

# **Anna and the Swallow Man Study Guide**

**Anna and the Swallow Man by Gavriel Savit**

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# Plot Summary

This study guide was created using the following version of this book: Savit, Gavriel. *Anna and the Swallow Man*. Alfred A Knopf. 2016.

*Anna and the Swallow Man* tells the story of a Anna, a young girl living in Poland during World War II. After her father, an academic, is rounded up by the Gestapo, she is left in the care of her father's friend Herr Doktor Fuchsmann. While Anna is unaware that her father is never returning, Herr Doktor Fuchsmann abandons her.

Left alone in the city, Anna is not sure what to do. She is locked out of her apartment and is left to her own devices. She encounters a tall, nameless man whom she learns to call the Swallow Man. Although he is reluctant, the Swallow Man takes Anna under his wing.

He teaches her his methods for avoiding getting caught during the war. His true identity remains elusive and he explains to Anna that is key for their survival. He tells her that it is best that she pretend that he is her father and that she not use her name. In fact, he does not believe that a name should be used at all. He teaches her to let people offer to help instead of asking for their help as well.

He teaches her how to live off what they find in the forest. The Swallow Man keeps them out of the cities and they take different routes to different place. When they encounter Reb Hirschl, Anna befriends him quickly. The Swallow Man does not want Reb Hirschl to join them, but does not explain to Anna why he does not want a Jewish man to join them.

Anna wears the Swallow Man down and Reb Hirschl joins them on their journey. The two men do not like one another. Reb Hirschl is warm toward Anna, while the Swallow Man remains aloof. As they continue through the forest, they encounter a Peddler who tries to sell them food, including offering them meat the Swallow Man knows came from a human.

When the Peddler tries to negotiate with Swallow Man and Reb Hirschl for alone time with Anna, Swallow Man takes matters into his own hands. He kills the Peddler to protect them. While Reb Hirschl does not approve of what the Swallow Man has done, he understands it. He decides to go out on his own and later the Swallow Man and Anna find Reb Hirschl's body hanging from a tree.

Along their journey, the Swallow Man has been taking medication three times a day. When he finally runs out of the pills, Anna begins to notice changes in his behavior. When they reach a country estate, Anna believes the Swallow Man is going mad. She is able to negotiate with a pharmacist to show him her body in exchange for the pills. Once Swallow Man begins taking his medication, his behavior begins to return to normal.



Swallow Man finally gets Anna to a fisherman and puts her on a boat to sail for a neutral country. He stays behind him, but makes sure she will be safe through the end of the war.



# Chapters 1 - 2

## Summary

Chapter 1 is titled "What Do You Say?". It begins on November 6, 1939, seven-year-old Anna is unaware of the Nazi activity going on around her. Her father, an academic, is taken into custody, and she is left alone in the care of a family friend, Herr Doktor Fuchsmann. Anna has learned to speak many languages from her father, so much so that she wonders what her own language is. Living in Krakow, she is aware of the soldiers. She is confused when one of the soldiers' laughter reminds her of Herr Doktor, whom she regards as nice, yet the soldier is not. Anna is too young to understand the concept of war, but recognizes that her "cookie supply" (9) has been affected, causing her to not approve of the war.

Anna spends her first night under the counter at Herr Doktor's shop because he refused to take her home. He brings her a little bit of food in the morning. While she holds out hope that her father will come back, her optimism fades quickly. Anna goes to her apartment and finds the door locked. Mrs. Niemczyk, the neighbor across the hall, does not offer to help when she sees Anna in the hallway. Instead she keeps checking out the door to see if Anna is still locked out and sitting in the hallway.

Hungry and cold, Anna heads out as the sun is going down. She tries waiting on the street for her father. While she waits, she hears footsteps approaching. Behind her is a very tall man in a brown three-piece suit. Anna watches the tall man talk with a soldier, asking him to light his cigarette. He complies and leaves. The man speaks to Anna in German, asking her name. She does not answer and he begins to ask in other languages: Polish, Russian, and Yiddish. She wants to answer his questions, but does not know how. When he asks if she is okay, she begins to cry. He calls a bird down from the roof of the building behind them and Anna stops crying as she looks at the bird standing before them; she even smiles. Anna returns the answers to the questions the man asked her in the corresponding languages. Her last answer is in French, a language the man does not speak. She explains that she does not speak Bird. She hears the man laugh for "the first of three times" (21) that she will ever hear him laugh.

Anna comes to know him as the Swallow Man. She connects with him because of the multiple languages he speaks. She understands that her father is not coming back. The Swallow Man gives her a cookie and tells her to stay hidden. She recognizes that it is wise for her to respond to someone in the language they speak to her instead of her speaking a language first. He tells her again to stay hidden and when he walks away from her, she decides to follow him.

Chapter two is titled "Follow the Leader." Anna follows the Swallow Man through the city. He is easy to keep track of because of his height. By the end of the day she has followed him to the outskirts of the city. With the sun setting, she becomes aware of the cold. She sees flashlight beams and remembers that the man told her to stay out of



sight. She spots a lantern, a man, and his dog approaching the Swallow Man. She calls out. He is relieved when he sees her and goes to her. He pretends that she is his daughter and explains that he was worried that she had gotten lost. He apologizes to the man for trespassing. The man gives them directions back to the road and the Swallow Man and Anna leave; he thanks her for interfering.

As they make their way to the road, they do not speak. Anna does not know what to think. He ends up telling her how dangerous the world is and asks if she is scared. She explains that she is and he believes this to be good. He asks if she knows people in Krakow who can care for her. He will take her back in the morning and find somewhere for her to go.

Anna thinks about how people think of her as being a precocious child. The Swallow Man tells her that it is not a good time for a girl to be without her father. He laughs for the second time when she counters that it is a bad time for a father to be without a daughter. He changes clothes and she tells him that she almost did not recognize him. He asks her to tell him if he ever resembles himself too much. She asks him if he wanted to go to Krakow, and when he replies affirmatively, she explains that they are going the wrong way. He asks if she wants to go to Krakow and she tells him no.

The Swallow Man explains that she can travel with him if she makes two promises. She agrees when he tells her that she must behave as she did in the pasture the night before, and that she can ask him any question she would like, but only when they are alone. He explains that he does not have a name and that she should forego hers because names are a way for people to be found and that they do not want to be found. He will call her Sweetie and she will call him Father in return. If they keep moving, they will not be found. She asks if she can call him Swallow Man and he agrees, but only when they are alone. He holds out his hand and she takes it as though she would with her father.

## Analysis

The novel opens with introductory information about World War II and when the Nazis took academics into custody. Anna is aware of where her father works and what he does, but she does not understand the dire situation her father is in. She believes that her father will return because that is what makes sense to a seven-year-old girl. This introduces the theme of war and demonstrates how age and exposure can influence one's world view. Anna does not question that she will be cared for because her father has made arrangements for her to stay with Herr Doktor Fuchsmann.

Because Anna does not have a relationship with her mother, it is easy to understand why Anna is able to adapt to change. She relies on her father and values what he has taught her, but she also understands that change happens and people need to adapt. In being left with Herr Doktor Fuchsmann, she likely sees it as a normal progression because she likes him and the way he laughs, and because he gives her cookies, but



once her father is taken into custody, the way Herr Doktor Fuchsmann's treatment of her changes. He gives her shelter for a night and then sends her on her way.

While this further develops the theme of war, it also introduces the theme of survival and how Anna quickly adapts into survival mode. When she returns to the apartment after being sent away from Herr Doktor Fuchsmann's, she finds herself locked out. She does not panic, opting to stay in the hallway outside the apartment. She is hopeful in this moment that her father will return. She notices the way Mrs. Niemczyk checks on her in the hallway, but she does not do it in a caring fashion. It is as if the woman is checking to see if Anna is gone and she will no longer have to worry about the girl in the hallway.

What Anna likely does not understand is that Mrs. Niemczyk and Herr Doktor Fuchsmann have something in common: they are both aware of what is happening with the war and why the Nazis took Anna's father. They reject the opportunity to look after Anna out of fear and their own self-preservation. While Anna speaks many languages, Yiddish among them, it is never directly stated whether Anna may be Jewish. It is possible that the adults around Anna reject her because of that or because the fear of being associated with anyone taken into custody by the Nazis, including an academic.

Given Anna's age and experience it is remarkable that she adapts to survival mode so quickly. She is not on the street for long before encountering the Swallow Man, noting him because of his height and his ability with languages. When the Swallow Man first speaks to her, she does not answer. He continues to ask questions in different languages to no response. Had she responded to the first or second language, she would not have learned about the Swallow Man's affinity for languages, not would she have had the opportunity to show her language skills off. The ability to speak multiple languages is what connects the two strangers. But Anna also instinctively does something that the Swallow Man teaches her to do: wait until someone else speaks to know how to respond.

