

Among the Hidden Study Guide

Among the Hidden by Margaret Haddix

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Overview

Among the Hidden is a thought-provoking story set in of the not too distant future that explores the choices and challenges faced by an early adolescent boy as he struggles to find his place in a world in which his existence is illegal. Luke, a third child, lives in a future where each family is allowed to have only two children. Because his parents broke the population laws when they let him live, Luke must stay hidden in his house, has never been to school, must eat in the attic stairwell to avoid being seen, and must spend his days with nothing to do except re-read a few old books and observe his neighborhood through the attic air vents.

When he discovers another third child, Jennifer Rose Talbot, also hiding in his neighborhood, he dares to venture outside his attic-hiding place and thus discovers a network of hidden children who communicate via Internet chat rooms. As Luke's friendship with Jen grows, he learns that she is organizing the hidden children to protest against the government's oppressive laws, and he must decide whether to defy the government and seek freedom. In this futuristic dystopia, Haddix explores the consequences of population control and other policies of a totalitarian government on individuals living in that society, and she explores how far an individual will go to have a life that is worth living.

About the Author

Margaret Peterson Haddix claims that from childhood she always thought that becoming a storyteller would be the "grandest thing in the world." The daughter of a farmer and a nurse, she was born April 9, 1964 in Washington Courthouse, Ohio. Haddix grew up on a steady diet of stories, both her father's family stories and the ones she read in books. As early as high school, Haddix knew that she did not want to just tell stories; she wanted to write them.

After attending Miami University and majoring in journalism, creative writing, and history, she got jobs at newspapers as a copy editor and a reporter which enabled her to write stories about real events. All the time, though, she continued to pursue her creative writing, working on short stories. Soon, she found that working as a fulltime journalist did not allow her enough time to write. So in 1991, when her husband started a new job in Danville, Illinois, she decided to work part-time and to devote more time to her creative writing.

Since 1995, when she published *Running Out of Time*, Haddix has written an impressive number of novels for young adults that deal with a range of provocative topics and represent a variety of genres. Although her novels have little in common in terms of plot or setting, they are all built on ideas and scenarios she encountered while working as a newspaper reporter, and so they are grounded in real world events and issues. Her realistic fiction explores important issues, such as child abuse, family relationships, and religious cults (*Don't You Dare Read This*, *Mrs. Dumphrey*, *Takeoff and Landings*, and *Leaving Fishers*). Her futuristic dystopia and science fiction ask questions about the implications of environmental policies and scientific experiments (*Among the Hidden*, *Among the Betrayed*, *Among the Barons*, *Turnabout*). She also mixes realistic stories with fantasy to explore what happens if a time slip story becomes all too real or if Cinderella were just a plain, ordinary girl who married a prince (*Running Out of Time*, *Just Ella*).

The quantity and variety of recognition and awards that Haddix's novels have received are evidence of the high quality of her work and its popularity. Haddix's novels consistently appear on lists of best books created by the American Library Association, the International Reading Association, and the American Bookseller. In addition, many of her novels have been nominated for reader's choice awards in a number of states, a testament to the appeal her novels have for young readers. Many of her books interest reluctant readers as well as those wanting to explore more complex stories and ideas. To achieve success like hers as storytellers, Haddix encourages young writers to read, write, listen, pay attention to the world around them, and think a lot.

Plot Summary

Among the Hidden is a gripping adventure about a boy whose very existence is declared illegal under the Government's cruel Population Law. Twelve-year-old Luke Garner has been hiding his entire life. As the third child born to the Garner family, Luke's existence is considered a crime under the law that restricts women from having more than two children in their lifetime. Luke does not know why he is illegal. In fact, it has taken him most of his life to figure out that he is different from his older brothers, Matthew and Mark. Growing up, Luke always assumed that all little children had to hide from people. After all, he knew of no other way to live. Luke has been so sheltered by his family that it has taken him many years to figure out that the way he lives is not normal. As he grows older, he realizes that he will never be allowed to go to school like his brothers, or walk down the street to the mailbox, or even play in the front yard.

When the woods next door to his house are cut down to make way for the construction of new houses, Luke's parents tell him he must never go outdoors again. The Garners are terrified that the construction workers or the people who move into the new houses will see Luke in the yard and report him to the dreaded Population Police. Luke is not entirely sure what would happen to him if the Population Police ever find him. However, his parents' fear is so great that Luke knows being found by the Population Police would be the worst possible thing that could happen. When new neighbors move into the recently built houses, Luke's father forbids him from even looking out the window. Eventually, his dad's fear causes him to restrict Luke to his attic bedroom. Luke is no longer allowed to eat at the kitchen table with his family because his parents are afraid someone could see his shadow through the window shade.

Despite his fear of being discovered, Luke cannot stand being imprisoned in his room. Six months go by in which he has nothing to do but watch the new neighbors through tiny vent opening in the ceiling of the attic. These vents provide Luke a window on a wider world than he has ever seen before. He sees more people through these vents than he has ever seen in his entire life. Luke gets to know the rhythms of the neighborhood and figures out that for several hours each weekday, all the houses near to his are completely empty. One day when everyone has left the new neighborhood for the day, Luke ventures into the kitchen against his dad's orders. Dad catches Luke and tells him he must never leave his room again. Luke grows despondent as he imagines the sad, isolated future ahead of him. He will never be able to marry or have a home of his own like his brothers. Luke cannot even walk down the street legally.

One day in the midst of this despair, comes new hope. From his attic vents, Luke sees the face of another hidden child in the house next door and he's thrilled. It had never occurred to him there might be other children like himself. Desperate to find someone who can understand what his life is like, Luke sneaks out of his house one day and breaks into the neighboring home. Inside, he meets a third child, Jen Talbot. The Talbots, like all the rich families in the new homes, belong to an upper social class called the Barons. Barons have a great deal of money and Luke quickly learns that money can buy privilege. Jen's life, although restricted, is not as restricted as Luke's.



Her parents have enough connections and money to bribe people whenever necessary to protect their daughter. Jen has a fake shopping pass that allows her to shop in malls almost like a regular child. Mr. Talbot has custom built a hidden compartment into the back seat of the family car for Jen to ride in during outings. The Talbots have an expensive mirror system rigged to all the windows that Jen uses to look out without being seen. Jen even has Internet access and chats online with other third children. When she meets Luke, she is shocked that he has never been off his own property before and she promises him that she is his ticket out of hiding.

Luke learns that Jen has a plan to force the Government to recognize the rights of shadow children. Using her parents' connections and her Internet access, she is organizing a huge rally. She intends to march up to the President's front door with all 800 shadow children she has recruited to her cause. Jen is adamant in her belief that shadow children deserve the same rights as anyone else. Her views are very different from what Luke has been raised to believe. In his heart, he has a hard time accepting Jen's assertion that he has a right to live openly. However, Jen gives him some literature to read and as Luke studies the history of the Population Law, he finally learns why it became a law in the first place. Apparently, the country had suffered from starvation, famine and drought. This, Luke learns, is why the Government controls his parents' farm so strictly. They regulate crop prices and even tell farmers where they can live and plant. According to the Government-sponsored books Luke reads, all these measures, including the Population Law, had been implemented to prevent people from starving.

Luke is not sure whether Jen is right or whether the Government was right to ban Luke's existence. Luke feels guilty that by being alive he is causing other people to starve. But Jen's dad tells her that there really is enough food for everyone if only the Government would distribute it fairly. The Government has become greedy and wants to hoard most of the food and money supply by keeping it in the hands of the Barons. Meanwhile, farmers like the Garners are kept in poverty by the Government so that they will continually work hard to survive. The harder the poor people work, the more food there is for the upper class of Barons. The Government and the rich Barons live off the hard work of the lower classes and this, claims Jen, is why the Population Law has not been repealed. Luke begins to believe she is right when he sees the Government banning practices which could alleviate the food shortage. The Garners are banned from raising livestock or growing food indoors to increase their total food production. Luke realizes that there are better answers to the hunger problem than denying him his human rights.

Yet, Luke lacks the courage to attend Jen's rally. Walking right up to the President's house and announcing his existence sounds to Luke like his worst nightmare. He is afraid for Jen that the other 800 kids won't show up either. Her only chance of success and survival is if she can bring a large enough group of shadow children out of the shadows. Tragically, only 40 other children accompany Jen to the rally and every one of these brave young souls is shot dead in the street by the Population Police. Luke, trapped at home, has no way of knowing what has happened to Jen. He waits anxiously for days hoping to hear news of the rally, but the radio news never mentions it. Finally, he sneaks over to Jen's house hoping to find out what happened to his friend. She is not

there, but Luke logs onto her secret chat room and types a message that he is looking for Jen. None of the other shadow children respond. The chat room is empty.

Jen's dad catches Luke inside his house. Luke learns to his horror that Jen is dead and that Mr. Talbot is a member of the Population Police. Panicked, Luke doesn't know if Mr. Talbot can be trusted. Before Luke can decide, more members of the Population Police arrive to search the house. The police had been monitoring the secret chat room ever since the rally and have traced Luke's message back to the Talbot's computer. To Luke's relief, Mr. Talbot saves his life by bribing the Population Police. Jen's dad tells Luke that he has been working behind enemy lines, trying to use his position with the Population Police to help other third children secretly. Now Mr. Talbot is in danger, too. He offers to help Luke while he still can. In honor of his daughter's memory, Mr. Talbot uses his connections to buy Luke a fake I.D. As the chapter comes to a close, Luke embarks on a new life as a Baron child named Lee Grant. An underground resistance group agrees to pay for a year-round boarding school where Luke will live as Lee Grant. Luke vows to use the education and privileges he receives as a Baron to help other shadow children come out of the shadows. He will carry on in Jen's memory.

Chapters 1 - 5

Chapters 1 - 5 Summary

Chapter 1: Luke Garner's mother calls him into the house. For the first time in his life, he does not obey right away. Luke stands for another moment in the woods, listening to the sound of falling trees in the distance. He breathes in the fresh air, enjoying his last moments of freedom. Luke is afraid he may never be allowed outside again.

That night at dinner, Luke asks his parents why they had to sell the woods next to their house. His parents explain and not for the first time, that the Government has forced them to sell. Twelve-year-old Luke thinks bitterly of all the other orders the Government has given his family, like where to plant their corn and how much to charge for their crops. Mother explains that the woods are being torn down to put in houses for Government workers and other city folk. Luke wishes he could go to the window and look out at the woods one last time, but he is not allowed to look out windows. Dad gets angry with Luke for asking if he'll be able to look out the windows once people move into the new houses that will be built where the woods now stand. Dad tells him he must stay away from the windows all the time. Luke wonders what will happen if anyone ever sees him in the window; his parents have never explained, but he knows it will be something really bad.

Luke's older brothers, Matthew and Mark, complain that they will have to do Luke's chores from now on, since Luke won't be allowed outside anymore. Just then, tires sound on the gravel driveway. Luke scrambles upstairs to hide while Mother takes Luke's plate and stashes it in the cupboard. She puts his chair in the corner of the kitchen so it looks just like an extra chair. Within 3 seconds, the family has hidden all evidence of Luke's existence.

Chapter 2: Until Luke turned 6, he had assumed that all little children had to hide from visitors. He thought that one day, when he got to be as old as Matthew and Mark, he too, would be allowed to play in the front yard and even go to school like his brothers. But when Luke turns 6, he can remember his older brother Mark's sixth birthday clearly. Luke realizes that Mark already had friends by that age. He thinks this over and then Luke realizes that maybe his brothers never had to hide at all, even when they were little like him. Luke asks his mother why things are different for him. Why does he have to hide? Mother explains that there is a law against third children like Luke. "They did things to women after they had their second baby, so they wouldn't have any more. And if there was a mistake and a woman got pregnant anyway, she was supposed to get rid of it." (pg. 6)

Mother explains that Luke was an accident, but that she and Dad had wanted him very much. They had refused to get rid of him as the law said they should. The Population Law had been new when Luke was born and Luke's parents figured that eventually the Government would get over its foolishness. So Mother had hidden away during her



pregnancy and hadn't even told her own mother or her sisters about Luke. Mother had hoped to give birth in the hospital as with her other children. She hadn't planned to keep Luke a secret forever. However, during her pregnancy, the Government had started an ad campaign on television, talking about how the Population Police would do anything to enforce the law. Then Dad had heard rumors in town about what happened to other babies born in violation of the law. Mother offers Luke a wobbly smile and says that the hiding has worked out pretty well, hasn't it? A sensitive and thoughtful 6-year-old, Luke feels he has to agree with his mom that the hiding is working okay. After that, Luke had convinced himself he was perfectly happy at home. After all, he could always go outside and play in the backyard and in the woods. But now, the woods are gone.

Chapter 3: Luke lies on the floor, playing with his toy train. Once, it had been his favorite toy, but now all Luke can think of is the outdoors. Outside, the skies are blue and a small breeze ruffles the grass. Luke is no longer even allowed to look out the windows. Dad had yelled at him this morning when he caught Luke peeking at the bulldozed trees in what was once the family's woods. Now, someone knocks at Luke's bedroom door and yells, "Population Police! Open up!" (pg. 13) Luke is so used to his brother Mark's jokes that he doesn't even bother to look up when Mark enters Luke's attic bedroom. Mark sees the look on his brother's face and takes a moment to reassure Luke that the family will always hide him and he'll always be safe. Luke refuses to be cheered up, however, even when Mark offers to play him a game of checkers. Luke says he knows Mother put Mark up to it and tells his brother to leave him alone.

After Mark leaves, Luke notices something for the first time. Light pours in from two ventilation shafts in his otherwise windowless room. Luke climbs up on a tall trunk and peers out first one and then the other, shaft. The first vent is disappointing. It looks out on a corn field. The second vent, however, provides Luke with a view of the former woods. Bulldozers and other machinery work busily in the once-wooded area. The most amazing sight, for Luke, is the sight of so many people. Besides his own family and pictures in books, Luke has only ever seen one other human being. A tramp had surprised the family one day by showing up at the door and begging for food. Luke only had time to hide in a cabinet and had been able to peek out and get a look at the starving man. But now Luke sees dozens of men working in the cleared field. He is stunned at the variety of shapes and sizes which people come in and the movement of so many people makes him dizzy. His mother knocks on the door; Luke slides off the trunk and away from the vent before telling her to enter. She apologizes to him for not letting him look out the windows anymore. Luke tells her it's all right. He does not tell her about the vents for fear that she and Dad will forbid him from using them anymore. Feeling a little guilty, he allows her to comfort him.

