with rules for spies like “Never abandon a team member” and “Trust your instincts.” Use one of the rules as an inspiration to write your own short story about a spy, in prose or in a graphic novel format.

Working in pairs, explore the codes in the “Secret Codes” section. Try to solve the examples and then check the answers on page 380. Use the codes to create simple messages that relate to the novel. Exchange your coded messages with another pair of students to solve.

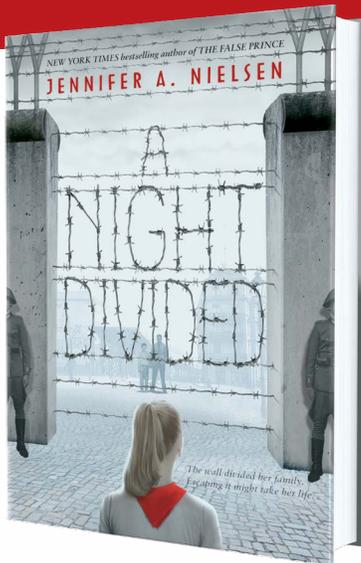
Write an essay relating these comments of Jakob’s to the novel: “I was taught that everyone has three choices in life. To be part of the good, part of the evil, or to try standing in the middle. But I don’t think that’s true anymore. There is no middle. Those who refuse to choose one side or the other only get in the way of those who are doing good, and in that way, end up helping those who wish to do evil” (pp. 110-111).

Rescue incorporates intriguing information about World War II.

Explore the war further by reading a nonfiction book like the ones below, which are full of fascinating facts and true stories. Compare the experience of learning about the war from fiction and nonfiction.

- **Bartoletti, Susan Campbell.** *Hitler Youth: Growing up in Hitler’s Shadow.*
- **Bascomb, Neal.** *The Nazi Hunters: How a Team of Spies and Survivors Captured the World’s Most Notorious Nazi.*
- **Hopkinson, Deborah.** *Courage & Defiance: Stories of Spies, Saboteurs, and Survivors in World War II Denmark.*
- **Hopkinson, Deborah.** *We Must Not Forget: Holocaust Stories of Survival and Resistance.*
- **Prins, Marcel.** *Hidden Like Anne Frank: Fourteen True Stories of Survival.*

A NIGHT DIVIDED



With the rise of the Berlin Wall, twelve-year-old Gerta finds her family suddenly divided. She, her mother, and her brother Fritz live on the eastern side, controlled by the Soviets. Her father and middle brother, who had gone west in search of work, cannot return home. Gerta knows it is dangerous to watch the wall, to think forbidden thoughts of freedom, yet she can't help herself. One day, Gerta spots her father on a viewing platform on the western side, pantomiming a peculiar dance. Soon after, she receives a mysterious drawing and realizes that her father wants her to tunnel beneath the wall, out of East Berlin. However, if they are caught, the consequences will be deadly. Will Gerta and her family find their way to freedom?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

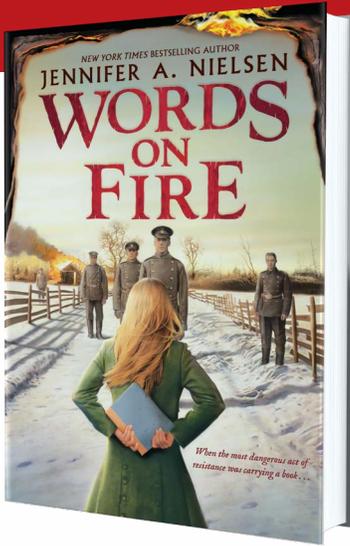
1. Gerta describes herself in the fourth chapter as “bold and outspoken” (p. 18). Identify incidents in the novel where this is shown to be true. How do these traits help her? When do they cause problems?
2. Near the end of the story, Gerta thinks, “I was proud of the person I had become over the last month, and all that I had withstood” (p. 279). How has she changed and what has she withstood? Point to some of the challenges she faced, how she reacted, and how they changed her.
3. Describe the relationship between Gerta and Fritz at the beginning and how they turn into an effective team. Identify some of the logistical problems they face digging the tunnel, such as disposing of the dirt. How do they solve various problems? How does Mama contribute once she joins their effort?
4. Where are Papa and Dominic, and why did they leave? Why didn't the whole family leave earlier, when there were signs that East Berlin was getting more dangerous? Contrast Gerta's parents and their points of view. Why does Mama change her attitude about the tunnel?
5. Gerta calls Anna “timid and shy” early on (p. 18). How does Anna prove to be different than Gerta believed? Discuss the rifts in their friendship and what caused them. What secrets do each of them keep from each other? What happens to each of them at the end?
6. In school, Anna points out that the west has faults, including poverty, and that in East Germany, “Nobody has everything here, but at least everybody has something. Why can't that be enough for you?” (p. 125). What is Gerta's reaction? Make a T-chart with the two views and write down evidence from the book that supports each perspective.
7. Fear is a constant presence in the story. Why is everyone afraid of the Stasi? How do neighbors betray each other? Describe Victor and his role in the story. Although Gerta is afraid of Officer Müller, explain how his choices surprise her.
8. Discuss Fritz's answer when Müller accuses him and Gerta of being traitors and cowards: “We don't belong to Moscow or to the west. We belong to ourselves and I have never betrayed that. This tunnel has taken every ounce of courage we have. We're not cowards” (p. 195). What does it tell you about Fritz and his beliefs?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

A dominant theme throughout the novel is division. List three examples of how something in the story is divided, either physically or metaphorically. What are other divisions that you've learned or read about, possibly in history or in another book? How are those divisions similar to those in this book? How are they different?