The Swallow Man does not invite Anna to join him, however. Anna opts to follow him. She is intrigued by him and senses a kindred spirit. He is easy to follow because of his height, but she also knows that she needs some kind of assistance in order to survive. The Swallow Man likely reminds Anna of her father because of the multiple languages. She is more apt to respond to a man as a caretaker as well, given that she was raised by her father. Because she understands that her father is not going to return, she looks to the Swallow Man as a surrogate.

The theme of identity is explored through the namelessness of the characters. The reader knows Anna's given name and understands why the Swallow Man tells her it is best to call him father and her sweetie. These are nondescript and are not going to tip off anyone they encounter to their real identities. Knowing Anna's identity demonstrates how identity is left behind. At seven, it is not likely that Anna's identity is fixed, but this is not something she may understand. The Swallow Man has rejected his identity. He does not want to be discovered and knows the danger in what his identity is. This foreshadows the reveal about his sickness in later chapters, as well as the suspicion about who and what he is.



The theme of language is obvious with the introduction of both Anna and the Swallow Man speaking multiple languages. But it is further developed in the way they travel together. They may be able to understand each other and others around them, but they also understand the power of silence. When they begin their travels, they do so in silence. Both understand the power of silence. While Anna will get frustrated with it in later chapters, her silence during their travels shows her reverence for what is occurring around her and her patience for connecting with the Swallow Man.

Anna follows him and tells him that she believes him to be a good man. His inclination, however, is to return her to Krakow to be cared for. She does not object to the decision to go back and tells him that she does know people there. Yet it is clear that she does not want to go back. The closest she can get to her previous life is staying with the Swallow Man. He relents to keeping her with him when she demonstrates a strong instinct for survival and adaptation in the pasture. When Anna tells him that it is not a good time for a father to be without a daughter, he is able to understand the relationship as mutually beneficial.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Anna decide to follow the Swallow Man?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the Swallow Man take Anna with him?

## Discussion Question 3

Would the Swallow Man have helped Anna if she had not proved useful to him?

## Vocabulary

fiat, gestapo, sovereignty, interment, ambivalent, deference, linguistics, cultivated, bespoke, discourse, spectrum, vibrant, accustomed, posture, idiosyncratic, insulate, furtively, descended, exuberant, reverberate, perpetual, inevitable, dearth, apparent, eternity, descent, comporting, congenially, implicit, diminutive, confounding, proffered, iridescent, impassive, menace, akin, cultivated, pungent, transubstantiation, coddled, adaptation, erratic, nuances, explicitness, legerdemain, self-effacing, engendered, kindred, denizens, torrent, transgression, contrition, monolithic, fraught, intuitive, resilience, exploited, fortification, façade, omission, emphatically, potent, maelstrom, precocious, certitude, surreptitious, indignant, indulgence, aquiline, equivocated, infinitesimal, erosion, innumerable, temperamental





## Chapter 3

### Summary

Chapter three is titled "A Lesson in Zoology." The author gives information about the 1939 German invasion of Poland. Anna and the Swallow Man avoid the soldiers and they get Anna some nice clothes to match his three-piece suit. They want to be able to blend in with affluent people to not call attention to themselves. The Swallow Man carries a bag with his clothes, his pills, a razor, and a German and Polish passport. He also carries an umbrella and a gun. He keeps his face scruffy because he does not want to appear too groomed when entering the city. He believes that money is more of a liability than not having any.

As Anna and the Swallow Man continue their travels, the Swallow Man laments one of Anna's growth spurts. Anna notes that he also carries a baby shoe with him that has pink and white beads on it. He teaches Anna that people are dangerous and that one should not speak to strangers first, letting others guide the conversation.

One day while talking to a truck driver, the Swallow Man explains that Anna's mother ran off. Anna objects instead of going along with whatever he says. He corrects her by explaining that she is remembering Anna's mother and not her own. He later tells her that he misses his friends as she does as well. He asks her the word for bird in different languages. He explains that his language is Road. There is no way to lie in Road.

They continue their travels. They avoid soldiers and seek out only people who will be able to help them. He tells Anna about the difference between the Wolf and the Bear as a way to convey information about the Germans and Russians. The Wolves are cruel and it is easier to convince a Bear "that you are like him" (67). Overall he tells her to avoid soldiers and anyone wearing red.

During winter they avoid checkpoints. Anna is impressed when the Swallow Man is able to lie to the soldiers and people they encounter. He talks to the soldiers about the town square or holidays in general ways. During the conversation, Anna interjects, asking if soldiers like strawberries. She holds one up and while the soldiers look to the fruit, the one holding the Swallow Man's passport would forget to look at it.

Making their way through the forest during the winter months, they must rely on the Swallow Man's knowledge of the environment. He teaches her that it is important to take care of one's feet while traveling and that they should avoid moisture. They catch fish and identify birds. After a year of traveling together, she asks where they are going. He tells her that he has been waiting for her to ask. He frames their travels as a mission to protect an "endangered species" (78), and that they are looking for a rare bird. He identifies their weapons as "knowledge and observation and patience and time" (79).



## Analysis

Chapter three establishes more information about the war. Just as Anna and the Swallow Man exists on the fringes of the city, there is distance from the war for the reader is well. It is easy to get caught up in the story of their travels and not have perspective on the impact of war. Their story could be survival of the wilderness. Because of this the reader needs the information about the war to enhance their perspective. The Swallow Man may keep details from the war to himself, but he also is not privy to the everyday happenings. They are traveling through an active war zone in which the Germans are advancing to occupy Poland.

The Swallow Man works hard to fit in with his surroundings. He arranges for Anna to have a set of nice clothes so that they are able to blend in with the affluent members of society when they need to be in town. This allows them to move freely among them and seek out those who can help. The one thing that the Swallow Man does not seek is money. He believes it to be a liability. If they take food or clothing, they can consume or use the goods offered or stolen. We're they to take money, they become vulnerable to others stealing from them. Further, people are more apt to notice when money is missing than a tin of food.

The theme of language is further developed when the Swallow Man corrects Anna when she interjects about her mother. This is one off the few times that Anna mentions her mother and it is also one of the last times the reader sees Anna reveal who she is. She learns that it is better to keep one's history private, but she also learns that the emotional attachment to those facts put her in danger as well. The Swallow Man is not teaching her to be cold or lack compassion, but rather to find loyalty to oneself. He explains that he misses his friends, just as Anna must miss hers, but the loyalty to self is key to survival.

The Swallow Man teaches Anna about war in an abstract way through the use of animals. While they have been traveling for a year, the concept of war is still challenging for an eight-year-old to understand or relate to. The Swallow Man likely senses that she needs to understand more about what is going on around them, especially in light of the German invasion of Poland. More soldiers are around them.

Another lesson he is tasked with teaching Anna is about lying. Because he can communicate with Anna in different languages, she is likely to understand that words in different languages may be similar but have alternate shades of meaning. By applying this to his own language of Road, he is able to convey to her that lying does not exist in this language as a key to survival.

By connecting these two ideas, Anna is able to appreciate the way in which the Swallow Man interacts with the soldiers. Further, she is able to more seamlessly move within the parameters of the lies as well, particularly when she distracts the soldiers with strawberries. This also hardens back to the Swallow Man's thoughts on money. Money would not have distracted the soldiers enough to let them pass the checkpoint. If they



had tried to negotiate with money, it would have been perceived as a bribe. The strawberries are a harmless treat.

The author also relates information about the struggles with traveling outdoors during the winter. The terrain offers less cover in addition to less sustenance. The Swallow Man is also concerned about trench foot. He teaches her how to fish and identify birds and other things in the forest. The one thing he does not tell her is about where they are going. It takes Anna year to finally ask their destination. The Swallow Man did not offer an answer beforehand because he does not know the destination because it does not yet exist.

When the Swallow Man explains about their weapons, two of the things he emphasizes are "patience and time" (79). In doing so he is able to convey that there is not a simple destination because their goal is to make to the end of the war alive and free. Because the end of the war is unknown, he cannot tell her where they are headed.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is it important for Anna to have a set of nice clothes?

## Discussion Question 2

What does the Swallow Man mean by not being able to lie in Road?

## Discussion Question 3

How is searching for an endangered species a metaphor for Anna?