Chapter 4: A few days later, Luke comes downstairs for breakfast, pausing at the bottom of the steps, as always, to make sure no visitors are inside the kitchen. Luke sees no one and quietly asks if the shades are closed. Mother opens the door between his attic steps and the kitchen, but she blocks him from entering with her arm. Mother hands him a plate and asks him to sit and eat it on the bottom step. Unable to look at Luke, Dad explains that the construction workers have started to wonder why the family's shades are always drawn. It's safer this way, Dad insists. Luke hears the sound of the



construction workers arriving for the day. From his vent view, Luke has gotten to know their routines. They work from sunup to sundown, as if they were in a big hurry to finish the construction. Luke watches his family eat at the table. Luke's chair is not even in the kitchen anymore. He wants to protest but knows his family is only trying to protect him.

Chapter 5: From that day on, Luke eats every meal on the bottom step. He quickly realizes that Mother speaks too quietly for him to hear from his new seat and Luke's brothers usually make their nasty comments under their breath. Luke finds himself unable to keep up with the family's conversation and after a week or two, he stops even trying. But one day a thick letter arrives from the Government. Dad looks worried, but announces there is no point in ruining a good meal with bad news. He waits until the end of the meal before opening the envelope. Luke strains to hear as Dad reads the letter aloud. The letter contains a lot of big words which not even Dad knows, but Dad realizes the letter is telling them to get rid of their hogs. Apparently, the Government doesn't want their employees, the ones moving into the new houses next door, to have to put up with the smell of the Garner's hogs. Dad throws the letter down angrily. Grain prices are so low the family has been relying on the money they made from the hogs just to get by. Now Mother worries how they can possibly survive without the hog income.

Chapters 1 - 5 Analysis

The book opens on a disquieting note. The author grabs the reader's attention right away by sounding this note of disharmony in an otherwise peaceful scene. Young Luke Garner is playing in the sunshine in a wooded area next to his house. This evokes a peaceful, serene quality which is dispelled when the reader realizes that Luke is enjoying his last breath of fresh air. Luke may never be allowed outside again. This fact, presented matter-of-factly and without explanation, is designed to get the reader asking questions. Why wouldn't Luke be allowed outside? Why does Mother hide his plate and why does he have to hide when a visitor interrupts their dinner? By the end of Chapter 1, the reader's curiosity is piqued.

In Chapter 2, the author explains that Luke has to hide because he is an illegal third child in a country that allows women to have only two children. Chapter 3 develops this theme further and the reader begins to realize how difficult life must be for a hidden child like Luke. Luke has never been allowed to see other people besides his family, with the exception of the tramp who wanders in unannounced one day. Despite these clear explanations of Luke's predicament, the author still keeps the reader guessing. Much remains unexplained, such as where Luke lives or what kind of government might actually outlaw people's right to live. Luke takes his difficult situation for granted at first, because he has never known any other way of living. However, as he starts to get a little older and wiser, Luke begins to ask the questions that are on the reader's mind. Thus, the author draws the reader into Luke's world and the story is told through Luke's eyes.

By Chapter 5, Luke suddenly has greater reason to question his unusual lifestyle. Luke's quality of life suffers several dramatic blows once the construction workers begin to build on the former woods. As if Luke's life weren't already bad enough because of having to hide from everyone but his family, it now becomes much worse. Luke can no longer enjoy even the simple privileges of fresh air and sunshine. He is trapped inside the house and is barred from looking out the window. This situation is obviously intolerable and yet Luke's parents insist there is no other way. Luke takes his first step toward independence by finding another way on his own. He discovers the attic vents and realizes that he can safely look out on the world through these tiny ventilation shafts. Luke's decision to keep the vents a secret from his parents shows that he is beginning to trust his own judgment. Luke knows the vents are safe and is unwilling to give his parents a chance to stop him from looking out on the world. This once-obedient child has begun to question his parents' judgment and make his own decisions. He still loves and respects his parents, but he realizes their fears may be clouding their judgment. Luke aids Mother in her denial by pretending that hiding is a tolerable way to live; however, in his heart, Luke knows that something must change if he is ever to have a real future.

Chapters 6 - 10

Chapters 6 - 10 Summary

Chapter 6: Two weeks later, the tax bill arrives on the same day Dad, Matthew and Mark load up the hogs for slaughter. When Dad hands Mother the tax bill, she is so startled she drops it. The bill is three times the usual amount. Dad explains that the taxes have gone up because the new houses next door have raised the property value of the Garners' home. Luke interjects that this sounds like a good thing. Secretly, from his vantage point at the attic vents, Luke has grown to love the new houses. Watching their construction has become his main form of entertainment. But Dad shakes his head and explains that the rise in property value is good only if a homeowner is planning to sell his or her house, which the Garners are not. "All it means for us is that the Government thinks they can get more money out of us." (pg. 28) Matthew wonders how they can possibly pay the bill, which will require more money than the family received for selling off all the hogs. Mother announces softly that she has just received her work permit. She suggests she might be able to get a job at the factory and maybe an advance on her paycheck. Luke's jaw drops at the thought of his mother leaving him alone all day. However, no one else seems surprised by her news, so he keeps his mouth shut.

Chapter 7: Luke's days quickly fall into a new pattern. He gets up at dawn for a chance to watch his family eat breakfast at the table before they all rush off their separate ways. Mother has to be at the factory by 7 each morning. Matthew and Mark are back in school. Dad works hard to get the machinery in working order before harvest time. Luke is the only one who doesn't have to eat his breakfast in a rush. He lingers over his dry toast. Now that he eats on the bottom step, Luke never asks for butter anymore because someone would have to get up from the table and pretend they forgot something in order to safely pass him the butter dish. After everyone leaves, Luke heads upstairs to watch the houses next door. They are all the size of mansions and though the construction workers work indoors now, there is still plenty for Luke to see. Lots of expensive-looking cars drive by and sometimes stop to look at the houses. Luke eventually figures out that the people in the cars are considering buying houses here, even though it takes him a while. He has so little experience with the world and because he doesn't dare reveal his secret vents, he can't ask anyone in his family.

The new residents, according to Mother and Dad, are Barons. Barons are really rich people. Luke doesn't know how the Barons got to be so rich when everyone else is poor, but he knows his dad can't even say "the word 'Baron' without a curse word or two in front of it." (pg. 31) The families all dress much more elegantly than Luke's family. Luke knows that not even Barons would dare have more than two children, but he always counts the number of kids in their families anyway. He imagines moving in with a family with only one child and living a normal life. Shaking off these guilty thoughts, Luke immerses himself in the books his family owns. He has read them all so often he knows them by heart, even the dull farming tracts his father owns about countryside



grasses and pig diseases. He likes the adventure books the best because they let him forget, if only for a little while each day, that he is an unwanted third child.

Around noon each day, Dad comes home for lunch. Dad never speaks to Luke at lunchtime for fear someone will overhear, but at least he puts on the radio for a little while before turning it off and returning to work. Dad makes himself four sandwiches and slips two to Luke quietly. Luke misses the lunches his mom used to make him before she started working. By 6:30, Mother comes home and says a quick hello to Luke in his room before she heads downstairs to do all the housework. His brothers usually stop in briefly, too, but they can't stay long since they have homework and chores to do in the evenings. Luke misses playing with his brothers outside in the evenings, as he used to be able to do before the woods came down. Now Matthew and Mark play checkers or cards with him, but Luke can tell they'd rather be outside, too. Luke's favorite part of the day is when his mother comes up to tuck him into bed. She tells him stories about the factory and usually stays for almost an hour. One night, she falls asleep in mid-sentence. Luke can tell how exhausted his mother is between her new job and her household duties. Luke sends her off to bed after telling her he's too old to be tucked in anymore. After she leaves, Luke turns his face to the wall sadly.

Chapter 8: One morning about a week later, Luke's family leaves in such a hurry they barely have time to say good-bye to him. Dad calls out that he's going to an auction in Chytlesville and won't be home until supper. Mother furtively hands Luke a bag full of food so he won't get hungry during the day and then Luke is left all alone. Luke peeks into the kitchen after they've gone and is delighted to see they left the window shade down. For the first time in nearly 6 months he can enter the kitchen without being seen. He decides to clean up the kitchen to surprise his mother, but he has no more than put a toe on the linoleum floor when the floor squeaks. Panicked, he rushes back upstairs to his room, calling himself a coward. Luke decides he's not a coward, he's just being cautious. He decides to look out the vents and make sure everyone in the new houses is gone before going into the kitchen.

Luke has been watching the new neighbors and has made up names for all of them. There's the Big Car Family with four cars in their driveway; the Birdbrain Family with a row of birdhouses in their backyard; the Gold Family with golden-colored hair; and the Sports Family, who lives closest to Luke. The two teenaged Sports Family boys have every kind of sports equipment imaginable on their back deck. Luke knows all the new houses are empty by 9 a.m. after the kids leave for school and the grownups leave for work. Even the mothers without jobs always leave during the day and don't return until late afternoon. This morning, Luke watches and counts them off as they leave. When all 28 residents are gone, he knows he's alone and safe. Luke plunges downstairs and begins cleaning. He mixes some bread as he's seen his mother do and puts it in the oven. Then it occurs to Luke he could even put the radio on very softly. By 2 o'clock, Luke is cleaning up in the living room when he hears tires on the gravel driveway.

Luke sprints for the stairs, but his father comes in and catches him. Dad is furious. Suddenly, the radio sounds too loud in Luke's ears as he makes excuses to his dad. Luke explains that he waited for everyone in the neighborhood to leave, but Dad doesn't



believe Luke could be sure about that and Luke doesn't want to explain about the vents. Dad tells Luke that if a Government inspector had come by and smelled bread baking in an empty house, Luke would have been caught. Just then, the buzzer on the oven goes off, indicating the bread is ready. Dad gives Luke a dirty look and pulls the bread out of the oven. He orders Luke upstairs and tells Luke he is no longer allowed in the kitchen ever again. Luke is furious because he knows no one could have seen him today. To prove his point to himself, he climbs up and looks out the vents. All the driveways are empty. Suddenly, Luke sees something unbelievable. A child's face peeks out of a window at the Sports Family's house.

Chapter 9: Luke is so surprised he nearly topples off the trunk and onto the floor. By the time he recovers his balance to look again, the child's face is gone. He asks himself if it could have been one of the Sports Family brothers, home sick from school. But the face had been younger than either of the teenage brothers; Luke is sure of that. He watches the house for hours but sees nothing until around 6, when the two teenage brothers drive up in their jeep. The brothers don't react as if there is an intruder in their house, but Luke is certain no one has left the house since he saw the face. Reluctantly, Luke climbs down from the trunk at 6:30 when his mother knocks on his door. She tells him she's grateful for his attempts to clean the house and make the bread and apologizes that Luke is no longer allowed in the kitchen. Luke thinks his family should just lock him in a trunk and be done with it. He begs his mother to convince his dad to allow him back into the kitchen, but Mother says they can't afford to take chances. Luke complains that there is nothing to do in his room. Mother strokes his hair and says she'd love to have a day in her room with nothing to do. Luke mutters under his breath, knowing his mother couldn't possibly understand. He wonders if the other third child, the one he now thinks might live in the Sports Family's house, might understand the way Luke feels.

Chapter 10: That night at supper, Luke sees that his mother has laid out his two loaves of bread on her good china. The loaves look lopsided and lumpy; he wishes Mother had simply thrown them away. From the bottom of the stairs, Luke complains that since the weather has turned cold, there's no reason they couldn't pull the shades and allow him to sit at the table with the family again. Dad explains that someone might see his shadow through the shade and Mother chimes in that they're only trying to protect him. Luke sits on the bottom stair, resigned to his fate. Luke's brothers notice the lumpy bread on their plates and make fun of it. Mother protests that it was Luke's first try. Luke thinks to himself miserably that it will also be his last. When Mark mocks the bread, Luke tells him he put a special poison inside it that only affects 14-year-olds. After making the joke, Luke feels guilty. Although he would never poison anyone, he can't help but think life might be normal for him if he only had one other brother. The bread tastes terrible, like poison, Mark says. Dad laughs it off, telling Luke that men get married so their wives will do the baking. But Luke feels a cold, hard lump in his stomach because he knows he'll never get married or even leave the house. Miserably, he excuses himself from the table and retreats upstairs to look out his vents. Luke notices that although some families in the new houses have their shades drawn, he can still see their shadows through them as the families eat their dinners. Only the Sports Family's house has every window totally blocked, covered by heavy blinds.



Chapters 6 - 10 Analysis

Luke's family displays a startling lack of empathy for his position. Luke, on the other hand, is a highly empathetic child. In Chapter 7, Luke senses his mother's fatigue and is able to empathize with how tired her busy schedule must make her feel. Despite his need for company, which is no longer met now that he is confined to his attic bedroom, Luke nonetheless asks his mom to stop coming upstairs to tuck him in. He cares about her needs and is willing to sacrifice his own so that she can get an extra hour of sleep. Yet in Chapter 9 when Luke asks his mother to put *herself* in *his* shoes, Mother is completely unable to empathize with Luke. She can see life only through her own tired eyes and imagines it must be lovely to sit around the house all day like Luke with nothing to do. One can understand her point of view, but ironically, she cannot see Luke's. She is too unimaginative to see how intolerable life must be for Luke now that he has become a virtual prisoner in his own home.

Dad's attitude is verging on the abusive. Dad is encouraged by society and by Government propaganda to see third children as unwanted extra mouths to feed. No matter how much he may love Luke, this message has begun to take a toll on his family relationships. Once the woods are gone and the risk of discovery threatens the entire Garner family, Dad begins to think life might be easier without Luke. Because the story is told from Luke's perspective, the reader never hears Dad come right out and say this. However, based on the frightened, jumpy way Mother reacts to Dad's orders, it seems that she has begun to fear him. Mother knows that Luke's existence puts the family in jeopardy and she may be afraid that Dad will decide they can no longer keep Luke. Dad is clearly not willing to risk much more than he already is for Luke's well-being.

Dad won't even talk to Luke when he comes home for lunch on the incredibly remote chance that someone might overhear. Dad not only refuses to speak to Luke, he often refuses to look at him. The further Dad distances his emotions from Luke, the easier it could become for him to treat Luke like an object to abuse or neglect him. This is what Mother fears and so she tries to make sure that Luke causes Dad not a minute's worry. She expects utter, complete obedience from Luke and gives Luke very little credit for how well-behaved he has always been. Mother refuses to stand up to Dad when he lays down unfair rules. Neither of Luke's parents considers alternate ways of keeping Luke safe. The family could easily make the curtains extra thick so that Luke could at least eat in the kitchen during the cool seasons, but Dad is so afraid of the Government that he would rather treat Luke like a prisoner than allow him to eat with the family. It is clear to Luke that the situation is degenerating, both for him and for his family.