Each chapter begins with a quotation or saying. Choose a quote to research, determining where it was originally said and learning more about the speaker/writer. Then write an essay to explain how the quotation deepens your understanding of the chapter and the book as a whole.

WORDS ON FIRE



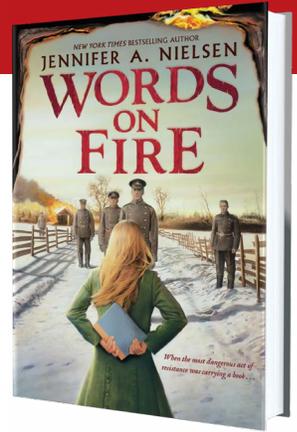
Danger is never far from Audra's family farm in Lithuania. She always avoids the occupying Russian Cossack soldiers, who insist that everyone must become Russian—they have banned Lithuanian books, religion, culture, and even the language. But Audra knows her parents are involved in something secret and perilous. In June 1893, when Cossacks arrive abruptly at their door, Audra's parents insist that she flee, taking with her an important package and instructions for where to deliver it. But escape means abandoning her parents to a terrible fate. As Audra embarks on a journey to deliver the mysterious package, she faces unimaginable risks, and soon she becomes caught up in a growing resistance movement. Can joining the underground network of book smugglers give Audra a chance to rescue her parents?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning, Audra explains that her name means storm (p. 1) but says of herself, "I was the girl who ducked into the shadows when we had visitors, the girl who watched life from afar but rarely participated" (p. 2). How does she change by the end? Give examples of challenges she faces and how she responds. When does she live up to the meaning of her name?
2. Why have Audra's parents protected her so much? What have they been doing that she doesn't know about? Describe her father's work as a magician and how it helped with his secret activities. What does Audra believe happens to her parents? When does she learn for certain?
3. What does Audra think of Lukas when they first meet? What does she eventually learn about his background and his relationship to Officer Rusakov? Why did Lukas leave home? What's his role in book smuggling, and what is his motivation for doing it?
4. Why are the Russians trying to erase the Lithuanian language and culture? What methods do they use? Find and discuss a passage illustrating why it's important for the Lithuanians to preserve their language and culture.
5. When Audra returns to Milda's house after the fire, she visits the book room and thinks, "When I had first come into this room, I had been a girl with no knowledge of books, other than understanding that they existed. And now, books had become my life" (p. 208). Describe her progress from not caring about books to risking her life for them.
6. Ben, Milda, and Lukas believe that Audra could become a highly successful book smuggler. Lukas says to her, "You're good at this because you think differently than the rest of us . . . I'm not here to teach you, Audra. You need to teach me" (p. 234). What does he mean? When are her strategies successful?
7. Lukas tells stories about a girl named Rue, a bear, and a snake. Why does Audra identify with Rue? How does the name connect to her background? When do rue flowers appear in the novel? What does Audra come to believe the snake and bear stand for?
8. Why do the Cossacks attack the church in Kražiai? What is the outcome of the attack? What do Audra and Lukas do to help the Lithuanians? How do Audra and Lukas get away? What is Ben's role and what happens to him? Explain what Audra learns about Ben's relationship to her and how it explains some of his earlier actions.

WORDS ON FIRE

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



Learn more about Lithuania, its history, current political situation, and traditions (music, dance, food, etc). Then choose a specific aspect to research further. Prepare a poster with sections about the things you learned to share with your classmates.

Audra says, “If we surrendered our books to [the Russians], we’d surrender our minds, leaving us hollowed-out puppets, ready to be controlled” (pp. 148-149). Write an essay on the power of books in this novel and elsewhere. How can books be used for good? How can they be used as weapons of control?



RESISTANCE



Chaya Lindner is a teenager living in Nazi-occupied Poland. Simply being Jewish places her in danger of being killed or sent to the camps. After her sister and brother disappear, Chaya is determined to make a difference. Using forged papers and her fair features, Chaya becomes a courier, smuggling food, papers, and even people out of the Jewish ghettos of Poland. She connects with a resistance cell running raids on Nazi supplies, but after one mission goes terribly wrong, her network shatters. She is alone and unsure until Esther, a member of the cell, delivers a message that chills Chaya to her core and sends her on a journey toward an even larger uprising in the works—in the Warsaw Ghetto. Though the Jewish resistance never had much of a chance against the Nazis, they were determined to save as many lives as possible, and to live—or die—with honor.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