## Vocabulary

carcass, imperial, procure, prosperous, conspicuousness, unscrupulous, whetstone, concession, vagrancy, meticulously, untenable, harbingers, avaricious, comrade, liabilities, scrupulously, ambivalent, inconvenient,

intolerably, contagious, inadequate, exponentially, taciturn, obliquely, aggrieved, deluge, obliged, delusion, regimented, dialect, gleaned, chided, disproportionate, insidious, aloof



## Chapters 4 - 5

### Summary

Chapters 4 is titled "The Man Who Kissed His Rifle." Anna and the Swallow Man are traveling in winter and are more exposed because of the bare trees and frozen ground. To survive the winter, they know they need to stay closer to people because the land will not provide them with sustenance. They sneak into town every few nights to steal food, learning what doors are unlocked and if pantries are close to those doors. They tell stories and nap to pass the time. One night the Swallow Man goes out, but does not come back. She listens and hears a gunshot and someone laughing. She is relieved when she later hears the Swallow bird call. As they travel the next day, they come across bodies and rifle shells and Anna understands what "rifles did" (89).

Six months later, Anna sees a man she believes to be kissing a rifle. By now, Anna has gotten used to seeing men with rifles strapped over their shoulders. When she sees a man coming through the trees, she does not recognize the rifle he carries and is further confused she thinks the man kisses it. She asks the man and he laughs, explaining that it is a clarinet and introduces himself a Reb Hirschl. She tells him she has not heard music in a long time, but she remembers it. The reed for his clarinet is cracked, so he is unable to play, but he is hopeful that he will play again. She watches him pretend to play and hum the melody.

When the Swallow Man approaches, he has his knife. Reb Hirschl is friendly and the Swallow Man regards this as a weakness. He asks Anna if she is okay and Reb Hirschl figures that the Swallow Man is her father. Anna knows it is time to leave.

They move on from Reb Hirschl, making their way further into the forest. The Swallow Man explains that Reb Hirschl is dangerous and Anna asks if he is dangerous because he is a Jew. The Swallow Man reinforces that their goal is to survive because the world is at war. As they continue on, Anna thinks about Reb Hirschl. They rarely light fires or eat food that requires cooking. Anna has trouble sleeping, thinking about Reb Hirschl being on his own. She gets up and decides to take a crust of bread to Reb Hirschl. She considers whether or not she will be able to find him, or make her way back to the Swallow Man, but she knows it is best if she keeps moving. She struggles making her way through the forest without a path to follow. After a while, she hears something behind her. In the distance she hears "muted laughter" (113) and music. Then she hears the Swallow Man tell her to stop.

He asks where she was going and she tries not to cry. He wants to know if she was leaving him or going to Reb Hirschl. He assures her that if she leaves him again, she will never find him again. She understands, but explains that Reb Hirschl knows how to laugh, whereas the Swallow Man does not. He leaves her alone.



Chapter 5 is titled "Patterns of Migration." Anna wakes up to find that the Swallow Man has returned and brought Reb Hirschl back with him. When she asks the Swallow Man why he did what he did, he explains that he neglected to consider that mere survival is not enough for all.

The Swallow Man and Reb Hirschl do not like each other. As they travel, their approach differs. The Swallow Man prefers silence, while Reb Hirschl likes to hum or sing and Anna prefers to sing along. They sing silly, made-up songs and as they travel, Anna begins to notice something different in their travel pattern. She wants to find a time to ask about it, but Reb Hirschl asks if they are going to stop traveling in circles. The Swallow Man does not want to cross the German lines, explaining that it is easier for him to cross with his daughter. Reb Hirschl questions why the Swallow Man is not shorting him food, instead doling it out evenly. The Swallow Man reminds him that the condition of bringing him with them was that he not ask questions. Reb Hirschl reminds him that he made no such promise and that the only reason he would not short him food and give more to his daughter is because Anna is someone he calls daughter. He also knows that the reason the Swallow Man wants to cross at a checkpoint is because only Reb Hirschl will be shot.

Reb Hirschl continues to challenge the Swallow Man, suggesting he is using his lack of identity as a shield and that Anna has not figured that out yet. He remembers playing music in the ghetto and considers himself lucky because he was able to enjoy liquor and music. The Swallow Man does not believe in the consumption of alcohol. He tells the Swallow Man about how he left the ghetto and the Swallow Man wonders if this is his way of convincing him that he will be able to cross the German lines unnoticed. He reassures him that regardless of where the Swallow Man leads them, he plans to keep walking.

The next morning they head out and the Swallow Man leads them to cross a river at dusk. Russians start firing at them and the Swallow Man tells Anna to run for the trees when she makes it across. He goes to help Reb Hirschl get across. In the process, the Swallow Man ends up with his pinkie finger shot off. All make it across the river and believe the Russians to be in pursuit, but did not see or hear anything overnight. The next morning they wake to the bombing of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

The author gives information about the invasion as the "largest military action that there has ever been" (142) and how the Soviets were unprepared. The three spend the day face down on the ground for protection, completely silent. After dark, the Swallow Man leads them further into the forest to an abandoned Soviet camp. The Swallow Man and Reb Hirschl disagree on how to proceed, with the Swallow Man thinking that it is best to pursue the Germans on their advance. They debate reinforcements coming. Reb Hirschl disagrees intensely, surprising Anna. In the distance they can hear a record playing on repeat and it gets to Reb Hirschl. The Swallow Man believes it indicates that the soldiers playing the record have been killed and that it would be dangerous to turn it off, indicating that someone was still alive in the area.



They end up searching the fallen soldiers' bodies for rations. Anna takes a pair of leather gloves and fills the tip of the pinky and gives them to the Swallow Man as a gift. He smiles at her. When she finds a flask full of vodka, she gives it to Reb Hirschl. The Swallow Man gives Reb Hirschl a strap for his clarinet. Reb Hirschl is not comfortable taking from the dead, but understands the necessity of it. As they continue on, Anna begins to notice that the two men have come to an understanding. They endure blitzkrieg and find that they have traveled "deep into the Soviet Union" (152). They fill a fallen soldier's backpack with rations they collect. As the Soviets push the Germans back, they begin their travels back toward Poland. When they come upon a pile of dead bodies, Anna begins to search. The Swallow Man stops her, explaining that they have lost enough and "we shall leave them what they have" (156). Anna does not tell them that the pockets were already empty. Anna realizes how much Poland has changed.

## Analysis

As Anna and the Swallow Man continue their travels through winter, they become more and more exposed because of the environment. They are more vulnerable during the winter and must risk going into town more frequently. They are not relying on the kindness of strangers, however. They are going into houses and looking for opportunities to obtain food without being detected. They assume a fair amount of risk in doing so, but it is part of their survival.

It may be surprising to learn that it is only when Anna hears the gunshots and later sees the bodies that she understands about rifles. Her understanding extends further than that, however. Seeing rifles is commonplace for her, but connecting the reality of what that rifle does is the next step in her coming to understand war. She does not dwell on the discovery. Rather she accepts it as information in much the same way she learns from the Swallow Man.

In meeting Reb Hirschl and mistaking him for kissing a rifle, it demonstrates her hopefulness that not all with a rifle are bad or to be feared. For someone in Anna's situation, she responds warmly to Reb Hirschl without much thought. She appears to retain some kind of hopeful optimism of being a child, or perhaps foolishness. She may simply be intrigued to see someone else who is not a soldier.

The Swallow Man does not respond similarly. He approaches Reb Hirschl with a knife in hand. The two men, who ultimately do not get along, come to each other with different languages: Reb Hirschl speaks through music, while the Swallow Man speaks through the intimidation of a weapon. Music is not a language Anna speaks, but it is a language she has heard and remembers. Her memory gives the reader some insight into her detachment from her life before. For many people, music is commonplace and it is jarring to hear a child talking about remembering music.

Anna knows not to dwell in the visit and she continues on with the Swallow Man. The reader gets further insight into Anna's understanding of the war when she asks the



Swallow Man if Reb Hirschl is dangerous because he is a Jew. She has learned enough to know that Jewish people are at greater risk. In the previous chapter, the Swallow Man indicated that they were tasked with finding an endangered species. He was likely referring to Anna, but what about her exactly. Is she endangered because she is an abandoned child, because she possesses the skill to speak many languages, or because she may be Jewish as well. This answer is ultimately left to the discernment of the reader, but there is mounting evidence.

Perhaps out of a sense of curiosity or compassion, Anna feels compelled to go back to Reb Hirschl. She wants him to join them in their travels, but it is clear that the Swallow Man deems it unsafe. She puts herself at risk when she sneaks off and is unaware that the Swallow Man is following her. Her act illuminates and confuses the Swallow Man. He understands the importance of her being able to be around others, particularly someone in stark contrast to the Swallow Man, but he questions why she chooses to assume that risk.