Luke is but a young boy with little experience of the world. His only human contact has been with his own family and he has little idea of how society works. He has always been safe at home and cared for by his parents. Yet now, despite his tender age, Luke realizes that his parents don't have a solution to his problem. No one in his family understands Luke. When he sees the face of another hidden child at the house next door, Luke is thrilled to think there may be others like him. He wants to meet this other third child, in hopes of finding someone else who really does know what it's like to walk

in Luke's shoes. If Luke is to find an answer to his problem, he will have to forsake the safety of his home and venture out into the world. His journey out of the nest is symbolic of the journey which all children must take on the road to adulthood. Several events propel Luke to take these first fledgling steps out of the nest; first, the cutting of the woods drives Luke to hide indoors; then, the construction workers' curiosity forces Dad to confine Luke to his bedroom; finally and most important, Luke discovers the presence of another hidden child in the new neighborhood. All the elements are in place for Luke to venture out into the world, but the reader knows that Luke has been conditioned to believe open spaces are dangerous. It remains to be seen whether Luke will find the courage to venture out.

Chapters 11 - 15

Chapters 11 - 15 Summary

Chapter 11: Luke watches the Sports Family house constantly now. On the fourth day of his vigil, he sees the blinds flip up and down quickly in an upstairs window at 11 a.m. after the family has left home for the day. On the seventh day, someone leaves the blinds up in a downstairs window when the family leaves the house and Luke is able to see a light flip on and off inside the house 2 hours later. A half-hour after he sees the light, the Sports Family mom drives up in her red car. She enters the house for 2 minutes, only long enough to close the blind in the downstairs window before leaving again. On the thirteenth day, a very hot day, the blinds are down, but the Sports Family leaves their windows open. The breeze blows the blinds back a few times and Luke is able to catch glimpses of more lights turned on and even the glow of the television. Luke no longer has any doubts that someone is hiding in the Sports Family home.

Chapter 12: At harvest time, Luke's family works harder than ever. Mother begins to work overtime, too, but she makes sure to leave Luke a supply of food so he won't go hungry while they're all gone. As he spends his days completely alone, Luke begins to hatch a plan. He plans the route he might take if he were to sneak over to the Sports Family's house and actually meet the other third child. The route from his house to theirs is partially screened by trees and the family has a sliding glass door in the back of their house, which Luke has noticed is sometimes left open with only the door screen blocking his entry. When the leaves on the trees begin to change, Luke realizes he'd better act fast or lose his chance; if the leaves fall, he'll lose his cover. Luke is too afraid to go and almost welcomes the rain which keeps his family indoors and prevents Luke from sneaking outside. But after the rain clears up, Luke knows he must act now. He watches again as all 28 residents leave their new homes. Then, resolutely, he moves down the stairs, through the kitchen and out the back door.

Chapter 13: For the first time months, Luke feels fresh air on his face. The long days of hiding in the attic dissolve as if they had been a dream. Recalling his danger, Luke crouches down and creeps along the edge of the house to the boundary between the Garner's property and the Sports Family's. All his life Luke has been taught to fear open spaces. Now he must steel himself to sprint across the open area leading up to the Sports Family's back door. He takes one look back at his own home and considers returning to its safety. Luke, however, realizes that his home is not a sanctuary; it is a prison. With that thought he sprints across the way to the screen door. It is locked.

Chapter 14: The possibility that the screen door might be locked had never occurred to Luke. Unwilling to go back and admit defeat, Luke punches his hand through the screen. He pulls the wire back and fiddles with the door until he unlocks it from the inside. Silently, he enters the house. Luke stares around him at the well-furnished house of a Baron family. Luke hears a cough and a beeping sound from another room. "Better to discover than to be discovered," he thinks and moves down the hall toward the



sounds. (pg. 57) Ever so slowly, Luke pokes his head around the half-open doorway of a computer room. Typing at the computer is a young girl. Luke had been expecting a boy. He gulps and she hears him. Before he can say anything coherent, she pins him to the floor in a wrestling hold and informs him he has set off the security alarm. Guards will be arriving any second. Luke protests, saying the guards can't come. The girl demands to know who he is to stop them. In a panic, Luke says the first thing that comes to his mind: Population Police. She lets go of him.

Chapter 15: She stares at him for a long moment and then grins. "I got it! You're another one. Great code word. I'll have to think about using that for the rally." (pg. 60) Luke stares at her in confusion. She asks him if he is another shadow child like she is. Luke gapes at her. He finds it difficult to say the words. She assures him there is nothing wrong with being a third child. Suddenly, she leaps to her feet, remembering the security alarm. She runs to the security panel, but it is already too late to cancel the alarm. Luke is shocked when she picks up the phone to call her dad. Luke's dad has banned him from using telephones because the Government has the technology to trace a call and can even verify the caller's identity. But this girl only rolls her eyes at whatever her dad is saying to her and cheerfully tells him she loves him before hanging up. Luke protests that the Government will find her now, because of the phone call. She only laughs and tells him the Government is too understaffed and too incompetent to do a good job monitoring phone calls. Luke asks about the alarm and the guards and she reassures him her father will have called off the guards by now. She tells him her family doesn't even know she knows how to disable the alarm and that sometimes she sets it off just for fun. Luke is appalled, but she insists if she hadn't caused false alarms in the past, her parents would have found out about Luke today for sure.

She catches Luke staring at the door as if he means to make a run for it and apologizes for scaring him. She says shadow kids are usually very jumpy people. To ease his mind, she offers him a seat and introduces herself. Her name is Jennifer Rose Talbot, but she is a tomboy and prefers to be called Jen. Jen is amazed to discover that Luke has never met anybody outside of his parents and brothers. Luke is equally shocked to learn that she has met other people. He feels betrayed by his parents. If Jen can go around freely and meet other people, why can't he? He asks her how come she's able to meet other people if she is a shadow child like him. Jen explains that her parents are very good at bribery.

Jen asks him how he found out about her. Luke tells her the whole story, beginning with when the woods came down. Jen is stunned to hear that Luke has never left his own property before and even more upset that he has been trapped inside his house for the past 6 months. Jen tells him her dad would be furious if he knew Jen had been caught peeking out the window. She explains she had looked outside only because her mirrors weren't working properly and Carlos had bet her she didn't know what the weather was like outside. Luke starts to ask questions about the mirrors and who Carlos is, but she waves them away. "'Luke Garner,' she announced solemnly, 'you have come to the right place. Forget that hiding-like-a-mole stuff. I'm your ticket out.'" (pg. 65)

Chapters 11 - 15 Analysis

Luke takes a very big risk and it pays off handsomely. This section of the story begins with his cautious, but courageous, trip to the Sports Family's house. There he meets the other third child, Jen Talbot and for the first time, sees a different point of view on life than his family holds. Despite being a third child, Jen and her family couldn't be more different than Luke and the Garner family. The Talbots are Barons and Luke notices right away that their furniture is not made to be sat on by people who are dusty from working in the fields all day. Jen's clothes are different than Luke's, too. For the first time in his life he feels embarrassed by his ragged, second-hand clothing. Luke had never realized how poor he was because he had no frame of reference for comparison. But what upsets him the most to learn is that Barons don't have to follow as many rules as farming families like the Garners. Barons can simply buy their way out of most trouble. This new fact is the most important one Luke learns, because it plants a seed in his mind. Luke has always equated being illegal with being wrong. In his heart, Luke does not feel he deserves to live like everybody else because he is an illegal child. The realization that not everyone believes every law is right gives Luke his first spark of hope that maybe it is not wrong for him to exist.

Jen makes everything look so easy. This breath of optimism is as welcome for Luke as the fresh air he gets to breathe on his way to her house. Luke will eventually learn that Jen was actually overconfident. Right now, however, Luke needs to believe in the things Jen is saying. She gives him hope that his future might be different, better, than his present life among the hidden. This section began with Luke sneaking out of his house for the first time and it ends with Jen informing him that she is his ticket out of hiding. Finding Jen gives Luke hope of a happy ending. This hope will turn out to be Jen's lasting legacy. Later, Luke will realize that the happy ending is not so simple. It comes to him in stages, with no guarantee of things turning out the way he hopes. But he hopes. That is the key. He leaves Jen's house with the hope of a normal future, something he has never had before. This hope will help carry him through the difficult times ahead.

Chapters 16 - 20

Chapters 16 - 20 Summary

Chapter 16: That night at supper, Luke tunes out his family's conversation. He is amazed at his own daring and in awe of everything he's seen at Jen's house. He has to struggle to avoid talking about his new friend to his family. He and Jen have arranged a signal so that Luke can come back to visit again. Jen showed him her mirrors placed by each of the doors and windows of her home. By tilting the mirrors, Jen is able to get a panoramic view of the entire neighborhood, including Luke's house. Luke considers asking his parents for mirrors, but they look expensive and anyway, he would have to explain how he came up with the idea. He and Jen have arranged for her to look outside using her mirrors every morning at 9. If Luke can come over that day, he will turn on his back porch light as a signal.

Luke toys with his mashed potatoes and thinks about how Jen mocked him for being so obedient. Her parents, she informs him, broke the law on purpose to have her. This is her mother's third marriage and her mother already had her two children with her first husband. Luke is shocked that Jen's dad, who is a lawyer and a highly respected Government employee, would break the law intentionally like that. Jen tells him Government leaders break more laws than anyone else. Jen was amazed to hear that Luke's family believes in the Government's propaganda. The Government spends a great deal of money convincing people they can monitor television and computer screens and therefore, Luke has never been allowed to sit in front of either his family's TV or his dad's computer. Jen assures him she has been using her family's computer since she was 3 years old and has never been caught. She tells him the Government is too understaffed to monitor all the computers. As Luke prepared to leave her house earlier today, Jen noticed three tiny drops of blood on the carpet from where Luke cut his hand on the screen door. To cover for him, she had thrust her hand into the screen so she will have a cut to show her parents. Luke remembers that image vividly as he finishes his dinner. He is amazed that Jen would so bravely do something like that for him.

Chapter 17: For the next 3 days, Luke waits for another opportunity to sneak over to Jen's house. He is unable to on the first day because a Government inspector shows up to examine the Garner crops. On the second day it rains and so Dad spends the day indoors working on paperwork and books for the farm. On the third day, Luke daringly turns on the light by the back door after his family leaves, even though he is risking discovery. However, Jen doesn't signal back. He worries that something has happened to her. "Just from the little time Luke had spent with her, he could tell: She took a lot of risks." (pg. 75) He tries to imagine what she might be doing, but her life as a Baron is so different from his humble life as a farmer's son that he cannot even picture what her days might be like. Fortunately, on the fourth day, Jen answers his signal.



Luke dashes right over to her house and demands to know where she was the day before. Jen tells him her mother had dragged her out shopping. She explains that the back seat of their family car is hollowed out. She complains that she had to spend 2 hours in that dark, confined space while her mother drove to the mall. Jen has a forged shopping pass, which her mother got for her years ago. She and her mother must drive to malls that are far away from their small town where everybody knows everyone else. Luke presses her for stories about the big city and the shopping mall, but Jen insists that it's boring. She changes the subject and advises Luke that she checked him out on her computer. There is no record of his existence, so, she tells him, he is safe. When Luke asks her how she accomplished this background check, she explains she used her brother's fingerprinting kit to lift Luke's prints off her screen door and scan them into her computer. Luke worries that now the Population Police will be able to find him, but Jen is unconcerned. Now that she knows Luke is who he says he is, Jen feels comfortable telling him about her rally and showing him her secret chat room.

Jen offers him soda and potato chips. Luke is shocked, because both those items are illegal. Once, Luke's mother had shared with him what she considered a special treat: a bag of potato chips she had saved from years before when they were still legal. They were hard as rocks and Luke hadn't enjoyed them, although he pretended to like them for his mother's sake. But the chips Jen gives him taste wonderful. He stuffs them into his mouth by the handful, prompting Jen to ask him if he goes hungry sometimes. Luke assures her that he doesn't, but Jen explains that many third children do go hungry. Since the illegal children don't have ration cards, the families don't always want to share their meager food supplies with their third child.

Jen opens the Talbots' overstuffed refrigerator, explaining that with their money and influence, they can get all the food they want. She wonders how Luke's family has managed to feed him. Luke tells her his family grows food in their garden and until very recently they had butchered their hogs, sometimes even trading a hog for another farmer's animal if the Garners wanted to eat beef or chicken instead of pork. Jen nearly drops her soda when she hears the Garner family gets to eat meat. Even her family can't obtain meat since the Government started trying to make everyone become vegetarians. Luke asks why they would do that and Jen explains that farmers have to use more land to produce meat than to produce soybeans. Luke explains how his family had always fed their hogs the grain which was not up to Government inspection standards. Since the Government forced the Garners to get rid of their hogs, the unusable grain lies rotting in the fields. Jen loves the idea of feeding animals leftover grain which can't be sold. She tells Luke she's going to post that idea online and runs out of the kitchen toward her computer.

At the computer, Jen assures Luke he'll be safe sitting in front of it. Without mentioning Luke's family, she types in his idea about the excess grain on a Government agricultural Web site. She tells him maybe a Government worker will read the post and consider the idea. Luke doesn't understand why it's important, so Jen explains to him why the Government passed the Population Law in the first place. "'It's all about food,' Jen said. 'The Government was scared we'd all run out of food if the population kept growing. That's why they made you and me illegal, to keep people from starving.'" (pg. 82) Luke

puts down the bowl of potato chips. It has never occurred to him that his existence was causing others to starve. He thinks of his well-fed brothers and feels a little better, but then he remembers the starving tramp who had come to the Garner house long ago, begging for food. Luke wonders if it is his fault the tramp had been starving. Jen assures him the Government is wrong to think so. Her dad tells her there is enough food, but it's just not distributed well among the population. She assures him the Population Law is wrong and announces her big plan: Jen is planning a rally to force the Government to recognize her and all the other third children. Jen tells him that she has tracked down hundreds of shadow children online and that all of them are going to march on the President's house. Luke stares at her as if she were insane.

Chapter 18: Luke can't imagine going out in public, much less marching to the President's house. Jen assures him that she is scared, too, but that it will be such a relief to come out of hiding and be free at last. She tells him he doesn't need to make up his mind today and introduces him to her chat room friends. Carlos, Yolanda and Sean are online, chatting about the trials and tribulations of being a third child. Carlos complains that his parents refuse to waste money running the air-conditioning during the day, even though it is 105 degrees outside. Yolanda encourages Carlos to turn it on after they leave and turn it off before they get home. If he gets caught, she teases, what can his parents do, ground him? Jen joins in the conversation, typing in her comments and receiving replies. Luke, who knows absolutely nothing about computers, cannot quite grasp what is going on; he wonders if these children are Jen's imaginary friends.

