

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Number the Stars

by
Lois Lowry

Book Information

Lois Lowry, Number the Stars
Quiz Number: 379
Houghton Mifflin, 1989
ISBN 0-395-51060-0; LCCN
137 Pages
Book Level: 4.5
Interest Level: MG

In 1943, during the German occupation of Denmark, ten-year-old Annemarie learns how to be courageous when she helps shelter her Jewish friend from the Nazis.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Jane Addams Book Award/Honor Books; Misc./Other; Newbery Medal; State Award; Sydney Taylor Award/Honor

Topics: Adventure, Escape; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Power Lessons AR, Grade 4; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Recommended Reading, Jewish Stars; Wars, World War II

Main Characters

Annemarie Johansen the principal character in the story; a ten-year-old girl who shows great courage to save her friends, the Rosens, from the German soldiers

Ellen Rosen Annemarie's best friend and neighbor; a Jewish girl who needs to escape from the Nazis

Kirsti Annemarie's little sister

Mr. and Mrs. Rosen Ellen's parents, who are neighbors and friends of the Johansens

Mr. Johansen (Papa) Annemarie's father

Mrs. Johansen (Mama) Annemarie's mother, who helps Uncle Henrik carry out the escape plan for the Rosens at the seaside farm

Peter a family friend of the Johansens and a Danish Resistance leader who is later executed

Uncle Henrik Mama's brother and a fisherman, who secretly carries Jewish people across the sea to Sweden

Vocabulary

Nazi a member of a political party under the leadership of Adolph Hitler

Star of David a six-pointed star used as the symbol of Judaism and Israel

swastika a cross-like symbol adopted as the national symbol of Nazi Germany

Synopsis

German soldiers have occupied Denmark, and Danish citizens are suffering from harsh restrictions imposed upon them. Food, fuel, clothing and shoes are scarce. Soldiers standing on the street corners with rifles are a constant reminder of the Nazi threat. In the midst of the disruption, the Johansens and Rosens struggle to live normally.

When a family friend of the Johansens, and a Nazi Resistance leader, Peter, comes to tell the Johansens of the Nazi plan to arrest and relocate the Danish Jews, the family becomes concerned. Annemarie Johansen, a ten-year-old girl, realizes very quickly that her Jewish friend and neighbor, Ellen Rosen, and her parents, are in danger. The Johansens are quick to respond to their neighbors' plight. With the help of Peter and Uncle Henrik, a plan is set into action.

The Johansens take the responsibility of caring for Ellen while her parents go into hiding. When German soldiers discover that the Rosens have disappeared, they search the Johansen apartment. Mr. Johansen tells the Germans that Ellen is his daughter, Lise. This is particularly poignant because Lise was his daughter who had been killed by Nazi soldiers as she ran from a Resistance meeting.

In the next stage of the plan, Mrs. Johansen and her daughters, Kirsti and Annemarie, accompany Ellen to Uncle Henrik's seacoast farm. Uncle Henrik is a fisherman. He, along with other fishermen in Denmark, secretly carries Jewish people across a

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saltwater strait to neutral Sweden in his fishing boat. Peter plays an important role in an intricate plan to help the Rosens and other Jews to escape.

Annemarie is mystified with the code language Henrik and her mother use during the period leading up to the Rosens' departure. She is especially confused when a wake is arranged for her Great-aunt Birte, the aunt who never was. Gradually, she understands that her mother, Henrik and Peter are taking extra precautions to prevent the Germans from destroying their plan--a plan that requires great courage to carry out.

Annemarie's own courage is tested when she needs to carry an important package to Uncle Henrik's boat. German soldiers and their dogs stop her in the woods and create a tense scene. Annemarie is brave and acts her way out of the situation. She delivers the package to Henrik. Later she learns that her brave act saved her friends and the other Jews aboard the boat.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Annemarie becomes angry with her mother because she lied about Great-aunt Birte. What makes her more understanding of her mother's decision to be untruthful?

She realizes her mother is trying to both protect her and make her brave. Later in the story, Annemarie herself tells the German soldiers a lie to protect the Rosens and the other Jewish people.

Literary Analysis

Put yourself in Ellen's place. How would you have felt boarding and hiding in Uncle Henrik's boat?

Ellen most likely felt grateful for the opportunity to escape. However, she must have felt great fear at the thought of being caught. Also, she might have been concerned about what her life would be like in Sweden. She probably wondered whether she would ever see Annemarie again.

Inferential Comprehension

Compare Annemarie's and Ellen's lives with your own. How are your lives similar, and how are they different?

Ellen and Annemarie both liked having fun. Annemarie loved to run. Ellen loved to act in dramas. They enjoyed many things kids today enjoy. However, they lived in a dangerous time. They had to watch their every step. They feared for their lives. Ellen suffered for being Jewish.

Constructing Meaning

Do you know of anyone who has risked his or her life to protect someone? How was that person like Annemarie, Peter, Uncle Henrik or Mrs. Johansen?

Answers will vary. "Courage" is a key word, as is "brave." Uncle Henrik says "brave" means "not thinking about danger."

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting At the beginning of the story, Annemarie's and Ellen's families live in Copenhagen, Denmark. Later, to secure Ellen's safety, Mama, Annemarie, Kirsti and Ellen travel to Uncle Henrik's farm in Gilleleje. Near the end of the book, Ellen and her parents travel in a fishing boat to Sweden. To help the students grasp the setting of the story, provide maps of Europe for them to identify the places noted, as well as other countries and cities key to World War II.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The author of *Number the Stars* makes references to

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Jewish traditions and customs. The Jewish New Year, for instance, is referred to. To expand the students' knowledge of the Jewish culture, have them research Jewish foods, symbols, religious ceremonies, and holidays unique to the Jewish people.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The Jewish Holocaust was a horrifying period. Many documentaries have been produced to inform us about the Nazi atrocities inflicted upon the Jews. Show an age-appropriate documentary. Also, provide a worksheet for students to fill in as they watch. Afterwards, go over the answers, and generate a discussion.

Understanding the Author's Craft *Number the Stars* is written from Annemarie's point of view. Although readers are aware of Ellen's traumatic situation, they strongly empathize with Annemarie. To help students identify with Ellen, have them write several diary entries from her perspective. Stress the key points of the book: Ellen's first night at the Johansens', the train ride to the country, the wake, the time spent hiding in the fishing boat, etc.

Comparing and Contrasting Ellen Rosen and her family need to flee Denmark to prevent their arrest by the Nazis. The Nazis are an evil force for the Rosens and millions of other European Jews. Show the movie *The Diary of Anne Frank* or read the book. Then ask the students to compare and contrast Ellen's life with Anne's.