The Swallow Man confronts Anna about why she left him. The distinction he makes is between leaving the Swallow Man and going to Reb Hirschl. For the Swallow Man, he can understand the former, but defines the latter as an act of betrayal. He tells her he will not come back for her a second time and Anna comprehends the seriousness of his stance. Because the Swallow Man ultimately views her actions as helping Reb Hirschl, he goes and gets him.

The theme of loyalty is further developed in the interaction between the two men. With Reb Hirschl observing the interaction between Anna and the Swallow Man, he notices something peculiar in the way the Swallow Man distributes food. While it has been easy thus far for the Swallow Man to convince others that Anna is his daughter, time spent with Reb Hirschl has revealed how else the perception can be viewed.

The Swallow Man reminds Reb Hirschl of the arrangement they made in order for Reb Hirschl to join them. Reb Hirschl maintains his autonomy by reminding the Swallow Man that he did not agree to the stipulation. Reb Hirschl remains true to himself and does not feel a sense of loyalty to the Swallow Man. He also questions the true motives for the Swallow Man's decision to take Reb Hirschl into the fold. He can be seen as a layer of protection at checkpoints. Reb Hirschl makes no effort to hide his identity even though it would be beneficial to him given the realities of the war.

Reb Hirschl furthers the exploration of identity by accusing the Swallow Man of obscuring his identity as a way to keep him safe. This suggests on some level that Reb Hirschl suspects that the Swallow Man may also be a Jew. Like Anna, this is never definitively answered. Reb Hirschl understands the danger of his identity, which is why he is hiding in the forest like the others.

More information is given about the war, including Operation Barbarossa. For Anna to think that the attack is because they are on the run in the forest illustrates her youth and her inability to fully comprehend the idea of a world war. They have traveled long and far enough to reach the Soviet Union.



More than that, what surprises Anna more is the way in which Reb Hirschl disagrees with the Swallow Man on how to proceed in light of the German advancement. While Anna has demonstrated her ability and willingness to go against the Swallow Man, such as when she tries to go get Reb Hirschl, she trusts her survival with the Swallow Man. Disagreeing with him goes against how Anna views the hierarchy of the group. She leaves the discussion to the men, but it is clear that given the option, she would choose to follow the Swallow Man.

In order to survive, they must go through the belongings of dead soldiers on the battlefields. This is something else that Anna adapts to quite quickly. Reb Hirschl is reluctant, but understands that he needs to participate in order to survive. Given any other circumstances, Reb Hirschl would balk at doing so.

While the Swallow Man is ultimately a resourceful man whose main objective is survival, he demonstrates his conscience when they come across a mass grave. The Swallow Man recognizes what it is and stops Anna from going through the pockets. He holds a moment of reverence, explaining that they have already lost enough. Anna does not tell him that the pockets were already empty because she does not want to hurt him further. If Anna understands the horror she just witnessed is unclear, but she wants to protect the Swallow Man of that detail.

Given that the novel is set during World War II, there is only a tangential reference to the horror of the Holocaust. Much as the war is distanced from the characters, this is similarly handled. Once Anna has seen this mass grave and they return to Poland, it is clear that Anna has changed. She sees Poland as different, but she is also seeing it through the eyes of a young adolescent who has spent a long time away from society, struggling to survive.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is Reb Hirschl's friendliness considered a weakness?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why does the Swallow Man reconsider what might be key to one's survival?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does the Swallow Man stop Anna from going through the pile of bodies when he has encouraged her to go through the pockets of dead soldiers?





## Vocabulary

traverse, insomniac, purloined, assuage, nocturnal, intermittent, cylindrical, unassailable, germinating, mournful, inebriation, viscerally, mitigate, espoused, incarnated, ephemeral, desolation, nebulous, delineated, insufficient, predicated, trajectory, ludicrously, labyrinth, treacherous, dictum, countenance, detonate, constitutionally, averse, mercurial, piety, asinine, puerile, leavening, benediction, peculiarity, pretense, squalid, topographic, tactical, garrisoned, iterations, edict, undulating, cauterize, incursion, cacophony, forage, virulence, decorousness, melancholy, iconography, penchant, blitzkrieg,

duress, opportune, stoicism, cultivated, arduous, dissipate, cede, sanctify



# Chapter 6

## Summary

Chapter 6 is titled "What'll You Give Me?" The group stays in the woods and Anna thinks about how she and the Swallow Man might have talked to "an affable stranger" (158), but keep to themselves. Anna is growing up and is noticing changes in her body as she starts to go through puberty. The men are respectful of the privacy that she now wants. One day while Anna is squatting in the brush, she meets a Peddler. He believes that she is alone and she tells him that her friends are nearby. He does not believe her. She calls for Reb Hirschl and he arrives, followed by the Swallow Man. The Peddler comments on her being with two Jews.

The Peddler offers to trade them for something in his pack and the Swallow Man explains that he only wants news about what is happening in the city. The Peddler tries to tempt them with meat, but the Swallow Man rejects it. He tells them the horror stories of what has happened in the city and Anna almost cannot believe it. As they talk, the Peddler believes that he recognizes the Swallow Man, asking if he has been to Berlin or Lodz. He admits to Lodz, suggesting the man may have seen him in passing. The Peddler offers to trade money or goods for time alone with Anna and the Swallow Man refuses.

The Peddler moves on and they eat what little they have for dinner and prepare to sleep. The Swallow Man goes off into the night. When he finally returns, he hands Reb Hirschl a bottle of alcohol and Reb Hirschl understands what the Swallow Man has done. He explains that he killed the man in his sleep and that he would not have felt much pain. Reb Hirschl does not think what the Swallow Man has done is right. He defends his actions and even points out that the meat the Peddler had was actually a human arm. Reb Hirschl believes that the Swallow Man killed the Peddler to protect his identity. The Swallow Man insists that if he was taken back into custody that his work would lead to much more killing. The men debate killing during war and the Swallow Man threatens Reb Hirschl if he tries to take Anna away from him. The men see that Anna has been listening. Anna does not say a word. Reb Hirschl leaves the camp and the Swallow Man begins to drink the vodka.

A week later, Anna and the Swallow Man find Reb Hirschl's body hanging from a tree. The Swallow Man cuts him down and Anna cries over his body. To console her, he calls the birds and is surprised by how many arrive. He places one on Reb Hirschl's body, telling her that the bird will stay with his body and keep the crows away.

They continue their travels and fall comes. The Swallow Man is running low on pills. As soon as he runs out, there is a noticeable change in behavior. By winter, he begins breaking out into sweats and his hands tremble. He begins talking nonsense and Anna is unable to discern what language he is speaking. They eventually come upon a manor and take shelter there. There is evidence that it was used by the military for some time



as well. Anna checks the pantry for food and wonders about the Swallow Man starving to death. The Swallow Man goes to the library by himself and Anna spends a lot of time sleeping. He begins nesting with the books around him, throwing them from the shelves. When Anna tries to talk to him, he tells her "'Not now, Greta!'" (191). The Swallow Man begins singing and losing his hair.

## Analysis

The further the group travels, the harsher reality they face. There is a sense of fatigue and vulnerability. They stay in the woods and Anna remembers how in the past they make reached out to someone to get food or information, but they are keeping to themselves. Anna is making observations that she may or may not have realized when she was younger. The reader begins to detect differences in the way Anna views the world and the way she is viewed as well.

Both the Swallow Man and Reb Hirschl have been conscientious about the changes in Anna's body and her need for privacy. Her identity is shifting from young girl to young woman. When the reader is made privy to this, Anna is alone and approached by the Peddler. He is viewed as an immediate threat and it is clear that he is hopeful that she is solitary. He even thinks she is joking when she calls for her friends.

It speaks to her instincts and her understanding of the world around her that she is immediately leery of the Peddler, given that she readily approached both the Swallow Man and Reb Hirschl in the past. Reb Hirschl and the Swallow Man both approach when she calls for them and while the group outnumbers the Peddler, he almost immediately demonstrates his power over them. He calls both of the men Jews, indicating he views himself as superior, although his nationality is not given. He is a man without an identity, projecting identities on the group. He even goes so far as to suggest that Anna is Jewish, which the Swallow Man immediately refutes.

They distrust the Peddler, but the Swallow Man sees this as an opportunity to learn about what has been happening throughout the war. The particulars are not given, instead they are communicated through indirect dialogue, leaving Anna's reaction to put them in perspective. The reader likely knows about the horrors of World War II and, like Anna, may struggle to believe that they happened.