When Jen tells the other children in the chat room about Luke, he worries that the Government will be able to find him. Jen reassures him that the chat room is secret. She set it up herself and only shadow children know the password. Luke tells her it's fine for her to take risks because her family can bribe their way out, but his family is too poor. Jen grimly replies that bribery only gets her past store clerks; not even her family could bribe the Population Police if they ever got wind of her existence. Besides, Jen informs him, nobody should have to use bribery just to walk down the street or go to a mall. Luke asks her how she found all the other shadow children. Jen explains she had known a few shadow children and had asked her parents to get them the password through their parents. The other shadow kids had carefully spread the password to other third children that they knew and before Jen knew it, she had 800 shadow children on her chat list. Luke asks for the password and Jen gives it to him. It is the word "free."

Chapter 19: That same day, Jen sends Luke home with a stack of books and a pile of computer printouts to read. At home in his room, Luke struggles to read the dense Government text called *The Population Disasters*. It contains a lot of big words and he is tempted to give up, but he remembers how Jen had looked at his worn out clothing and asked him if he even knew how to read before giving him the books. Luke intends to prove to her that poor people are as smart as Barons and so he gets out his dictionary and begins working his way through the books. The next few days bring more rain, allowing Luke to hole up in his room and read. Luke is careful, aware that the rain is keeping his dad inside, too; he doesn't want to get caught with the books. On the fourth day, he hears his father's footsteps on the stairs to the attic and quickly shoves the book under his pillow. Dad plays cards with Luke. Luke is distracted the entire game



because he can feel the sharp edge of *The Population Disaster* poking him in the back as he plays rummy with Dad. Luke has just finished reading a chapter about hydroponics, the growing of food indoors using special lights and mineral water. Without using the term hydroponics, Luke asks his dad if it might be possible to grow food indoors. His dad has heard about this practice and becomes inspired by the idea of growing food inside. With the hog money gone, the family needs some other way to pay their bills.

After Dad leaves, Luke returns to his reading. Once he gets the hang of the big words, the texts begin to make sense to him. He learns that some 20 years earlier, the world had become overcrowded and there was not enough food to go around. To make matters worse, a drought had developed and farmers were unable to produce as much food as before. People starved everywhere. Finally, the Government began rationing food, allowing people only 1,500 calories per day. They also placed many new restrictions on farmers, most of which are still in force today. The Government then passed the Population Law, shortly before Luke's birth.

That night at dinner, Luke is unusually quiet. He is considering the idea that by eating food, he is causing other people to starve. He begins refusing second helpings and worries that the Government might have been right to outlaw him. However, Luke cheers up considerably when he reads the two computer printouts that Jen gave him. The point of view of the information downloaded from the Internet is very different from the government literature. One of the printouts says, "'The Population Law is evil,'" the other says, "'Hundreds of children are hidden, mistreated, starved, neglected, abused-even murdered-for no reason. Forcing children into the shadows can be counted as genocide.'" (pg. 93) Luke is astounded by how different the two points of view are and he asks Jen about it a week later when he sees her again. Jen believes that the computer printouts are the correct point of view because whoever authored them took a big risk by going against the Government's point of view. Luke wonders still. The Government books look so official and important; how could they be wrong?

Chapter 20: Luke is afraid that once the snow starts, he won't be able to visit Jen very often. Luckily, it hardly snows this winter. By January, Luke is comfortable making the trek between the two houses. He knows the schedules of all of the Barons; his only worry is getting caught by Dad. During the winter, Dad is usually at home more often. This year, however, Luke's dad spends a lot of time at the library researching hydroponics and in town looking for the necessary equipment to grow vegetables indoors. Luke brags to Jen that he gave his father the idea to try hydroponics. Jen's reaction disturbs Luke because she seems to feel that the Government will not let Mr. Garner use hydroponics.

One day, the shadow children in the online chat room discuss fake I.D.'s. Luke learns that fake I.D.'s are expensive and many of them don't look real. Jen reacts angrily to the discussion. She says she refuses to get an I.D. until she can get one with her real name on it. She reminds everyone that after the rally they won't have to hide any more. Luke wonders, since she feels so strongly about not using fake I.D.'s, how come she doesn't mind using a fake shopping pass. Jen responds that she does mind using the fake

pass, but she doesn't want to fight her parents about everything. Still, she draws the line at fake I.D.'s; she refuses to take on a false identity permanently. She explains that using a fake I.D. is just another way of hiding. Jen is highly passionate about the rally and the need for shadow children to come out of hiding. She becomes frustrated when the other shadow children don't respond with equal passion. Luke tries to explain to her that everyone has a different way of expressing their feelings. For the first time in his life, he realizes that he has done a better job handling the hiding and secrecy than any other member of his family would have done.

Chapters 16 - 20 Analysis

In this section, Luke goes from having limited knowledge of the world to suddenly being presented, quite literally, with volumes of information. Jen herself, with her Internet access and family connections, is a fount of information for Luke. She teaches him about everything from junk food to security alarms to why the Government passed the Population Law in the first place. As a Baron's child, Jen has more access to resources and is better informed on the workings of the Population Police than Luke's parents, who simply live in fear of them at all times. Jen teaches Luke that although Barons can get away with a lot of things, not even her rich family could save her from the Population Police if they ever found her. Luke has lived such a sheltered life that he feels initially overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information he receives from Jen. After learning about chat rooms and computers and how Barons live, Luke is daunted by the idea of also reading the thick books Jen has given him. He may have backed down from the challenge had Jen not revealed her prejudices about farmers. Luke is intent on proving to Jen that farmers are just as smart as Barons.

Nonetheless, Luke realizes the practical differences between being a Baron and being a farmer. Luke's family is too absorbed with the uncertain business of economic survival to have time for luxuries like higher education or lobbying for political change. Luke is not as politically aware or as passionate as Jen about changing the laws. Luke understands why the other children in the chat room are afraid, even more so than Jen. Jen is certainly aware of her danger, but she has learned a certain sense of entitlement that comes with being a Baron's daughter. Jen comes from parents who can make things happen in the world and they've taught her that she can, too. Luke's parents, on the other hand, are forced to react to events which are usually beyond their control. The Garners are courageous and they work hard to meet the ever-increasing demands of the Government, but the Garners do not have the ability to ease the restrictions placed on them. Jen's family can bribe their way out of many restrictions.

Jen is rightfully angry, however, that she should have to bribe people just to be allowed to walk down the sidewalk. Still, she is lucky because her idealism has been allowed to flourish in her nurturing environment. Luke has walked a harder path and idealism is something for which his parents have little time in between their many jobs and bills to pay. Yet Jen's idealism is exactly what Luke needs at this moment. Meeting her gives him the opportunity to consider other points of view that aren't available to him within his own household. Jen's optimism and hope are a shot in the arm for the isolated boy. By

the end of this section, Luke has been able to place his experience in a wider context and for the first time he realizes what a good job he has done dealing with his difficult situation. Jen's confidence is contagious and Luke's self-esteem increases as he masters the difficult words in the thick Government publications. Soon Luke is sharing the new ideas he has learned with his family. Luke never forgets the danger of his position, however, as Jen is wont to do. He ventures cautiously into the future, where Jen tears ahead recklessly. Perhaps he is overcautious, or perhaps she is too much of a risk taker. These two friends have much to learn from each other.

Chapters 21 - 25

Chapters 21 - 25 Summary

Chapter 21: The next month, Dad gets a letter from the Government forbidding him from growing anything indoors hydroponically. The Government letter uses a lot of big words and the Garners have trouble understanding it. Luke is the only one who can decipher its meaning, having practiced by reading the thick Government books Jen loaned him. Apparently, the Government has discovered that Dad has been buying plastic tubing and other items needed for hydroponics. They order him to hand over all the supplies he has bought because the Government has outlawed hydroponics because this method has been used to grow illegal drugs in the past. Dad is upset. He had hoped to supplement the farm income with the hydroponic vegetables.

Luke again feels guilty and wonders whether his family wouldn't have more money if they didn't have to feed a third child. Even more upsetting to Luke is the fact that without the hydroponics project to keep Dad busy, Dad will be spending more time around the house. Luke is able to visit Jen only once in February and twice in March. Every time she sees him, Jen greets him with a big hug and a smile. They play board games and bake cookies together. Jen is more relaxed than Luke has seen her; in the past she spent a lot of time working on and worrying about the rally. Jen tells Luke stories about the fun times she has had. When Jen was younger, her mom took her to a play group with other third children. All the kids had parents in the Government and most of the parents acted as if it were a status symbol to break the law by having a third child. One of the families even brought its dog, even though pets were also illegal. Luke asks why the Government made pets illegal and Jen replies that it was again because of the food shortage. Now Luke feels guilty for eating food that could have sustained a pet.

Jen sees Luke's guilty expression and tells him not to feel that way. She reminds him that the Government's point of view is a lie and that there actually is enough food in the world. Jen contends that because of the Government's propaganda campaign against pregnancy, most women are now loathe to get pregnant and not enough babies are being born anymore. Jen changes the subject and asks Luke if he thinks his brothers would ever betray him. "'Not now, necessarily, but, say, years from now, if your parents were dead and it wouldn't hurt anybody but you and they'd get lots of money for it-'" (pg. 105) Luke has never considered this possibility. He thinks about it and is proud to realize that he *is* sure his brothers would never betray him. Luke and Jen play for the rest of the day; by the time Luke goes home, he has had so much fun he thinks he could go on living this way for the rest of his life.

Chapter 22: The first 2 weeks of April are rainy and Luke goes stir crazy in the house, unable to visit Jen. When he finally gets back to her house, she greets him with the news that the rally is this very week. Jen plans to drive one of her parents' cars, intending to pick up three other children on the way. She has saved a seat in the car for Luke and tells him he's lucky, because a lot of the kids will have to walk to the



President's house. Luke asks her what happens if the Population Police stop her on the way to the rally. Jen grins and advises him she has hacked into the police database and arranged to give several policemen vacation days so that there will be no one to stop her on the road. Luke suddenly realizes that Jen has been working overtime to plan her rally and that the reason she has been so relaxed and playful when he's visited is because she has been using his visits as break times from her work. Jen tries to arrange to pick Luke up at 10 p.m. on Thursday, but he avoids answering her. He wonders aloud how many of the other kids will actually show up at the rally. Jen is adamant that they will all come. Luke tells her he won't be coming; he is too frightened. Jen lays a guilt trip on Luke. He is sad because everything she says about him being a coward is true, but nonetheless, he is too scared to go to the rally. Luke backs away from Jen and runs back to his house.

Chapter 23: Luke stomps back into his attic bedroom, angry at Jen for putting him on the spot. Luke buries his face in his hands. Hours later, Mother finds him sitting in the same position, with his head in his hands. She sees how pale he is and worries that he's getting sick. Luke wants to tell Mother everything but decides against betraying Jen. He passes off his paleness as a simple lack of sunshine.

Chapter 24: For the next 3 days, Luke agonizes about the rally. He wavers back and forth, thinking about going with Jen and then thinking about stopping her. The rain pours down, preventing Luke from visiting Jen at all this week. He feels like a prisoner in his own home. On Thursday night, Luke lies awake thinking about Jen and the other kids driving to the rally. Later, he awakes in the darkness and hears Jen's voice in his room. Luke is glad to see her, but tells her he has definitely decided not to go. He tells her his parents are farmers, not Barons and that it's rich people like Jen who change history, not poor people like Luke. Jen accepts his choice graciously this time. She realizes that the rally is dangerous and no one should attend involuntarily. She tells Luke he has been a good friend and that she will miss him. He says he will see her after the rally. She tells him they can hope.

Chapter 25: Luke lies awake all night. At dawn, he gets up and cleans up the muddy footprints Jen tracked inside his house. He finishes just in time to avoid getting caught by Mother, who wonders at his being up so early. After Luke's family leaves for the day, he sneaks into the kitchen and turns the radio on low. He listens for news of the rally, but hears nothing. At lunch when his father comes home, Luke again hopes the radio will announce the rally, but again he has no luck. For days, Luke desperately hopes to catch a news announcement about Jen's rally, but he never hears anything. He watches Jen's house obsessively, but sees no sign of her in the windows. Her family comes and goes as usual. Luke cannot tell from a distance if they look sad or worried. Finally, out of desperation, he suggests to Mother that she go over and welcome the new neighbors. Mother looks at him like he's crazy. The neighbors have lived there for months, she tells him; besides, they are Barons, why would they welcome a visit from her? By the time a week has passed, Luke's nerves are on edge. He has taken to avoiding his mother, who continually asks him what the matter is. At last, Luke comes up with a plan.

Chapters 21 - 25 Analysis

This section leads to a big turning point for Luke in Chapter 25. As Chapter 21 opens, however, Luke lulls himself into a false sense of security. Now that he has a friend to visit and a means of getting out of the house, Luke tells himself he could be happy living like this forever. It seems like the best of both worlds. Luke has the security and sanctuary of his home, plus the excitement of the new world he's been exposed to at Jen's house. This is Luke's first taste of normal life or at least as close to normal as a hidden third child can get. Jen and Luke both have a friend in the neighborhood, just like any normal kid and they hang out together and do many of the things normal kids can do. For the first time since meeting Jen, Luke again embraces his mother's denial. He tells himself that he can be happy living like this. He deliberately refuses to think about the future, which has not changed for him at all. Luke will still be unable to marry, hold a job, or have any kind of a life outside his hidden attic room.

Therefore, ultimately, Luke is lucky that Jen forces the issue. She does not allow him to hide behind his false sense of security. By going ahead with her plans for the rally, Jen is changing Luke's future. She hopes to change it for the better, but Jen is too impatient to accept the fact that she has not won the full support of the other third children. The other 800 children invited to the rally appreciate Jen's strong belief in their right to exist, just as Luke does. Also just like Luke, the other shadow children are afraid to risk their lives on such a risky endeavor. The author uses Luke's fears in Chapter 22 to foreshadow the tragic outcome of Jen's rally. Jen insists that there will be safety in numbers at the rally; however, Luke questions how many kids will actually show up. His decision not to go plants doubt in the reader's mind as to whether the other kids will show. In Chapter 25, the reader realizes, as Luke does, that the rally would have made the news if it had been successful. The silence on the radio is ominous.

At this stage, Luke could easily slip back into his denial and false sense of security. No one in his family knows about Jen or the rally, so all Luke would have to do is pretend like she had never existed. That way, he could avoid any consequences related to the apparently unsuccessful rally. Luke, though, would never dishonor his friend by pretending she doesn't exist. After all, Jen is the one who taught Luke that third children have a right to live and breathe on the planet. He honors her by doing what she would have done under the circumstances. Luke hatches a plan to discover what has happened to his friend. No longer content to be passive in life, Luke decides to make things happen, just like a Baron would.