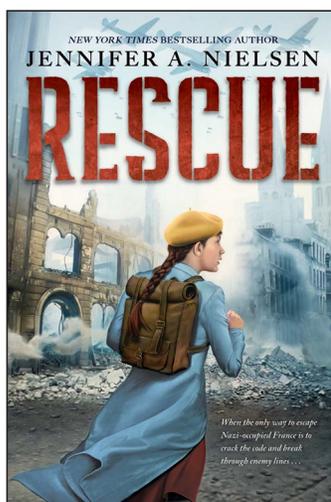
1. Describe Chaya, her background, and her personality. What is Akiva? What does she do as part of Akiva, and why? What strengths does Chaya bring to the work? What does she learn while helping? How does she change during the novel?
2. During the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, Esther asks Chaya if she regrets coming, and Chaya replies, “No regrets” (p. 337). Talk about why she feels that way, even though there’s a good chance she will die or be injured in the coming days. Why is it so important to her to fight the Nazis?
3. Discuss Chaya’s parents and her encounters with them. What happened to her sister? How have her parents reacted? What do they think happened to Yitzchak? When does Chaya encounter Yitzchak again, and where had he been? How do the two work together after they reunite?
4. What is Chaya’s initial reaction to Esther, and why? What do you learn throughout the story about Esther’s background? Why do the two girls go to Lodz, and what happens there? Describe how their relationship changes, and why Chaya ultimately believes Esther has “uncommon courage” (p. 372).
5. After Chaya and Esther leave Lodz, they meet Wit, who offers to shelter them. What is Chaya’s response, and why? Discuss her statement, “For the first time in weeks, I felt hope for the future” (p. 178). Why does Chaya later turn down an offer to stay with the partisans?
6. Besides Wit, what other non-Jews offer help to Chaya, and how? What people that Chaya meets purposely endanger her besides soldiers? Overall, how did everyday non-Jewish Poles help Jews, and how did they hurt them? How did other countries react to the Nazi treatment of Jews?
7. Explain why Akiva chooses to attack Cyganeria Café. What’s their plan and what is Chaya’s role? How well is the plan carried out? What are the results? What happens afterward to the Akiva members, including Chaya and Esther?
8. Discuss this statement Dolek makes about Akiva and the uprising: “We will not win, we will not get glory, not in this life, anyway. We are fighting for our three lines of history just so that it will not be said that our youth went like sheep to the slaughter” (p. 59).

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Choose a topic mentioned in the novel to research, and then present your findings in a presentation. Possible topics include the history of anti-Semitism; death camps; Jewish underground and resistance movements; Polish Underground; Polish history; other war resistance movements; or similar subjects.

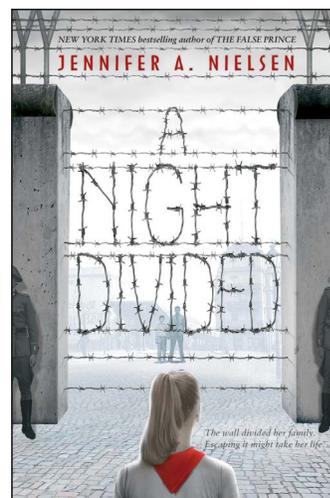
Research real-life young people who were in various resistance movements during WWII in books like Deborah Hopkinson’s *We Must Not Forget: Holocaust Stories of Survival and Resistance* and *Courage & Defiance: Spies, Saboteurs, and Survivors in WWII Denmark*. What things that happened in *Resistance* were likely to have happened in real life? What are ways in which the experiences of people in the resistance across different countries or groups were similar? And how were they different?

HISTORICAL FICTION NOVELS FROM JENNIFER A. NIELSEN



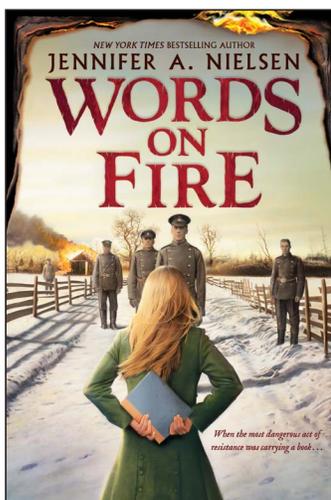
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About the Author

Jennifer A. Nielsen is the acclaimed author of the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling Ascendance Series: *The False Prince*, *The Runaway King*, *The Shadow Throne*, *The Captive Kingdom*, and *The Shattered Castle*, coming in Fall 2021. She also wrote the *New York Times* bestselling Mark of the Thief trilogy: *Mark of the Thief*, *Rise of the Wolf*, and *Wrath of the Storm*; the stand-alone fantasy *The Scourge*; the historical thrillers *A Night Divided*, *Resistance*, *Words on Fire*, and *Rescue*; and The Traitor's Game series: *The Traitor's Game*, *The Deceiver's Heart*, and *The Warrior's Curse*. Jennifer lives in northern Utah with her husband, their children, and a perpetually muddy dog.

About the Writer of This Guide

Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years, gives professional development workshops on new books for children and teens. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award Committees.