There is a threat to the Swallow Man's safety when the Peddler suggests that he may know who he is. Perhaps his face is one that could be mistaken for another, but certainly his height is something that could give him away. The Peddler only indicates that he has seen his face. It is unlikely that the Peddler has actually seen the Swallow Man in person, but rather seen his photograph in a newspaper. The Swallow Man becomes defensive and the Peddler redirects, but does so in an even more threatening manor. He wants to trade food for time alone with Anna. The Swallow Man defends her and sends him away.



The episode with the Peddler further demonstrates the loyalty the Swallow Man has for Anna as well as his determination to keep his identity hidden. This is important as a way to justify what the Swallow Man decides to do. He murders the Peddler while he sleeps. Reb Hirschl objects to the killing, unsurprisingly and understandably. Throughout the time they have spent together, the threat of violence has never manifested into actual violence. Perhaps Reb Hirschl would have viewed the killing differently if it occurred during a physical attack and was self-defense. The Swallow Man pursued the Peddler after he left their camp and killed him in his sleep.

The two men debate the justification of this act, unaware that Anna is listening. Her reaction is to regard the reveal with the language of silence. She does not know how to respond, but listening offers her insight into the Swallow Man's past that she would not have previously been privy to. This is the first indication of what kind of life the Swallow Man led and it strongly suggests that he was involved in developing weapons, in particular an atom bomb.

Reb Hirschl decides to leave the camp. He may be able to come to some kind of understanding as to why the Swallow Man killed the Peddler, but his action has crossed a line that he cannot live with. Had he not left the camp, it is possible that Reb Hirschl would have lived, but it is also possible that the Peddler could have told others about the men he encountered. There is no way to know this for certain, but his decision to leave costs him his life. It becomes a metaphor for Reb Hirschl's willingness to die for what he believes in.

Reb Hirschl's death becomes symbolic of Anna's transition to adulthood. She is no longer protected from the horrors of the war or the knowledge of what the Swallow Man is capable of. She remains loyal to him by choosing to stay with him. The Swallow Man attempts to comfort Anna by telling her that the birds will watch over Reb Hirschl's body, but she knows better now.

By the time Anna and the Swallow Man arrive at the door, the Swallow Man is exhibiting symptoms of radiation sickness. Without his pills, he is vulnerable, which also leaves Anna vulnerable. The dwor is a vast manor and the size of the building becomes symbolic of the size and scope of the war and how they are now surrounded by it.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does the Peddler not believe Anna when she tells him her friends are nearby?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the Swallow Man threaten Reb Hirschl to keep him from taking Anna?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does the Swallow Man kill the Peddler?

## Vocabulary

affable, manna, mundane, gaunt, irrespective, myriad, bandolier, nascent, endearment, deranged, malleable, allotment, narcissistic, steward, sustenance, impunity, cadence, decorum, conjured, repertoire, utilitarian,

placid, semblance, futility, portico, volition, concentric, emanating, flaccid



# Chapters 7 - 8

## Summary

Chapter 7 is titled "Endangered Species." Anna continues to watch the Swallow Man deteriorate. She thinks about what scares her and, even though she knows he is dead, she fears the Peddler returning for her. She sees the revolver in the bottom of the Swallow Man's bag and it concerns her. She hears footsteps and two local boys only a bit older than Anna talk about how the land and manor should be theirs. The boys see the Swallow Man in the hallway and one of them points a gun at him. The Swallow Man stays still, even as one of the boys insists the house is his. He tells the boys that he is Boruta, a Polish demon who is tall and thin and could appear as a bird. Anna listens, convincing herself that it is not true. One of the Boys insists that the Swallow Man is "just some old hobo Gypsy" (199) and that he will tell his father about him. The Swallow Man stands to his full height and begins to rub his hands together until they smoke and green flame appears. They boys run away, but not before shooting the Swallow Man.

Later, Anna takes the Swallow Man back to his study, trying to get him to use the umbrella as a cane. In leaving the manor, she struggles with keeping him moving. She is scared, but knows it is more dangerous to not go. When they come across some soldiers, she tells the Swallow Man to fall over and he does. She asks the medic soldier to help her father and he injects him with morphine and treats the gunshot wound, explaining they should get to Danzig to rest.

They get into town and eat. Anna decides to take the Swallow Man's knife and go in search of medication. She reads the prescription bottle and knows that she needs potassium iodide. She finds a pharmacy and speaks the pharmacist first in German. She realizes his native tongue is Polish. She explains that her father needs medication and that she does not have any money. He tells her that the medication she is looking for is not common. She explains that he will die without it and the man tells her he will suffer, but not die. He makes an arrangement with her for the medication and takes her into a back room where she takes her clothes off for him. He does not touch her or himself, but simply looks at her. As she stands before him, she realizes that she is unable to not be Anna.

Afterwards, she gets the medication and cries. She feels like the daughter she became to the Swallow Man had died and that she is now only able to be Anna. She takes the medication to the Swallow Man and as he begins to get back to normal, he apologizes to her.

He begins to grow stronger and realizes where they are. They go to the house of an older German man who recognizes the Swallow Man. The two men talk and Anna overhears them talking about the war and weaponry. The older man refers to the Swallow Man as professor. They reach an arrangement and the man reminds the



Swallow Man that if he helps him and he disappears again, his life will be threatened. The Swallow Man agrees to the arrangement.

A week later, Anna and the Swallow Man begin visiting landmarks in the city. He explains to her how he killed the Peddler with a "smooth stroke" (219). A fisherman approaches and Anna does not recognize his accent. The Swallow Man asks that he take Greta out on his boat. While she is insecure, she trusts the Swallow Man and goes on the boat with the fisherman. The Swallow Man gives the fisherman his revolver, but not the ammunition, as part of their agreement. He is given a bundle of cotton in exchange. He checks it before putting it in his pocket. He reminds her about how he killed the Peddler and then disappeared around the block.

Chapter 8 is titled "Epilogue: The Uncertainty Principle." Anna is in the boat with the fisherman and they are making their way out to sea. She begins to remember being in Poland and listening to the sound of water and birds and the Swallow Man pointing them out to her. She remembers the Swallow Man teaching her how to create a sundial to tell the time. Seeing flying birds makes her feel lonely. She remembers telling him that she wants to know everything like he does and he confesses that he does not know everything.

Anna watches a bird soaring above the boat. It is big enough that she does not believe it should be able to fly. The fisherman points out islands in the distance and warns her that they are in cold waters now. She asks the fisherman "what is out there?" (230).

## Analysis

The concept of an endangered species returns in chapter seven. While the earlier reference indicated Anna, this time it references the Swallow Man, making their characters parallel. While he kept Anna safe until this point, it is time for Anna to save the Swallow Man.

Anna is aware of her fear and has the insight to understand that she is most afraid of the Peddler, even though he is dead. For Anna, the Peddler represents a moment in her life when she is shown the horrors of war. He gives updates about the war to the Swallow Man that she cannot believe; given the chance, he would have assaulted her; and it allowed her to see the violence that the Swallow Man is capable of. In order to save the Swallow Man, she must confront her fears and go out on her own. The parallel between the Peddler's desires and the pharmacist she goes to see exists, but what she endures is less than what the Peddler would have done. This in no way justifies what the pharmacist asks of Anna because his actions alter who she is.

At this point in the novel, Anna can no longer escape who she is. If there has been a struggle for identity throughout her journey, she knows who she is. In order to survive and save the Swallow Man she is forced to be herself. This foreshadows that the Swallow Man must also make peace with his identity as well, but it does not suggest that it will be easy.



The other thing that happens to Anna when she ventures out on her own is she forgets momentarily what the Swallow Man has taught her. She reveals her language first, instead of waiting for the pharmacist to reveal his. This demonstrates her insecurity and nervousness in going out alone, but not that she is ill-prepared. She takes the knife with her, instead of the revolver. There are many reasons she may have chosen the knife over the gun. She may not know how to fire the gun or the knife is easier for her handle or disguise on her person. Ultimately, it is the weapon of choice of the Swallow Man, which he passes along to her at the close of the novel.

Before Anna goes into town to get the medication for the Swallow Man, she see him defend himself against the boys. He uses his size and local folklore to convince them that he is some kind of demon. Ultimately, the Swallow Man is just a man, but he is able to view himself as a demon because of the things he has done. Whether it is killing the Peddler, getting into a fight with Reb Hirschl, or helping to develop an atomic bomb, the Swallow Man is burdened by what he is done. The extent of this burden extends to the possibility that he had a daughter named Greta. He carries a pink baby boogie with him and call Anna Greta when she finds him in the library. The notion that the Swallow Man once had a daughter explains why he was willing to bring Anna along with him. If he was unable to be a father to his own daughter, he was able to redeem himself by caring for Anna.