Chapters 26 - 30

Chapters 26 - 30 Summary

Chapter 26: A few days later, the weather finally provides Luke with a clear, dry day. Luke knows his dad will spend the whole day in the fields, leaving him free to carry out his plan. Luke slips out the back door and dashes toward Jen's house. To get inside, Luke has to not only rip the screen, but also break a pane in one of the windows. Once inside, Luke heads for the alarm panel and nervously punches in the code Jen has taught him to disable the alarm. He calls loudly for Jen as he searches the bedrooms. He gets no response and hurries to the computer room, where he logs on with the password, "free." He is so jumpy he mistypes it twice, as 'fere' and 'feer' before getting it right. Once in the chat room, he is surprised to see no one chatting. Desperately, he types, "'Where's Jen?'" (pg. 123) When he receives no answer, he follows that up by asking, "'Hello? Is anybody there?'" (pg. 124) Still no answer. In frustration, Luke screams at the computer. Behind him, a voice responds. The unknown voice tells Luke to turn around slowly because there is a gun pointed at him.

Chapter 27: Luke longs to run, but forces himself to turn around slowly, as instructed. "'You're Jen's dad,'" he says. (pg. 125) Jen's dad, Mr. Talbot, demands to know who Luke is; Luke tells him he is a friend of Jen's. Luke begs to know what's happened to Jen and her father, beginning to believe him, lowers the gun. Mr. Talbot wants to know what Luke knows before sharing any information of his own. Luke admits that he, too, is a third child. Mr. Talbot asks how Luke found out about Jen in the first place. Trying to protect Jen, Luke explains that he only guessed after seeing lights on in the house when it was supposed to be empty. Her father comments angrily that Jen must have been careless. Luke defends her by stating that she was not careless, he had merely been observant. When asked, Luke admits that Jen taught him how to disable the security alarm. Jen's father explains that he gets notified whenever it goes off, even if the alarm is cancelled. He grills Luke, sounding accusatory, about his and Jen's activities. Luke tells Mr. Talbot that Jen had invited him to her rally, but that Luke had been too scared to go. Mr. Talbot studies Luke intently and demands to know why Luke didn't stop Jen from going herself. "'Stop Jen?'" Luke replies, "'That's like trying to stop the sun.'" (pg. 127) Mr. Talbot rewards him with a tiny smile.

Luke asks again where Jen is. Harshly, Mr. Talbot tells him Jen is dead. Luke had somehow known this already and yet the words send him into shock. Her dad tells him Jen had been shot and killed at the rally by the Population Police, along with the 40 other children who showed up. The blood had run into the President's rosebushes, but they had it cleaned up before the tourists arrived so no one would know. Mr. Talbot had been allowed to take Jen's body as a special privilege for Government officials, but he couldn't bury her in the family plot or even tell anyone about her death. He and his family have had to go about their business without even the luxury of mourning Jen. Mr. Talbot breaks into tears; he wonders how Jen could have taken such a huge risk when he spent years teaching her to be wary of the Population Police. Luke tries to explain

that Jen initially believed the rally would work, but that as the time grew nearer, she had faced an uncertain future bravely. For Jen, Luke tells her dad, had wanted to live, truly live and for this she had been willing to risk death.

Mr. Talbot reluctantly informs Luke that he is now in danger, too. The chat room Luke has just logged onto has been monitored by Government officials since the rally. Talbot explains that although he has managed to cover up Jen's existence since her death, the Population Police will have already traced Luke's message back to the Talbot home computer. Now the Population Police will be actively looking for him, Jen's dad explains and it won't take long to search all the houses in the vicinity to find him. However, offers Mr. Talbot, if Luke is willing, he can get him a fake I.D. Luke asks how and why Mr. Talbot would do this for Luke. Mr. Talbot says he is doing it for Jen and admits that he has the right connections to get a fake I.D. because he works for the Population Police.

Chapter 28: Upon hearing Mr. Talbot admit he works for the Population Police, Luke begins screaming. He grabs for Mr. Talbot's gun and gets it away; Mr. Talbot lunges for Luke, just as Jen had once done, but this time Luke steps expertly aside. Mr. Talbot slowly gets up and faces Luke. He swears to Luke that he's on Luke's side. Luke thinks it over and puts down the gun. "'I was going to explain,' Jen's dad said, panting a little. He sat down. 'I only work at Population Police headquarters. I don't agree with what they do. I try to sabotage them as much as I can. Jen never understood, either-sometimes you have to work from inside enemy lines.'" (pg. 133) Mr. Talbot asks Luke if Luke knows anything about the history of the Population Law. Luke says he only knows what he's read from the Government books and computer printouts Jen lent him. Mr. Talbot says that Luke has read only the propaganda from both sides of the issue and that the truth lies somewhere in between. Mr. Talbot swallows hard and says he encouraged Jen to hope for a repeal of the law by giving her slanted literature from online to read. He had only wanted to give her hope; now he regrets leading her to believe there was a chance the law could be repealed. Luke asks Mr. Talbot what the truth actually is. "'Nobody really knows. There have been too many lies for too long. Our Government is totalitarian and totalitarian governments never like truth.'" (pp. 134-135)

With a biting cynicism that reminds Luke of Jen, Mr. Talbot goes on to explain that the Government intentionally keeps people hovering around the poverty level because research shows people will work harder when their existence is on the line. Luke recalls his parents' constant fears about having enough money to survive and he grows angry at the Government. Luke asks him whether Barons must follow the Population Law. Is it necessary? Is there simply not enough food? Jen's dad suggests that there is probably enough if it were only distributed fairly. He believes the country could have survived the drought and famine crisis without eliminating anyone's rights had the leaders been fair and honest and if people had not panicked. Now, given that the Population Law has reduced the population significantly, Mr. Talbot believes that repealing the law would not cause anyone to starve. Luke presses for an answer: Is the Population Law wrong? Mr. Talbot admits that he, for one, believes it is wrong. Chagrined, Luke realizes that had he believed that-had he truly believed he had a right to exist-he too, would have gone to the rally along with Jen. Mr. Talbot ends the discussion by reminding Luke of the danger.



Talbot repeats his offer to get Luke an I.D. Before Luke can reply, the Population Police pound on the Talbots' front door.

Chapter 29: Jen's dad thrusts Luke into the closet, telling him to use the secret door at the back of the closet to get out. Mr. Talbot screams at the policemen that if they break down his expensive door, they will have to pay for it. While he's yelling and the policemen are breaking down the door, Mr. Talbot hurriedly connects his computer to the Internet. Luke burrows as deep as he can into the back of the closet, but cannot find a secret door. The next thing Luke hears is the Population Police coming up the stairs, laughing at having caught Mr. Talbot with his pants down. Mr. Talbot pretends he was in the bathroom and that's why he didn't answer the door immediately. He thunders at the policemen, accusing them of breaking down his door unjustly. Luke is amazed at how convincing Jen's dad sounds; he begins to have hope. But the Population Police insist that Mr. Talbot's computer has been used for illegal purposes in the past half-hour. Mr. Talbot states confidently that he is working a sting operation in the chat room, hoping to find evidence of other shadow children so he can eliminate them. Talbot assures the policemen that there is a memo regarding this sting operation on their desks. Talbot tells the police that they're simply too low-ranking to realize that Talbot has been pretending to be a guerrilla leader named Jen to catch the hidden children. Talbot reminds them of the awards ceremony in which Mr. Talbot had received a commendation for ridding the country of 40 illegal children.

Meanwhile, Luke cowers in the closet, wondering how Mr. Talbot can bring himself to lie so convincingly about Jen, cruelly denying her existence. Luke begins to wonder whether Mr. Talbot turned in Jen and the other children. Unable to find a secret door at the back of the closet, Luke wonders if Mr. Talbot intends to hand him over to the Population Police. He can hear the policemen insisting on searching despite Mr. Talbot's protests. Mr. Talbot says it doesn't matter, they won't find anything. Talbot throws open the closet door and tells them to start searching. Luke huddles under a blanket; in the now lit closet, he can actually see the shadows of the policemen as they stand in the closet doorway. Luke's life flashes before his eyes. He thinks of his parents and his two brothers. Luke wishes he could apologize to Matthew and Mark for not appreciating all the times they stayed inside to play with him when they would have preferred to be outdoors. Luke realizes if he is arrested, he won't see his family again. He will have to lie to protect their identity so that his family doesn't get in trouble with the Population Police.

As he thinks these thoughts, Jen's dad enters the closet, alone. He clamps a hand over Luke's mouth and gives him a note. The note tells Luke he is safe now, the Population Police are gone, but that he must not talk. Luke nods acceptance and Mr. Talbot removes the hand covering Luke's mouth. Mr. Talbot writes an explanation to Luke, that the police have planted listening devices in the house and even one on Mr. Talbot himself. Luke writes him back, suggesting he remove the bug, but Mr. Talbot's written reply states that it's safer if the police feel they know everything that's going on. Mr. Talbot scribbles some more words onto the paper, informing Luke that he had to bribe the police with fur coats from the closet. Unfortunately, explains Talbot, all he did was to buy them some time. Once the policemen return to their office they will be able to find



out that there is no memo and no sting operation. Talbot thinks his goose is cooked and if Luke wants a fake I.D., he had better take it now because Talbot may be unable to get him one later. Luke, still unsure whether to trust Talbot, asks him about the secret door in the back of the closet. Talbot writes down that there is no door; he had only hoped to get Luke all the way to the back of the closet to hide.

Luke is confused and wishes he did not have to decide his future this minute. He would like to simply forget about everything that's happened. He misses the safety of his attic bedroom and quiet life with Mother and Dad. But he doesn't have the luxury of time. His eyes search Mr. Talbot's face. From the look of concern he sees there, Luke instinctively knows he can trust Jen's dad, even if he is a very good liar. Although Luke misses the serenity of his home life, he realizes he does not want to go back to being bored and desperate every day. He wants to live. He thinks what he would do with a fake I.D. if he had one. Luke realizes he can help other shadow children. Not in the way Jen tried to do, or by getting fake I.D.'s like her dad; Luke thinks a more cautious, patient approach to creating change might be ultimately more successful. He had once told Jen that it was rich, influential people like her who changed the world, not poor farmers like himself. But now Luke thinks that maybe being poor made him more patient; he doesn't have Jen's sense that the world owes him everything. Luke can afford to cultivate change slowly. Maybe he can succeed where Jen failed precisely because he is not a Baron. Mind made up, Luke writes down his desire to obtain a fake I.D. from Jen's dad.

Chapter 30: Luke settles into the car for a long trip. He reminds himself that his name is now Lee Grant and tries to look at his family's farmhouse as if he were a stranger. He cannot convince himself of his new identity yet, however. Luke's loving eye runs over every line of the weathered farmhouse and barn which have been his only home. According to the official story, Luke, or rather Lee Grant, is a Baron child who had run away from home and who sought shelter with the friendly family in the farmhouse. The real Lee Grant died in a skiing accident the previous night and his parents had donated his identity to a secret group which exists to help shadow children. Mr. Talbot had dropped off the I.D. with the pretense of asking the Garners to cut back their willow tree which hangs over Talbot property. The Grant family is too distraught over the real Lee's death to take Luke into their home, but the group that arranged the I.D. has also arranged to pay for Luke to go to boarding school year-round. Luke will assume Lee's identity and live at school among other Baron children. He must live like a Baron and now has a suitcase full of rich, Baron clothing packed away in Mr. Talbot's car.

From the car, Luke looks back at his family, gathered on the porch to say goodbye. Mr. Talbot is still bugged, so everyone sticks to the cover story. However, Mother and Dad had insisted on hugging Lee Grant goodbye, since they had become so attached to the boy in the short time he has been at their farm. Mother cries today just as she had 2 days ago when Luke had told his family the whole story about Jen, the rally, the Population Police and the fake I.D. Despite the Garners' desire to keep Luke with them, they reluctantly agree that he must take this opportunity to live a normal life. So today they had all pretended that he was Lee Grant, while Mr. Talbot had lectured Lee about running away from home. As punishment, Lee was to be sent to year-round boarding school at the Hendricks School for Boys. Mr. Talbot maintains the pretense in the car



and Luke does his best to be Lee Grant. As the car pulls away from the Garners' farm, Luke sees the view beyond the front yard for the very first time in his life. Grief for his friend Jen finally sets in as her father drives him towards his new future. Luke vows to work to free the other third children in honor of Jen's memory. "Someday when we're all free, all the third children, I'll tell everyone about you. They'll erect statues to you and name holidays after you....' It wasn't much, but it made him feel better. A little." (pp. 152-153)

Chapters 26 - 30 Analysis

The ending of this story shows the reader how much of an impact Jen Talbot had in her short life. Although Jen's rally ended in failure and tragedy, her legacy lives on in Luke and all the other shadow children who remain alive among the hidden. Jen was so passionate about her cause that she assumed all the other shadow children would share her fervor. What Jen did not realize is that the other children, like Luke, lacked both hope and self-esteem. Having been raised to believe that they are unwanted and unacceptable, third children lack the self-esteem to stand up for their rights. Jen's confidence and unwavering belief in her and her friends' right to live like everybody else is a powerfully attractive notion for the frightened shadow children. It is this optimism and confidence which attracts over 800 kids to her chat room. Jen assumes that these 800 children share her optimism and passion. She does not realize that they are looking to her to provide the confidence and belief which they lack. Her spirit burns brightly enough to ignite the imaginations of nearly a thousand hopeless children. She will live on in their memories and hearts. Her beliefs have provided a spark of self-respect within the hearts of the unwanted shadow children. This spark may prove enough, in the future, to win them the freedom Jen sacrificed her very life to provide.

Luke's happy ending is a final gift from Jen. Although Jen's rally cost her her life, it gives Luke new life. Mr. Talbot helps Luke in honor of his dead daughter, whom he can honor in no other way. In the climactic scene, Mr. Talbot protects Luke by using his money and clout to influence the Population Police. Through Mr. Talbot's ruse, Luke gets to see yet another way of creating change, by working behind enemy lines. When Luke receives a fake identity which makes him a Baron, Luke realizes that he, too, will have an opportunity to work behind enemy lines. Luke intends to wage Jen's battle, but in his own way. He is now a farmer with the resources of a Baron. This puts Luke in a perfect position to effect change peacefully, powerfully and above all, patiently.