This leads him to sacrificing himself by revealing his identity. When he goes to see the professor, the men discuss whatever project he previously worked on. The details of their arrangement remain vague, but if the Swallow Man backs out, the professor will be at risk. Just as Anna is unable to avoid being Anna, the Swallow Man must confront his real identity as well.

The Swallow Man apologizes to Anna for what happened while he was sick. It is unclear that Anna tells the Swallow Man the arrangement with the pharmacist, but it is unlikely that she did. To do so, she would have to reveal herself as Anna and her relationship with the Swallow Man is built on not having an identity. She is also faced with mourning the loss of who she was with him. This foreshadows their separation.

The Swallow Man arranges for Anna to escape Poland. He does not tell her anything about the trip or where she is going. What he does explain to her is how he killed the Peddler. He gives her his knife and instructions, but Anna is left to know when or where or whom she may have to defend herself.

As the novel draws to a close, the Swallow Man identifies Anna as Greta. In this moment he allows himself to accept her as his daughter. Just as with his biological daughter, the Swallow Man must separate from Anna, likely for her own good. If one is to believe the possibility that the Swallow Man is Jewish, it is possible that his wife and daughter were taken to a concentration camp. He may have been spared because of his abilities as a scientist. Further, if Anna is Jewish, then it is imperative for him to get her away from the war.





The fisherman warns her about the cold waters, suggesting passage toward a country like Sweden. This is left up to the reader to decide, just as with the aforementioned suspicion about Anna and the Swallow Man being Jewish. Ultimately, the novel ends on an ambiguous note. There is a suggestion of magical realism with the large bird flying overhead, possibly symbolizing the Swallow Man watching over her. The final line of the novel is a question: "what is out there?" (230) and that seems to represent the ambiguity of war. Anna does not know what comes next, just as the world must come to terms with the aftermath of war and figure out a way to rebuild and cope with what happened.

## Discussion Question 1

What does the Swallow Man's claim to be a demon reveal about his character?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Anna unable to pretend to be someone else when the pharmacist asks her to take off her clothes?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does the Swallow Man send Anna away instead of fleeing with her?

## Vocabulary

unmitigated, pro-coagulant, desensitization, apothecary, detritus, cache, berate, convalescence, incremental, politesse, epilogue, rudimentary, inert, diffuse



# Characters

## Anna Lania

Anna Lania is a seven-year-old girl living in Poland with her father during World War II. She is a precocious child who can speak many languages. Among the languages she speaks are Polish, German, Yiddish, and French. While she does not understand the war going on around her, she has a presence of mind to find help.

She does not immediately accept that her father is not returning. She trusts Herr Doktor Fuchsmann to care for her, but his rejection of her leaves her on her own. She does not know why he has done so, but she tries to get along. After getting locked out of the apartment and the neighbor woman not offering any assistance, she strikes out on her own.

She befriends the Swallow Man and decides to follow him after discovering the languages he speaks. She trusts him, and adapts to his way of life quickly. She is not shy about voicing her opinions, such as wanting to help Reb Hirschl.

She wants to do right by people and see the good in them. She is resourceful and a quick study of the Swallow Man's ways. She loves Reb Hirschl and the Swallow Man differently. She is charmed by Reb Hirschl, while she views the Swallow Man as a surrogate father. When the Swallow Man needs medication, she is willing to risk her own personal safety to obtain it for him.

## The Swallow Man

The Swallow Man is a tall, slender man who carries considerable mystery about him. Like Anna he is multi-lingual. He does not want to take Anna with him after they meet, but he agrees to help her after they bond over their knowledge of languages.

He is a professor, although his exact area of expertise is unknown. In some capacity he has worked with radiation, as is evidenced by the potassium iodide that he takes. It can be inferred that he has worked in some capacity on an atomic bomb and has gone into hiding.

He is knowledgeable of the land and wants to protect himself and Anna equally. He brings Reb Hirschl to their camp because Anna wants it. He kills the Peddler after he makes advances on Anna and claims to recognize the Swallow Man.

He is distant and quiet and reserved of emotion. He wants to protect Anna, sacrificing himself to get her on a boat safely out of Poland.



## Reb Hirschl

Reb Hirschl is a Jewish man that Anna and the Swallow Man encounter in the forest. The Swallow Man is reluctant to have him around them, but ultimately invites Reb Hirschl to join them on their travels.

He is a musician, but is unable to play his clarinet because of a broken reed. He hums and makes up silly songs to sing with Anna. He is jovial around Anna, but is not afraid to confront the Swallow Man because of what he believes is right.

When the Swallow Man murders the Peddler, he knows that he can no longer travel with the Swallow Man and Anna. His decision to leave them leads to his death, when he is tortured and hanged from a tree.

## Peddler

The Peddler is a traveler the group meets in the forest. He has money, goods, and is willing to make a trade for the meat he has to sell. He has confiscated most of what he is peddling from the dead bodies throughout the forest. The meat he is trying to sell is a human arm.

He believes that he recognizes the Swallow Man, but cannot pinpoint his name or where exactly he is from. He offers to trade some of his goods for time alone with Anna, considering her youth an asset.

The Swallow Man and Reb Hirschl send him on his way. Later that night, the Swallow Man catches up with him and slits his throat.

## Pharmacist

The pharmacist that Anna encounters when she is trying to get potassium iodide for the Swallow Man is reluctant to get the medication for her. He makes an arrangement with Anna for her to bare her body in front of him as trade. He does not touch her or himself during the encounter, but causes Anna emotional harm.

He gives Ann the medication that helps the Swallow Man return to his normal behavior.

## Herr Doktor Fuchsmann

Herr Doktor Fuchsmann is a friend of Anna's father. When he is taken away by the Nazis, he agrees to care for Anna, but soon breaks his promise. He allows Anna to stay in his shop for one night before sending her out on her own.



## Father

Anna's father is an abstract character who is seen through Anna's memory. He is a professor who is taken by the Nazis, never to return, as they begin to round up the academics. Multi-lingual, he speaks many languages, which he teaches to Anna. He asks Herr Doktor Fuchsmann to look after Anna when the Nazis come for him.

## Greta

Greta is the Swallow Man's daughter. She is presumed dead. He carries her baby shoe among his possessions. He reveals her name when he is out of sorts after he has quick taking his medication. He calls Anna Greta when he makes arrangements for Anna to travel out of Poland with the fisherman.

## Two Boys

Two Boys arrive at the door while Anna and the Swallow Man seek shelter there. One of the boys claims his family owns the manor. The boys confront the Swallow Man about it being their property and are scared off when the Swallow Man tells them that he is a Polish demon. One of the boys shoots the Swallow Man before running off.

## The Fisherman

The Fisherman is who the Swallow Man leaves Anna with to get out of Poland. The Swallow Man has made some kind of arrangement to ensure her passage, but he does not completely trust the man, offering Anna advice on how to dispatch with him if needed.

The Fisherman makes good on his word to get Anna out of Poland. He warms of cold waters and speaks with an accent Anna does not recognize. He may be of Swedish or Norwegian origin.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Name

A name is symbolic of identity. The Swallow Man never reveals his name, keeping his true identity hidden. He does so to stay safe, encouraging Anna never to use her own name as well. Anna is able to hide from her identity until the pharmacist trades her nudity for drugs and she can only think of herself as Anna.

## Knife

The knife symbolizes survival. The Swallow Man slits the throat of the Peddler to protect his identity and keep Anna safe from a predator. He is able to justify the murder because of his circumstance. This demonstrates how the justification is on one side, while cold-blooded murder is on the other, illustrating a double edge. He later gives the knife to Anna as a means to protect herself, understanding that she will only use the knife if absolutely necessary.

## Gloves

The gloves that Anna gives the Swallow Man symbolize his missing identity. When the Swallow Man's finger is shot off by a Russian soldier, she gives him gloves with the pinky filled in. It demonstrates how Anna is able to provide him with a piece of his identity, in particular his past as a father to Greta.

## Language

Language symbolizes the ability to hide. Both the Swallow Man and Anna are multi-lingual. Their ability to speak multiple languages gives them greater ease to blend in with other groups. By allowing the strangers to speak first, they can adjust to whatever language best suits them to fit in and not be noticed.

## Clarinet

The clarinet symbolizes hope. Reb Hirschl carries the clarinet with him even though he is unable to play it because of a broken reed. He is hopeful that he will be able to make music with friends again, even though the likelihood of it happening is remote. In spite of all the hardships of the war, he is hopeful to find joy.