Characters

Luke Garner

Luke Garner is obedient to a fault. The first thing the reader learns about 12-year-old Luke is that he has never disobeyed his mother's order to hide. Luke is a highly sensitive child who has taken on adult responsibilities at a young age although he does not actually realize how maturely he has behaved. All his life, Luke has sensed the importance of his parents' need to hide him and he also senses that disobeying his parents' orders will cause them hardship and emotional pain. For the sake of his family's well-being, Luke denies his own needs for fresh air, sunshine and human companionship. This type of sacrifice is usually made by adults; the willingness to set aside one's personal needs for the greater good is a sign of maturity, a maturity that Luke has instinctively displayed all his life.

Still, part of coming of age and maturing is breaking the rules. Luke must figure out who he is and how he wants to live his life. To do so, he must find the courage to disobey his parents' directive to hide from all people. To his credit, Luke even manages this adolescent rebellion in a safe and mature fashion. While he does disobey his parents and takes risks to meet with Jen, Luke is nevertheless more cautious than Jen. He accepts the grim realities of being a third child much more readily than his idealistic, hot-tempered friend. Ultimately, Luke can be proud of the risk he takes which leads him to a more optimistic future. He can also be proud of the risk he refuses to take. By not jeopardizing his life on a single chance at freedom like Jen does, Luke wisely buys himself time, time to live another day and fight another battle. In the end, Luke vows to carry on Jen's fight in her memory. He will patiently and gradually work for his freedom by educating and inspiring others to find a better solution to the problem of famine than the cruel Population Law.

Harlan Garner (Dad)

Dad is the strict disciplinarian of the Garner family. He rules his family in a traditional, male-dominated household. Harlan Garner teaches his two elder sons that housework and cooking are for women to do and that being taken care of is the purpose of getting married. While he is fundamentally a decent man, Mr. Garner's views about marriage are self-serving and chauvinistic. He does not understand that his wife nurtures him only because she loves him, not because he is entitled, as a man, to feminine slave labor. His anger rarely erupts, but it is always there, boiling just under the surface and this causes his wife and youngest son to tiptoe around him out of fear. Harlan Garner accords the same blind obedience to the Government as he expects from his wife and youngest son. To his way of thinking, the strong dominate the weak in a natural order not worth changing. He does not realize that a man's true character is revealed by how he treats those weaker than he is. Harlan comes dangerously close to being an abusive parent given the abusive attitudes he harbors just below the surface.



Some of his attitudes verge on selfishness and child abuse, such as when he complains about the necessity of heating the attic to keep his third son warm, even though he does not even use enough heat to prevent icicles from forming inside his son's room. Unfortunately, the Population Law encourages such abuse by convincing border-line abusive men like Harlan that their third children don't have a right to exist. By treating the shadow children like objects with no human rights, the Government enables their abuse by parents such as Harlan. Ultimately, Harlan is not a bad man. In other circumstances, he would likely be a loving father to Luke. Harlan is ruled by the poverty mentality and financial fears placed on his shoulders by the totalitarian Government. By keeping hard-working family men such as Harlan under their thumb, the Government is able to dominate society utterly. Harlan must work too hard to survive to have time for luxuries such as education, political knowledge, or social idealism. The Government keeps him busy trying to keep his family alive and never allows Harlan the financial peace his hard work should earn him. This artificially controlled economic situation gives rise to abusiveness in Harlan and many other hard-working parents of third children forced, by the Government, to choose between their youngest child's welfare and the survival of the rest of the family.

Edna Garner (Mother)

Luke loves his mother very much, even more than most boys. This is not only because she is a loving and kind woman, but also because she is the central figure in Luke's life. Unable to mingle with other human beings outside the family, Luke is closeted at home with his mother for most of his young life. When the story begins, Mrs. Garner is a housewife who has remained home with Luke for the entire 12 years since his birth. Since Luke must stay inside while his father and brothers work and play outdoors, he spends most of his time around his mother. Mother works very hard to keep the house clean and the family fed, but her workplace is Luke's only refuge, so even when she is busy she remains a constant presence in his life. Mother loves Luke and loves children and would have gladly borne a fourth boy if she'd had the chance. She was raised before the Population Law went into effect and grew up hoping to have a big family. Thus, when she accidentally gets pregnant with Luke, she and her husband vow to protect him from the Population Police and give him as normal a life as possible.

Imagine, then, Luke's reaction to learning that Mother must go to work outside the home. This announcement coincides with Luke's being restricted to spending his time in his attic bedroom; a combination of events that takes Mother, Luke's only companion, away from him during the day. Now, when she returns home in the evening, Mother must spend several hours completing her regular housework after first feeding her family. Thus, she is able to see Luke only when she goes upstairs to his room for what she calls her "Luke breaks." As busy as she is, Mrs. Garner makes a point of spending at least an hour with Luke after her marathon day comes to an end. However, Luke is a sensitive and mature boy who can't help but notice the fatigue which lines his mother's face. Although Luke is too young to realize that Mother's extra visits to tuck him in at night could potentially be interfering with her marriage and her relationship with her other two sons, he is mature enough to realize that she is simply too tired to spend her



nights in the attic with him any longer. Luke frees his mother from the burden of being his sole companion and in so doing, makes room in his life for his new friend, Jen. His growing independence means his mother is no longer his only source of human companionship and warmth. Consequently, although Mother is grief-stricken in the end when Luke must leave, she knows that by letting him go, both she and Luke will have more normal lives.

Jennifer Rose Talbot

Jennifer Rose Talbot is the full name of Luke's vivacious and spunky friend, Jen. Jen refuses to use her full name, which she feels is too girly and sissified. Jen is a tomboy who takes after the boys in her family with her love of sports. She has a strong sense of self and believes in her right to equality, both as a female and as an illegal shadow child. Jen's passion drives her to take unnecessary risks, yet she would argue that the risks involved in standing up for her right to lead a normal life are not unnecessary at all. Her idealism and passion captivate Luke. From Jen, Luke learns that he too, has certain inalienable human rights, which no Government or Population Law can take away from him. Unfortunately, Jen's idealism is not tempered by caution. She believes so strongly in her right to freedom that she is willing to die for it. While this passion leads her to display astounding courage, it also shortens her lifespan tragically. Jen pins all of her hopes on a single rally, which she works tirelessly to organize. Her cleverness and bravery are commendable, but Luke later realizes that not all wars can be fought with a single battle. Had Jen the patience to start small in her bid for equal rights, she might have survived to adulthood and might ultimately have made a greater impact on the world. However, Luke vows to carry on the fight for freedom in her memory. Thus, Jen's final legacy is Luke himself and the principles she has taught him to believe in. Her radical bid for freedom inspires Luke to leave the safety of his home and go out into the world, seeking to create change.

Mr. Talbot

Mr. Talbot is the father of a hidden child, Jennifer Talbot. Jen is Mr. Talbot's only natural child, since Mrs. Talbot, Jen's mom, had already given birth to two boys during a previous marriage. When the Talbots marry, they choose to break the population law so that they can create a child together. Mr. Talbot, the reader eventually learns, is a member of the dreaded Population Police. Instead of enforcing the evil Population Law, however, Mr. Talbot considers himself a spy behind enemy lines. He uses his position on the police force to cover up his daughter's existence and to get fake I.D.'s for other shadow children like Luke. In the end, he puts himself at risk to help save Luke out of loyalty to his dead daughter, Jen.

Matthew Garner

Matthew Garner is the oldest of the Garner children. He is 15 when the story begins and treats his youngest brother, Luke, as rudely as any typical teenager might treat a younger sibling. Matthew often makes snide remarks about Luke and his other younger brother, Mark. Yet Matthew also makes a point of spending time indoors playing checkers with Luke even when the sunshine and fresh air tempt him to enjoy other activities. Luke knows in his heart that Matthew loves him and would never, ever betray him.

Mark Garner

Mark is the second-eldest Garner child. Like Luke, he is more sensitive than his older brother Matthew, yet Mark takes after Matthew in many ways, including the snide remarks he makes about Luke at the dinner table. Like Matthew, Mark is just being a typical teenager; he means nothing by his remarks and truly loves his little brother, Luke. He is forced to make certain sacrifices, like never having friends over to the house, to ensure Luke's safety. Neither Matthew nor Mark, however, can imagine how difficult life must be for Luke. Mark, as the second child, gets to enjoy most of the privileges of an ordinary childhood.

Carlos

Carlos is the name of one of the shadow kids linked into Jen's underground, online network. The reader never meets Carlos or any of the other third children in the network, but it's clear from the messages they send Jen in the chat room that these children all admire and respect their friend Jen, even if they don't share her courage to attend the rally.

Lee Grant

Lee Grant is the young Baron boy whose death gives Luke Garner a new chance at life. When Lee dies in a skiing accident, his grieving parents generously donate their dead son's identity to the cause of helping shadow children. Thanks to Mr. Talbot's connections, Luke becomes the lucky recipient of Lee Grant's identity. Luke can now live out in the open, among other people so long as he maintains the fiction that he is actually Lee Grant.

The Tramp

Although the reader never learns the tramp's name, this character is an important symbol of the Population Law. Luke remembers the tramp showing up at the Garner farm one day several years before the opening of the book. The tramp had begged for

food because he was starving. When Luke learns about the famine that had prompted the Government to pass the Population Law, he thinks of the tramp and wonders if it is his fault the tramp had been starving. Yet when the Garners offered to trade the tramp supper for some farm work, the tramp had refused to work for his food. Before Luke discovers Jen Talbot, the tramp is the only human being outside of Luke's nuclear family whom he has ever seen up close.



Objects/Places

Population Law 3903

The law enacted some 13 years before the start of the book that limits the number of children a woman may bear to two. Women are surgically altered to prevent further pregnancies after their second child and any third children who do come to term are automatically condemned to death under the law without a hearing or a trial. Among Government officials, however, it becomes a secret status symbol to have a third child in violation of the law. The Population Law is a condemnation of Luke's human rights; it negates his very existence and denies him a place in society. Human rights are not considered inalienable under the totalitarian Government regime that controls the nation in which Luke lives. Even the rich Barons find themselves unable to flout the Population Law when their children begin to come of age. As this first generation of third children begins to grow up, both parents and shadow children begin to face the harsh reality of their position. As the Talbot family learns the hard way, the Population Law is not likely to be repealed anytime soon. By the end of the book, Luke comes to terms with the idea of the long, cautious bid for political change that lies ahead for him, assuming he survives into adulthood.

The Woods

The woods adjacent to the Garner house had once guarded Luke's privacy from the outside world. As a hidden child living in an isolated farmhouse, he had been able to go outside and play in the shelter of the woods until one day when Luke is 12 years old, the Government chops the woods down. Once the woods are gone, Luke is forbidden to go outside or even into the kitchen of his home where he might be seen from the window by the construction workers building houses where the woods used to be. Eventually, the new houses replace the woods, causing Luke's parents to fear even more for his safety. Had the woods not been chopped down, however, Luke would have never met Jen and may never have received another chance to live a semi-normal life.

The Population Disaster

This is the first of the three thick Government books, loaned to him by Jen, that Luke reads. It contains a chapter about growing food indoors, hydroponically. When Luke casually mentions the idea to his father, it inspires Dad to try a hydroponics setup in their house.

The Population Reversal

This is one of the three thick books, published by the Government, that Jen gives to Luke for background reading on the Population Law. It contains Government theories about the need to have and strictly enforce such a law. According to Jen, this book can't be judged by its cover. The Government is stupid and the theories in this book are

propaganda and lies, cleverly dressed up to look like a thoughtful study of the population issue.

The Famine Years Revisited

This is one of the three Government published books Jen gives Luke to read. This text discusses the years of drought, famine and starvation which led the Government to enact the Population Law. The book makes Luke feel guilty for being alive. He thinks his existence is causing other people to starve.

The Chat Room

Created by Jen Talbot, this secret chat room allows hidden children to meet online and befriend one another. Only third children are allowed to have the password and Jen uses the chat room to promote her rally. After the unsuccessful rally, the Population Police learn of the chat room and monitor all communications in the room in hopes of catching and killing more third children.

The Attic Vents

Luke's dad often complains about having to heat the attic for his third child when so much of the heat just leaks out of these vents anyway. However, his parents don't realize the vents in Luke's attic bedroom are his only window onto the world. Luke has secretly learned to climb up to the ceiling vents to look out on the neighborhood. Since Luke is a hidden third child, he is not allowed to look out the windows of his house for fear someone on the outside will spot him. Yet from this perch underneath the attic vents, he is able to watch the new houses being constructed and eventually, his careful surveillance results in his catching a glimpse of Jen's face at her window.

The Fur Coats

Mr. Talbot uses the expensive furs hanging in his closet to buy off the Population Police who come to search the house for Luke.

The Mirror System

The Mirror System is a custom-built mirror installation that provides Jen a safe means of looking out her windows. It is the richer, Baron equivalent to the attic vents that provide Luke a window onto the world.

Lee Grant's I.D. Card

This all-important fake I.D. allows Luke to come out of hiding and live a more normal life. Lee Grant was a real boy, a Baron, whose parents, even in their grief, choose to donate their son's I.D. card to help a hidden child in need. The I.D. card is donated after Lee's death much the way organs were once donated by the dead to help the living.

Setting

Although *Among the Hidden* does not have a specific setting, the story takes place in an America not too different and not too distant from our own. Throughout the course of the novel, the reader learns a lot about the society in which Luke and his family live. Sometime about ten years before the beginning of the novel, the country experienced a food shortage, and in order to control the population growth and preserve the food supply, the government passed laws forbidding parents from having more than two children. Luke's mother accidentally became pregnant after she had already had two children, and she decided to keep and hide her "third." This totalitarian government places other restrictions on its citizens, such as controlling what type of crops and livestock farmers may raise, forbidding junk food, confiscating farmland and woods for building houses, controlling the media, and forcing people to become vegetarians. These rules are enforced by the Population Police who hunt down and punish those who disobey. At the same time that these laws were passed, the government made a conscious decision to create an upper class, the Barons, who run and control the government and who enjoy many special privileges, such as permission to keep pets, access to junk food and soda, and new luxury houses. By contrast to the Barons, Luke's family scratches out a living on a marginal farm. Traditionally, they have planted crops and raised hogs. However, in light of new laws, they must sell all their livestock that they depend on for income because the smell of their farm offends the Baron families living in the new houses built on the formerly forested land adjacent to theirs. This unprofitable sale throws the family further into poverty and pushes Luke's mother to take a job in a factory processing chickens that only the Barons will be allowed to eat. At the same time, the government has confiscated the woods adjoining their farm on which to build luxury homes for Baron families. Thus, a productive farm is turned into a wasteland at a time when food is supposedly in short supply.

Although it is unclear what the consequences of disobedience would be, Luke's family and, presumably, other citizens are terrified of the government and its Population Police. The Garners disobeyed the government once by bearing and hiding Luke, but now they dedicate their whole existence to making sure that they never break the rules again. They are willing to impose ever increasing restrictions on their child—he can no longer eat at the table with the family, no television, no radio, no walking around on the first floor of the house, no looking out the window—all in an effort to avoid their being caught. While the Baron families have more wealth, more technology, and more power, they are also ultimately controlled by the Population Police and by the rules of the totalitarian government. They may indulge in potato chips, chocolate chip cookies, and soda, but in the end, even they cannot get away with bearing and hiding a third child.

Luke retreats to the attic as a way of separating from his family during his adolescence and finds that he can continue his development by carefully peering out the air vents in the roof and watching first the housing construction and then the residents of the new houses. He discovers, like many adolescents, that the world is full of many people who bear no resemblance to his family; in fact, he discovers that there is somebody else just like him living right next door. It is at this point in the story that Luke, yearning to go

meet this person, begins to question his own courage and ability to act when he ponders whether he is a coward or whether he is cautious. Eventually, he dares to sprint to the house, break in the screen door, and learns that there is a name for what he and his new friend Jen are—shadow children.

One of the most powerful qualities of this novel is that its setting, the world that Luke and Jen live in, is identical to the contemporary United States except for the totalitarian policies of its government. The Garners' farm, the food they eat, and the clothes they wear, as well as the luxury homes, sports equipment, cars, chat rooms, and even the Barons' chocolate chip cookies create a realistic setting that seems a great deal like the world of contemporary young adults. Even most of its manipulative and restrictive practices (population control, food rationing, propaganda, censorship, privacy breaches) can be found in the world today.

This setting makes it easy for readers to imagine themselves in the position of Luke or Jen or their families and to ponder the impact that such a world might have on them. By the time Jen and the shadow children are murdered at their rally, the scenario seems all too real and almost too possible.

Social Sensitivity

Among the Hidden is a young adult novel that can be used to discuss a number of provocative and relevant social issues. The population control laws in the story were supposedly necessary to reduce a population that was growing more rapidly than the country's food supply. Luke's story can lead to an interesting discussion of population growth, allocation of the world's supply of oil and other resources, and the production and distribution of agricultural products. The right to privacy is not a feature of Luke's world. This government employs both censorship and propaganda to control the lives of its citizens, and the use of media and technology both to monitor and to manipulate behavior raises questions about these features of life in contemporary America. Luke and Jen's behaviors and aspirations challenge gender roles and stereotypes throughout the novel. Jen adopts a tough and prickly exterior and prides herself on risk taking while Luke is more cautious and sensitive. Examining the behavior of these two characters can provide interesting insights into the choices and expectations faced by adolescent boys and girls.

Because Among the Hidden ventures into many thought-provoking areas, Haddix also brings up several issues that some may view as controversial in a novel written for younger adolescents. As Luke learns to question the actions and the authority of the government, he and Jen express many views that are anti-government; for example, that the government is incompetent and stupid.

While this may be true in their world, some may interpret this as encouragement to view government in such an unflattering light.

This government also employs a number of controversial technologies, such as abortion and gender selection, to accomplish its goals, which may be viewed as inappropriate for adolescents. Finally, the story has a very upsetting and violent conclusion when Jen and the other shadow children who attend the rally are shot to death while protesting at the White House. While this event is consistent with the story, some may object to this type of violence in an adolescent novel.

Literary Qualities

In *Among the Hidden*, Haddix weaves elements of a dystopian novel into a contemporary realistic story to explore important themes and issues. Just as a Utopia is an imaginary place that represents a society where everything is as ideal as possible, a dystopia is a world in which everything is as bad as possible. Examples of classic dystopian novels are *Brave New World* and *1984*. These kinds of books for young readers are rarely completely evil or hopeless, but rather they contain dystopian elements, such as in this case totalitarian governments, loss of free will, manipulation of the truth, and misuse of technology. By combining these elements with a coming of age story that will appeal to younger adolescents, Haddix draws readers into the story and inspires them to ponder the larger issues facing society.

This story is told from Luke's point of view, using a third person narrator who sees the world through Luke's eyes. Throughout the course of the novel, Luke learns to see his world more broadly and clearly, and so does the reader who knows only what Luke knows and grows in understanding along with Luke. Haddix uses both conversations between Luke and the other characters and Luke's interior monologues to tell the story. These conversations allow both Luke and the reader to check their views of reality against their experiences with other characters in the novel: In *Among the Hidden*, Haddix employs a journalistic writing style. This style reflects her training and background as a journalist, and it is also highly effective in the telling of this story. Luke's world is plain and stark with few colors, smells, or sounds, and this setting is reflected in Haddix's straightforward language. There are few descriptions of Luke's surroundings except when he briefly ventures outside. Also, this is the story of an eleven-year-old boy who has had very limited experiences; he has never even seen the other side of the barn and the field beyond. Haddix's use of simple language also reflects those limitations and casts over the whole work a sense of the factual and real.

Themes

Overpopulation

Margaret Peterson Haddix touches on both social and environmental themes in *Among the Hidden*. By creating a make-believe future in which America has become a totalitarian state, the author provides a means for exploring the potential consequences of overpopulation. This imagined future provides a marvelous way to introduce discussion of such socio-environmental issues as overpopulation and population control, particularly in a democracy like The United States of America. It is an excellent way to engage 10- to 14-year-olds in a dialogue about the responsibilities that come along with the freedoms provided by the Constitution. In the book, the Population Law curtails the basic human rights of children like Luke. Since the issue of overpopulation occurred long before Luke was born, Luke must study history to try to figure out why the Population Law was passed.

Jen provides him with literature from the groups who support and the groups who oppose the Population Law. Upon reading the conflicting viewpoints, Luke only becomes further confused. The country *is* overpopulated and many people had to starve to death before the Population Law was enacted. However, the law is a poor solution to the problem because it hurts children like Luke. Luke's studies teach him that there might be other, better ways, of solving the starvation problem. He reads about hydroponics, the science of growing food indoors. Also, Luke's family has figured out how to feed their hogs with leftover grain that they can't sell; since the grain would have gone to waste otherwise, it really costs nothing for the Garners to raise their livestock. Unfortunately, the Government outlaws both of these potential solutions to the food crisis. This makes Luke believe that the Government is in the wrong because it supports the Population Law while banning practices like hydroponics and growing livestock that could help feed so many people. However, when Luke talks to Mr. Talbot at the end of the novel, Mr. Talbot explains that both the Government and the rebel points of view are slanted and extreme. The truth, claims Mr. Talbot, lies somewhere in the middle. Ultimately, Luke decides that the Population Law is indeed wrong; however, he also comes to see that the hunger problem it addresses is very real. Luke hopes to find more ways of feeding the hungry so that someday there will be no reason for the Government to have a law against children like Luke.

Social Order/Caste Systems

A pecking order exists in all human societies. In some societies, however, social classes have become so rigid that they may be considered permanent caste systems. The slave-slaveowner dynamic of the American South is one such example of a permanent caste system, enforced by both society and government. Apartheid in South Africa is another such example from recent history. In the make-believe world of Margaret Peterson Haddix' book, society's upper crust has been determined by government



selection. These elite families, called Barons, are made up of Government officials and other people who find themselves in favor with the Government. In many ways, the caste system in *Among the Hidden* is rigid and impenetrable. Those of a lower class, like the Garner family, are kept in poverty by the Government. They are not allowed entrée into the Baron class. However, the system is not totally inflexible, for the Government can cast Barons out of the privileged class and consign them, too, to lifelong poverty whenever it chooses.

The Garners are treated completely differently than the Talbots in terms of how much salary, food rations and respect they receive. As Jen's father explains to Luke, the only people expected to follow the Government's laws are the working class and poor, like Luke's family. The Government does not tell them this, of course. In fact, the Government spends a great many advertising dollars convincing the lower classes how important it is that everyone live by the rules. But Government officials don't live by their own rules and they don't care if the rules are fair. The rules are put into place by greedy people who want to keep the lower classes in economic slavery. The Government wants most people to work very hard to support the luxurious lifestyle of the lucky few, the Barons. To squeeze the most out of the working poor, the Government keeps them poor to inspire them to work harder. As Jen's dad tells Luke, "The Government justifies keeping everyone else in poverty because people seem to work the hardest when they're right on the edge of survival" (Chapter 28, pg. 136). Totalitarian governments, such as the one Ms. Haddix writes about, typically restrict their people's access to communication to keep them ignorant and poor. In the book, the Government keeps the people poor by controlling crop prices, sending out inflated tax bills and banning activities that could bring in additional income, like hydroponics or raising hogs. However, rich Barons are protected by the Government when they break laws. The Barons who comprise the upper class of this caste system protect each other even as they live off the backs of the poor.

Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience is a wonderful age-appropriate topic to explore in this middle-grade fiction book. Luke Garner is 12 years old at the outset of the story. An obedient boy all his life, Luke is now struggling, as do many adolescents, with the need to become his own person. Individuation by rebelling against the rules is normal for a child Luke's age and by placing his rebellion in the context of civil disobedience, the author teaches responsible rebellion to her target audience. Peaceful protests and the right to assembly are core concepts of a democracy. Jen's rally is a non-violent protest designed to protect her rights and the rights of the other shadow children in the book. Teachers and parents can explore the value of democracy with their children by explaining that peaceful rallies like Jen's are supported by a free, democratic government.

The tragic result of Jen's rally opens the discussion of personal liberties. What is allowed in a democracy which may not be allowed under other forms of government? The benefits of living in a free, democratic society go hand in hand with civil responsibility. By teaching these core concepts, author Margaret Peterson Haddix

teaches children the value of voting and participating in their democracy, as well as to appreciate the freedoms they do have. Unfortunately, as Luke learns the hard way, rash rebellion like Jen's is risky. There are responsible ways to bring about change and Luke realizes that to succeed, he must be patient and persevere. The responsible approach to civil disobedience advocated by the author is a timely lesson for child readers on the cusp of adolescence. Parents and teachers can take advantage of the civil disobedience theme in *Among the Hidden* to teach their young charges the value of patient, thoughtful decision-making, as opposed to rash rebellion.

Themes/Characters

In *Among the Hidden*, Haddix uses the development of Luke Garner from a frightened and powerless child into a self-aware, confident young adult to explore several important themes. Unlike Utopian and dystopian works, which describe imaginary societies, this novel concentrates on the maturation of one twelve-year-old boy as he learns about the society he lives in, the freedom he has lost, and the costs of choosing to make a difference in the world. Luke confronts the developmental tasks of all young adults, but he does so in a dystopian world where he is not even supposed to exist.

As the story begins, Luke's mother is exhorting him to get in the house and hide immediately because the government has begun to cut down the trees next to their house that have previously hidden Luke from view when he is outside. Until he turned six years old, Luke's family sheltered him from the knowledge that he was different, and he believed that when he turned six he would be able to go out into the world like his brothers. Although he has always been the only one in his family to ask "why" questions, as he has grown up he has learned to be somewhat satisfied with his life. As a "third" child, he has always been special to his mother; she chose to keep him in defiance of the government.

However, the government is cutting away more of Luke's life as it takes down the trees. Luke begins to realize that not only is he different from the rest of his family, but he is actually illegal—"There is a law against Luke." The government's actions in cutting down the woods and then forcing the sale of the family's hogs oblige Luke to stay in the house, and he becomes even more isolated as he withdraws first from his brothers and father and then from his mother.

Just at the time when most adolescents begin to separate from their families by venturing out into the world, Luke separates from his by withdrawing to the attic.

Jen Talbot, who challenges gender stereotypes with her rough and tough appearance and attitude, introduces Luke to a whole new world, so much so that when he returns home, he tunes out his family. Jen prides herself on being as disobedient as possible without getting caught; she participates vigorously in an Internet chat room for hidden children and even posts antigovernment comments on government web sites. From Jen, Luke learns not only about disobedience but also about wealth, poverty, divorce, gender selection, and potato chips. Jen tells him about the history of the population laws, the corrupt and manipulative practices of the government, and gives him new books and computer printouts to read.

But Jen introduces Luke to two even more important new ideas—friendship and thinking critically about the world. When Jen deliberately cuts her hand to hide the fact of Luke's existence from her parents, Luke is amazed that she would do something like that for him when they just met.

Later, when Jen seems not to be home, Luke realizes that he now has someone else to worry about other than himself. After carefully reading the books and articles that Jen gives him, Luke begins to question what the truth is since all the books and articles appear to be true, but they contradict each other. In addition, when he realizes that the Barons have lots of money and power but rarely get to eat meat while his family is dirt poor but eats well everyday, he begins to see more complexity in the world. Finally, when Jen is killed by the government while protesting at the White House, Luke realizes that Jen has been naive and gullible, that she underestimated both the fear of the hidden children and the power of the government and that ultimately she was just as manipulated as everyone else.

Jen and Luke have their worst disagreement over whether it is necessary to act to change the situation or whether it is better to accept things the way they are and just hope they will get better. Luke tries to change things for the better by suggesting hydroponics to his father as a way to grow crops without land, which temporarily inspires his father until his efforts are forbidden by the government. Although Jen is very angry with him, Luke refuses to go with her to the protest rally because it is too dangerous for him and for his family. But he cannot stop Jen and, as it turns out, Luke is right and Jen is killed.

This brutal act forces Luke to examine his situation even further, to come to know himself even better, and to find enough courage to move out into the world. Through Jen's father, he discovers that there really is no objective truth to rely on. Both sides have created propaganda that does not really represent the true situation. Jen's father is involved in a complex set of lies to his own child, his employer, and to the Population Police; he even lies to Luke when he tells him there is a door in the back of the closet in order to get him to hide there.

Since there is no truth to rely on, Luke realizes that he must rely on himself and that perhaps he can succeed because of who he is, someone who does not believe that the world owes him anything, someone who can be "more patient, more cautious, more practical."

Luke knows that he has to leave the safety and support of his family if he is to make a difference in the world. He tells his mother, "But Mother, I don't want to go.

It's just that.. . I have to. I can't spend the rest of my life hiding in the attic.... I want to do something with my life. Figure out ways to help other third kids. Make—Make a difference in the world."

Style

Point of View

Among the Hidden is told entirely from the third person limited point of view of its main character, 12-year-old Luke Garner. Young Luke has been sheltered his entire life. His lack of life experience makes his point of view more or less a blank slate as the novel begins. He has no experience with society or Government regulations, having lived his entire life closeted inside his family's residence. Thus, when Luke is thrust by circumstances into a political battle, his reactions are refreshingly pure and unguarded. At first, when he reads the thick books that Jen calls Government propaganda, Luke's ignorance makes him highly susceptible to believing the propaganda. He becomes convinced that he has no right to exist. Luke believes the Government point of view completely, at least initially, because he has never been exposed to any alternate points of view. As a result, when he reads computer printouts written by underground organizations that defy the Government, Luke does not know what to believe. He is thoroughly confused by the great disparity between the point of view of those in favor of the Population Law and those against the Population Law.