## Strap

The strap the Swallow Man gives Reb Hirschl symbolizes Reb Hirschl's death by hanging. The Swallow Man brings Reb Hirschl along even though he knows he puts the group at greater risk. He offers Reb Hirschl the strap for the clarinet, showing an understanding between the men. When Reb Hirschl breaks from the group after disapproving of the Swallow Man killing the Peddler, he takes his life into his own hands. When the Swallow Man and Anna find Reb Hirschl hanging from the tree, it demonstrates how being alone made him more vulnerable.

## Arm

The meat that the Peddler tries to sell the group is a human arm, which symbolizes the horrors of war. It symbolizes how people take from the dead to survive. For the group it may be matches or food or other supplies, but for the Peddler, he is willing to make money off the flesh of the dead.

## Birds

The birds symbolize the migration of Anna and the Swallow Man. Just as birds migrate for the winter, Anna and the Swallow Man also migrate throughout Europe, eventually circling back to Poland where they started. When the Swallow Man sends Anna away at the end of the novel, she sees birds overhead and considers how birds make "Anna feel nothing so much as loneliness" (226). It is as though she continues to migrate, trying to find a home.

## Boat

The boat symbolizes opportunity. The Swallow Man arranges for Anna to travel with the fisherman north away from the war. Anna is on the boat as the novel concludes, not having reached her final destination. It leaves Anna in a position that opportunity awaits her.

## Forest

The forest is symbolic of the fog of war. Anna follows the Swallow Man for nearly a year before she asks him where they are headed. In doing so, she has learned enough to recognize when they are traveling in circles. When they continue east and make their way into Ukraine, the group is not aware that they have traveled so far. The Swallow Man asks the Peddler for news of what is happening on the war front because they do not have access to information as they continue their travels on the outskirts of civilization. The forest prevents them from obtaining a full picture of what is occurring in the war.



# Settings

## Krakow

The novel begins in Krakow, Poland where Anna lives with her father. They have an apartment there. It is where Nazi soldiers come and take her father away. Anna is instructed to stay with Herr Doktor Fuchsmann, but when he abandons her, Anna is left on her own. While on the streets, she first encounters the Swallow Man and decides to follow him.

## Apartment

The apartment is where Anna and her father lived before he was taken into custody. It is where Anna learned multiple languages from her father. She goes there after Herr Doktor Fuchsmann refuses to care for her after promising Anna's father. Because she is locked out of the apartment, Anna waits outside. Her neighbor spies on her, but does not offer to help. She never returns to the apartment.

## Forest

The vast majority of the novel involves Anna traveling with the Swallow Man. They spend their time avoiding people and crossing German lines. It is where they encounter Reb Hirschl and the Peddler, and where both men are killed.

Because they spend years traveling through the forest, they make their way from Poland to the Soviet Union and back to Poland. They witness several seasons, living off the land in harsh conditions.

## Dwor

Is the Polish manor in which Anna and the Swallow Man take shelter after the Swallow Man begins to exhibit strange behavior after running out of his medication. It is a large estate that has also been used as a military compound.

It is where the Swallow Man tells the Polish boys that he is actually a demon. When they run off, one of the boys fires his gun, shooting the Swallow Man.

## Pharmacy

The pharmacy is where Anna sneaks off in search of medication for the Swallow Man. When she arrives at the pharmacy, the owner tells her that the medication she is looking for is expensive and makes an arrangement with her to get the medication.

In the back room of the pharmacy is where Anna takes her clothes off for the man in exchange for the medication.





# Themes and Motifs

## Survival

The author uses the backdrop of World War II to illustrate the different ways people must find a way to ensure their survival. For both Anna and the Swallow Man, their survival is contingent on adapting to their surroundings and making difficult compromises.

Anna is left alone after the Nazis take her father. She spends the first night alone, but knows that she must do something to ensure her survival. She befriends the Swallow Man, fascinated by his ability to talk to birds, speak multiple languages, and his enormous height. The Swallow Man does not offer to help Anna, rather she follows him, giving her agency for her survival. She may need him to help her, but she plays a part.

She is also empathetic to the survival of others. Anna senses immediate fondness for Reb Hirschl when they meet. She wants him to join her and the Swallow Man, even though she knows there are risks involved. She is willing to sacrifice her own safety to get to him, but is protected by the Swallow Man. In doing so, she prompts him to go and get Reb Hirschl.

Without the men, Anna likely would have fallen victim to the Peddler. The Swallow Man takes it further when he kills the Peddler, thereby keeping the Peddler from assaulting Anna and possibly revealing the Swallow Man's true identity.

The group endures the hardship of the land in addition to the rations of the war. During winter, they are exposed without coverage in the forest and have little to eat. They regularly encounter soldiers and must find ways to outsmart or deceive them. The Swallow Man even goes so far as to try and convince the boys in the dwor that he is a demon to keep Anna safe.

## Loyalty

The author demonstrates that loyalty above all else is the key to surviving the war. The Swallow Man demands loyalty from Anna when he takes her with him. He also negotiates with Reb Hirschl when he brings him into the camp.

While Reb Hirschl joins Anna and the Swallow Man for a long time, his safety is jeopardized when he confronts the Swallow Man about killing the Peddler. The Swallow Man justifies the murder because it keeps them all safe, but Reb Hirschl cannot stay with them after the killing. The Swallow Man reminds Reb Hirschl at one point of the agreement they made, but Reb Hirschl reminds him that he never agreed to it. When Reb Hirschl departs the group, he ends up getting killed. By not staying loyal to the group, he put himself in grave danger.



After the Swallow Man is back to normal when he resumes his medication, he goes to see a professor that he once knew. The men are loyal to each other and the Swallow Man keeps a promise to him because he knows that if he backs out, it will cost the professor his life as well. The professor affords the Swallow Man the opportunity to get Anna out of Poland and away from the war. This is the way that he demonstrates his ultimate loyalty to Anna.

While the details of the arrangement with the professor are not revealed, what Anna is forced to do to help the Swallow Man is. When she goes into town to get medication for the Swallow Man, the pharmacist agrees to give her the medication in trade. Because of Anna's loyalty to the Swallow Man, she subjects herself to the humiliation of taking off her clothes in front of a strange man and enduring the humiliation.

## War

The theme of war is used as a metaphor for the struggles of life. Because the author gives the novel the backdrop of World War II, it gives urgency to everything the characters face. The very things they need to survive are difficult to come by. They must steal from pantries and live off the land, all the while avoiding detection from the soldiers.

The ambiguity of the Swallow Man's ethnicity is in contrast to Reb Hirschl's forthrightness about being a Jew. The Swallow Man hides his identity, but clearly emphasizes with the plight of the Jewish people during the war. He is reluctant to bring Reb Hirschl along because of the danger it poses, but he also sees the opportunity of knowing that the soldiers would be more apt to shoot Reb Hirschl at the checkpoints instead of the Swallow Man and Anna.

The Peddler demonstrates the darkness of war. He will trade just about anything he can get his hands one, without any concern for others. He offers to trade food for time alone with Anna, sexualizing a child to meet his baser needs. He also is willing to trade human flesh, trying to sell it as a lean cut of meat one might find in a butcher.

As the novel progresses, the war shows fatigue. There is the largest attack with Operation Barbarossa. By the time they return to Poland, Anna knows that after the Swallow Man has been shot, the soldiers will not be as apt to question giving him medical attention because the vast amounts of injuries they have seen during the duration of the war.

By the close of the novel, the war has not yet ended. The question of when or if it will is mirrored in Anna's escape to a new land. She does not know what awaits her, just as the people in Europe do not as well.



## Language

The author uses the theme of language as a way to demonstrate the necessity of finding a common language to communicate effectively.

Anna is taught from an early age to speak multiple languages because her father speaks them as well. Because Anna does not feel that any one language is her own, she comes to wonder whether or not she actually has a language.

When she meets the Swallow Man, he asks her questions in multiple languages and she does not respond. Alone and scared, she wants to speak, but her words fail her. When she begins to respond, he is impressed with her abilities. The Swallow Man understands the advantages of knowing multiple languages and how it enables someone to hide more efficiently.

Anna learns from the Swallow Man that it is best to let others speak first and respond in the corresponding language. Anna notes the flawless use of accents that the Swallow Man uses as well. While Anna appreciates this approach, when she ventures out on her own, she forgets the rule. She speaks to the pharmacist first. It is as though she gives him the power to lead the discussion. She regrets her failure to heed the Swallow Man's advice, but is able to keep her wits about her to survive.

Non-traditional language are used throughout the novel as well. War has its own language, with the sound of troops advancing, bombings, and silence after a battle has ended. There is a language of music that Reb Hirschl shows to Anna when they meet. There is also a language of violence. The Swallow Man keeps both a knife and revolver with him, but his preferred language is the knife. It is fitting then that he passes along the knife to Anna when he sets her out on her own.

## Identity

The theme of identity is used as a metaphor for the countless people who suffer during wartime. The reader is first introduced to the reader by her first and last name: Anna Lania. Her father is not mentioned by name and her mother is absent from the picture. She quickly becomes orphaned in the world and must seek out the kindness of strangers.

When she meets the Swallow Man, she does not anything about him except for his ability to speak multiple languages and that he is very tall and thin. She connects with him without ever learning his name, where he is from, or any other personal details. She knows that he carries two passports with him, but that the photos do not quite look like him. Perhaps he is German or Polish, but she never learns.

When the group encounters the Peddler in the forest, he labels both the Swallow Man and Reb Hirschl as Jews, and even suggests that Anna is Jewish as well. Of the group, only Reb Hirschl is open about being Jewish. He is not ashamed of who he is. He sings,



says his prayers, and keeps other customs from his religion in mind, such as not taking from the dead and not eating particular cuts of meat. He breaks with some of his traditions because of the war, but he is aware of what he is doing.

The Swallow Man encourages Anna to hide her identity, telling her to forget being Anna or aspects of her life before. He does this to ensure her safety, but when Anna is objectified by the pharmacist, she returns to being Anna. In her nudity, she is reborn as Anna and must figure out how to exist in the world as herself.

While the reader never learns the identity of the Swallow Man, it is clear that he has returned to his previous life to protect Anna. By the end of the novel, both Anna and the Swallow Man have returned to their original identities. Because of this it is fitting that the two are separated because their previous selves existed apart from one another.

# Styles

## Point of View

The novel is told through a third-person, omniscient narrator. The story is straight forward, although the narrator does break in on occasion to comment on what happened or in the case of Reb Hirschl's death, telling the reader directly that the details of his death will not be revealed. This is evidenced by the comment that "All the same, I will spare you the details of what happened to Reb Hirschl" (175).

That is not to suggest that the narrator shies from the horrors of war. The narrator gives details about the different events in the war, from the Polish invasion to when the academics, such as Anna's father, were taken into custody.

Ultimately, the war is seen through the lens of a seven-year-old girl abandoned during World War II. She ages throughout the course of the novel through puberty, but does not reach adulthood before the novel concludes. When Anna is left alone, she fends for herself, befriending the Swallow Man, which saves her life.

Anna's lens is one of understanding and compassion. Her her ability to speak multiple languages gives her an advantage to communicate with as many people as possible. Her connection with Reb Hirschl prompts the Swallow Man to risk their safety in order to help him as well.

## Language and Meaning

The novel is comprised of seven chapters and an epilogue. None of the chapters are numbered, but are numbered for the purpose of ease in this study guide. Each of the chapters has a titled: "What Do You Say?", "Follow the Leader", "A Lesson in Zoology", "The Man Who Kissed His Rifle", "Patterns of Migration", "What'll You Give Me?", "Endangered Species", and "The Uncertainty Principle." A Table of Contents is also provided.

The narrative unfolds in a linear fashion. The narrator gives the reader insight into major events in the war. In addition to explaining about the Nazis taking academics into custody, the narrator provides information about different offensives, such as Operation Barbarossa. The attack is described as "the largest military action that there has ever been" (142), but is put in the context of how Anna may see the attack. She believes they are "after her and her friends" (142).

As the group travels, they are on the fringe of war. They see the consequences of war: dead soldiers on a battlefield, Jews in a mass grave, and food shortages. By keeping them on the outskirts, they are safer than they would be perceived in the city. They are constantly on the move, giving them agency in their survival and distance in themselves from the war.



The novel concludes with an ambiguous ending. Anna is sailing north to an unspecified country, as part of an arrangement the Swallow Man made. The war is ongoing and Anna is seeking safety.

## Structure

The language in the novel is accessible for young adults, although the vocabulary can be challenging, offering the reader an opportunity to further build their own vocabulary. This makes sense given the way in which Anna, her father, and the Swallow Man all appreciate the use of multiple languages.

Some vulgar language is used in the novel. When the Peddler tries to show his dominance over the group, he tells the men "What the fuck do you care what kind of meat it is?" (164) and calls Reb Hirschl a "fucking cow" (164). The language is used to demonstrate the Peddler's vulgarity in contrast to Anna and the men. Because the passage occurs later in the novel, it further illustrates the harshness of war as it continues.

There is an emphasis on family, albeit a non-traditional one. Anna and the Swallow Man forged a father-daughter type relationship. The subject matter may invite conversations about the harsh realities of losing a parent, finding one's place in life, and learning to communicate. It also demonstrates the value of loyalty and resourcefulness.

The novel does not shy away from demonstrating the horrors of war, but it does not linger on them either. The intended audience is likely teenagers to adults. In doing so, the reader will have the opportunity to know the dangers Anna may face and understand the choices she and the Swallow Man make.



## Quotes

The first time Anna realized that a language was a compromise shared amongst people - that two people who spoke the same language were not necessarily the same - this was the only time she could remember asking her father a question that he could not manage to answer.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 18)

**Importance:** The quote reflects the state of the world at war and how commonalities are not enough to bridge understanding and peaceful accord.

Anna felt irresistibly that in this tall stranger she had found another of their tribe - a man of many tongues.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 128)

**Importance:** The quote demonstrates how Anna has struggled with understanding what her own language might be because she speaks so many. She connects with the Swallow Man because of his ability to understand most of the ways in which she can communicate.

This is no time for hoping.

-- Swallow Man (chapter 2 paragraph 81)

**Importance:** The quote illustrates the pessimistic outlook the Swallow Man has of the war. He understands that it is a dire time and this is how he makes peace with it.

If I ever look too much like myself, you must tell me.

-- Swallow Man (chapter 2 paragraph 122)

**Importance:** The quote shows how the Swallow Man trusts Anna to see him when his ultimate goal is to keep his identity hidden.

The liabilities of money far outweighed its advantages.

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 21)

**Importance:** The quote illustrates how the Swallow Man views currency during the war. He knows that other forms of currency are far more useful and valuable and less apt to cause imminent danger.

He never spoke to strangers first, preferring to allow them to reveal their language and accent to him, and once they had, it was a rare occasion upon which he didn't closely match them.

-- Narrator (chapter 3 paragraph 47)

**Importance:** The quote demonstrates the basis for how the Swallow Man interacts with



others, obscuring any clues to his identity whenever he meets someone. He breaks this rule when he speaks to Anna first.

It was something like six months later when Anna met a man in the woods who was kissing his rifle.

-- Narrator (chapter 4 paragraph 49)

**Importance:** The quote shows Anna's detachment from society. She is more comfortable seeing a rifle than a musical instrument.

I had lost sight,' said the Swallow Man, ' of the fact that survival in and of itself is not sufficient to support every life equally.

-- Swallow Man (chapter 5 paragraph 11)

**Importance:** The quote shows how the Swallow Man has developed a desire to provide for Anna in a way that exceeds food and clothing.

You told me I was honor-bound to ask you no questions, and I think you will recall that I said I would make no such promise.

-- Reb Hirschl (chapter 5 paragraph 69)

**Importance:** The quote demonstrates how Reb Hirschl maintains his autonomy, giving insight into how he came to be traveling by himself in the woods away from other. He is not willing to compromise what he believes.

For the first time the boiling cruelty that simmered low inside the Peddler had slipped up to the surface, and all three of them took silent note.

-- Narrator (chapter 6 paragraph 44)

**Importance:** The quote illustrates the way power is wielded during times of war. The Peddler knows that Reb Hirschl is Jewish and suspects the same of the Swallow Man. By indicating his contempt for Jews, he seeks to instill fear in them.

Now there was only one feeling in her: pure, unmitigated terror.

-- Narrator (chapter 7 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** The quote shows Anna coming to terms with the fear and horror she has faced throughout the war and how she is confronted with facing it alone to help someone she cares for.

Flying birds still made Anna feel nothing so much as loneliness.

-- Narrator (chapter 8 paragraph 18)

**Importance:** The quote demonstrates a departure from Anna and the Swallow Man's connection with each other. While they share many things, including multiple languages, she does not share his affinity for birds. She does not feel a need to be able to fly away, and she may not have left the Swallow Man had he not arranged for her to leave.