Jen blithely informs him that, of course, the opposition's viewpoint is correct. She passionately believes in her right to exist and refuses to entertain the Government's point of view for one second. However, to Luke's credit, he displays both maturity and discernment by carefully considering both sides of the question. Eventually, Jen's dad helps Luke see that the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Luke forms his own judgment. By the end of the story he firmly believes the Population Law is wrong, but he advocates finding better solutions to the population problem instead of just opposing the Government's solution blindly as Jen did.

Setting

The setting of *Among the Hidden* remains nebulous throughout the novel. Author Margaret Peterson Haddix takes advantage of the writer's prerogative to create a wholly fictional world and yet that world resembles modern-day America in so many ways that the reader will feel largely at home in this fictional setting. The author drops certain clues into the narrative, hinting that the story may take place in the future of the United States of America. In many ways, Jen, Luke, Matthew and Mark act like all-American kids. There is an Internet and Jen uses chat rooms just like modern American children do. However, the differences between the fictional setting and real life remind the reader constantly that Luke's world is very different from the reader's in some very disturbing ways. Instead of the free Internet access provided by many modern American libraries, in Luke's world, Internet access is restricted by the Government. Just as the American government currently regulates crop prices to some extent, the Government in Luke's country does so as well. However, Luke's Government is totalitarian and its regulations

are much stricter and markedly less fair than those enforced by the democratic government of the United States.

Haddix uses her fictional world to underscore the importance of the freedoms available in a democratic society. As such, her novel, *Among the Hidden*, serves as an excellent introduction to civil responsibility for her young audience. Luke's research demonstrates the process of discernment and choice that citizens of a free society must embrace to keep their society free. Haddix' totalitarian vision of the future makes this novel a cautionary tale about what might happen if Americans agree to exchange their basic human rights for the dubious security of total government control. Given today's political debates about giving up freedoms in the name of Homeland Security, Haddix' book is more timely now than it was when it was first published in 1998.

Language and Meaning

The language in *Among the Hidden* is targeted toward older children. The protagonist, Luke Garner, is 12 years old when the novel begins and since the story is written from his point of view, the language reflects language that a 12-year-old might use. Author Margaret Peterson Haddix does a tremendous job of conveying complex concepts in very simple language. To accomplish this goal, she relies heavily on words that convey emotion. Luke may be too young to grasp the vagaries of social and environmental politics, but he is mature enough to know when something simply feels wrong. His objections to the Population Law stem from the fact that he is treated unfairly by his family, yet he is an emotionally mature boy and realizes that his family treats him differently because they hope to protect him from an unspoken, but certainly terrible, fate. By focusing on words that convey Luke's emotions, the author is able to communicate complicated themes quite clearly. Haddix relies on the old adage that children often perceive things more clearly than adults do to make her case against totalitarianism.

As the story progresses and Luke learns to read from thick Government-issued books that contain a lot of big words, the reader notices a profound change in the language used by the author. She begins to incorporate some more complex vocabulary words designed to challenge her youthful readers. The novel thus provides a good primer for teaching older children the vocabulary of politics and social change. Teachers and parents might use the vocabulary words in the text as a teaching tool when discussing the novel with young readers.

Structure

The novel is divided into 30 brief chapters. It is a linear narrative that occasionally ventures into flashback as the young protagonist, Luke, recalls key events in his life which influence his current decision-making. On the whole, the story follows the classic novel structure of introduction, turning point, conflict, climax and resolution. Luke's everyday world is introduced to the reader. Just as the reader begins to grasp how

challenging Luke's daily life must be, the author works in additional obstacles for her protagonist to manage. Suddenly, Luke's lifestyle becomes intolerable and conflicted. His parents try to keep everything the way it's always been. They can find no better solution to keeping Luke alive in defiance of the Population Law than to hide him just as they've always done. However, once the new houses are built next to Luke's once isolated farmhouse, hiding him becomes a much greater challenge. Luke's parents are forced to keep him locked up in the attic. He is no longer allowed any fresh air, sunshine, or even a view. His ordinary world is transformed into a nightmare from which Luke must escape.

These pivotal circumstances thrust Luke from his safe confinement into the wider world to seek his answers. Meeting Jen is a major turning point in Luke's life and will ultimately lead him to the resolution he seeks. Luke is faced with some difficult choices along the way. His character is forced to adapt and grow in response to the obstacles in the story. The story arc rises to a climax after Jen's rally when the Population Police arrive at the Talbot home in search of Luke. Jen's dad steps in and saves the day. Out of loyalty to his daughter, Mr. Talbot provides the final resolution to the story by giving Luke a way out of his confinement.

Quotes

"He had never disobeyed the order to hide. Even as a toddler, barely able to walk in the backyard's tall grass, he had somehow understood the fear in his mother's voice."

(Chapter 1, pg. 1)

"Then, more to herself than to him, Mother added, 'And things could be worse.'

Somehow, that wasn't comforting. Luke didn't know why, but he had a feeling what she really meant was that things were going to get worse. He snuggled tighter against Mother, hoping he was wrong." (Chapter 3, pg. 19)

"It was strange-he should hate the new houses for replacing his woods and forcing him to stay indoors. But he'd half-fallen in love with them, having watched every foundation poured, every wooden skeleton of walls and roofs raised to the sky. They were his main entertainment, aside from talking to Mother when she came upstairs for what she called 'my Luke breaks.'" (Chapter 6, pg. 28)

"Maybe it was a thief. Or a maid, come early.

No. It had been a child. A-

He didn't even let himself think what another child in that house would be." (Chapter 9, pg. 42)

"When Luke went down to supper, he saw that Mother had set his two loaves of bread out on the china plate she used for holidays and special occasions. She was showing off the bread the way she used to tape up the crooked drawings Matthew and Mark brought home from school when they were little." (Chapter 10, pg. 45)

"'There!' she said cheerfully, lining up boxes of crackers and bags of fruit. 'This way, you won't even miss us.'

Her eyes begged him not to complain.

'Uh-huh,' he said, trying to sound game." (Chapter 12, pg. 51)

"'Don't you have to hide?' he asked.

'Sure,' Jen said. 'Mostly. But my parents are very good at bribery. And so am I.' She grinned wickedly. Then she squinted at Luke. 'How *did* you know I was a third child? How did you know I was here?'" (pp. 64-65)

"'We're all gonna get real I.D.'s that say who we really are!!!! WE AREN'T FAKES! WE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO HIDE!'" (Chapter 20, pg. 97)

"Don't you ever feel like saying, 'I can't take this anymore'?" she asked. She leaped up and began pacing the floor. 'Don't you ever want to just walk out into the sunshine and say, "Forget hiding! I don't care!"? Am I the only one who feels this way?'

'No,' Luke whispered." (Chapter 20, pg. 98)

"Another choice. Another choice.' She paced, then jerked back to face Luke. 'Sure. You can be a coward and hope someone else changes the world for you. You can hide up in that attic yours until someone knocks at your door and says, "Oh, yeah, they freed the hidden. Want to come out?" Is that what you want?" (Chapter 22, pg. 111)

"It's something about having parents who are farmers, not lawyers. And not being a Baron. It's people like you who change history. People like me-we just let things happen to us." (Chapter 24, pg. 117)

"Guns had been outlawed for everyone but Government officials long before he was born. But he recognized the object pointed at him from books and Dad's descriptions. Dad had always talked about hunting rifles and shotguns, big guns to bring down deer or wolves. This gun was smaller. Meant to kill humans." (Chapter 27, pg. 125)

"But Jen said there'd be too many people to shoot. She said there'd be a thousand,' Luke protested, as if Jen's words could change what he was hearing.

'Our Jen had too much faith in the bravery of her fellow hidden,' Jen's father said.

Luke flinched. 'I told her I couldn't go,' he said. 'I told her! It's not my fault!'" (Chapter 27, pp. 128-129)

"A chill ran down Luke's spine. So he would die, just like Jen. Or not like her-she had gone bravely. He would be caught like a mouse in its hole." (Chapter 27, pg. 131)

"The Government justifies keeping everyone else in poverty because people seem to work the hardest when they're right on the edge of survival,' he continued. 'The Government does try to make sure that most people-the ones who cooperate-do survive. If you've heard your parents talking about other farmers, you'll know that nobody loses their farms anymore. But, also, nobody ever makes enough to live comfortably.'

Luke thought about his parents' constant worries about money. Was it all unnecessary? Were they just being manipulated?" (Chapter 28, pg. 136)

"If Luke had been one of the Population Police, Jen's dad would have scared him to pieces. Luke would have backed out muttering, 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry.' He never would have believed that Jen's dad was hiding a third child." (Chapter 29, pg. 139)

"Jen's dad was a good liar, there was no doubt about that. How could Luke trust him? Luke raised his head and watched as Jen's dad scribbled something else on the paper. His expression was full of concern and Luke knew, somehow, that he was trustworthy. He easily could have turned Luke in and gotten praise and another commendation

ceremony. But how confusing, to never know when someone was lying." (Chapter 29, pg. 144)

"Luke remembered how bored he'd felt before meeting Jen, how desperate he'd been to do something-anything!-besides read and daydream. He'd been so desperate that he'd risked his life for the chance of meeting another third child. Did he want to spend the rest of his life feeling that desperate? Did he want to just...waste it?" (Chapter 29, pg. 145)

Adaptations

Among the Hidden is the first book in a projected sequence of stories about the hidden children, and Haddix continues the story of Luke and the other shadow children through several more books. Among the Imposters follows Luke as he assumes the identity of Lee Grant and enrolls in the Hendricks School for Boys. Among the Betrayed and Among the Barons continue the story of the network of hidden children.

Readers who enjoy these books may also be interested in reading other dystopia written for young adults that explore the challenges faced by other adolescents in future worlds where Utopian ideas have not worked out very well. Titles of interest include *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *Off the Road* by Nina Bawden, *River Rats* by Caroline Steverman, *Shade's Children* by Garth Nix, and *Found* by June Oldham. More mature young adult readers may also find *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *1984* by George Orwell to be of interest.

Topics for Discussion

What are some of the differences between a totalitarian government like the one in the book and a democratic government like the United States of America?

Did you notice any ways in which the government in the book and the government of your country are similar?

How would you feel if you lost your freedom and had to hide from the police to survive? Do you think you would handle it as well as Luke does? Why or why not?

Do you think Jen was courageous or foolish to risk her life at the rally? Or both? Why?

Had you been Luke, would you have taken the fake I.D. offered by Jen's dad? Why or why not?

Mr. Talbot lied to the Population Police to remain true to his daughter. Do you believe he did the right thing by breaking the law to save his daughter's life? Why or why not?

Jen tells Luke she's his ticket out. What do you think would have happened to Luke if he had never met Jen?

1. Who are the hidden in this story? Are Luke, Jen, and the shadow children the only ones who are hidden? In what ways are the other characters in the story hidden?

2. Why is Luke's family so terrified of the government? What strategies does the government use to make a family like Luke's feel so powerless?

3. Early in the novel, Luke says that his family will ask who, what, and when questions, but does not consider what questions are worth asking. Why?

4. Discuss the differences between the Barons and ordinary citizens. How are the families of Jen and Luke similar and different?

5. Jen tells Luke that "hope doesn't mean anything" and that "action is the only thing that counts." Luke says that people like him just let things happen. Do you agree with Jen or with Luke? Explain.

6. When Luke first sees Jen, he thinks that she is a boy. Why? How would this story be different if Jen were a boy?

7. Why do you think that Luke is so reluctant to accept the false identity card that Jen's father offers him?

8. Jen's stepfather is a member of the Population Police, yet he harbors a third child in his own home. Is he brave and admirable or cowardly and hypocritical? What do you think happens to him after he drops Luke off at his new boarding school?

9. Describe Luke's relationships with his mother and with his father. How do these relationships change during the course of the novel?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Imagine that five years have passed since Luke left in Mr. Talbot's car with his false identity card. Write a letter from Luke's mother to Luke telling him what his family is doing now.

2. Pretend that Luke is about to graduate from the Hendricks School for Boys.

Write a letter from Luke to his family telling them what he has learned there and what his future plans are.

3. Jen and the other hidden children communicate via a chat room on the Internet. Create a transcript of an imaginary chat room session among the hidden children debating whether to demonstrate at the White House.

4. The population control laws in *Among the Hidden* are fictional, but contemporary China does have similar laws that limit the number of children parents can have. Explore the population reduction laws of China and the impact of those laws on the Chinese people. Evaluate the laws' effectiveness and explore the ways people use to evade the law.

5. Although there is still a president in the White House in *Among the Hidden*, the government of this future United States has become a totalitarian regime. What are the characteristics of a totalitarian government in comparison to a democratic government? Find out which countries in the world currently have totalitarian governments? What would it be like to live in one of those countries?

6. Many governments have used propaganda to convince their citizens to behave in particular ways. Find some examples of government propaganda from the past and discover how effective they were.

7. Jen believes that everything she reads on the computer is true, but her stepfather tells Luke that he slanted the information that he sent her via the computer. Find an example of slanted information on the Internet and write a critique of it.

8. Create a newspaper advertisement or a poster to remind ordinary citizens about one of the government policies necessary to control population growth (third child law, vegetarianism, anti-junk food, obeying the Population Police, agricultural controls).

Further Study

"Haddix, Margaret Peterson." In *Something about the Author*, vol. 94. Detroit: Gale, 1998. This is a brief biography of Haddix as well as a critical overview of her novels.

Hoy, Sherry. Review of *Among the Hidden*.

Book Report (May/June 1999): 63. This reviewer recommends the novel as definite food for thought and discussion stating that it contains some of the same tones as *The Giver*.

"Margaret Peterson Haddix." In *Contemporary Authors Online*. Detroit: Gale, 2001.

This is a brief biographical article including a listing of the numerous awards and honors Haddix's works have won along with a detailed discussion of the critical reception of her works.

Review of *Among the Hidden*. *Kirkus Reviews* (July 15, 1998). According to this reviewer, Haddix offers much for discussion by presenting a world that is not too different from the United States in the early 2000s and that provides readers with a new appreciation for their own world.

Review of *Among the Hidden*. *Publishers Weekly* (August 31, 1998): 76-77. According to this reviewer, although the plot is sometimes implausible and the characterizations brittle, the story is unsettling and thought provoking enough to keep readers hooked.

Rogers, Susan L. Review of *Among the Hidden*. *School Library Journal* (September 1998): 203. According to this reviewer, this is an exciting and compelling story about the loss of free will and the choice to defy authority in order to make a difference.

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