

Echo Study Guide

Echo by Pam Munoz Ryan

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Echo Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
The Untitled Opening Section.....	5
Part One, Chapters 1-15.....	8
Part One, Chapters 16-29.....	14
Part Two, Chapters 1-12.....	18
Part Two, Chapters 13-24.....	23
Part Three, Chapters 1-12.....	26
Part Three, Chapters 13-21.....	31
Part Four, Chapters 1-3; Final Untitled Chapter.....	34
Characters.....	37
Symbols and Symbolism.....	41
Settings.....	43
Themes and Motifs.....	45
Styles.....	51
Quotes.....	53



Plot Summary

Otto is a young boy who is playing a game with a little girl named Mathilde. He hides in the woods and begins reading a book about a young boy named Otto. He suddenly realizes he has been in the woods for a long time and when he heads back toward the game, he becomes lost. He encounters three princesses named Eins, Zwei, and Drei, which translate to One, Two, and Three. Their father, the king, so desperately wanted a boy that he abandoned each of the girls to the care of a wicked witch. Otto reveals that his book is about the three girls and they beg him to read the ending so they will know what happens to them. To Otto's surprise, the book he is reading has no more words after the scene in which they meet. The moral of that story is that the princesses and Otto have to write their own story rather than reading about their lives in a book.

The princesses give Otto a magical harmonica with instructions to pass it along when it is time. He becomes the first messenger of the harmonica. No one believes his story about the princesses and he eventually stops telling it. He marries Mathilde and they have a daughter who needs medical attention that Otto cannot afford. He gets a job making harmonicas for a company but their dog chews up one of the instruments. Otto delivers the harmonica given to him by the princesses in place of the destroyed instrument.

The harmonica winds up in a German factory where a young man named Friedrich works. One day, Friedrich finds the harmonica in an abandoned storage room. He is a brilliant musician but has a birthmark on his face. Hitler is just coming into power and the situation becomes dangerous for Friedrich and his family. When Friedrich's father is arrested, Friedrich's sister Elisabeth contributes money to help Friedrich ensure their father's release. Just before he prepares to leave the harmonica factory, Friedrich remembers his uncle's warning that he is to take nothing of sentimental value with him. He polishes his beloved harmonica and places it in a box about to be shipped out to America. Elisabeth remains in Germany while Friedrich, his father, and his uncle escape from the country.

The harmonica winds up in an American music store. Mike Flannery and his younger brother, Frankie, are in the process of an adoption by a young American woman who lost her own son years earlier. A family friend purchases harmonicas for both the boys and Mike chooses Otto's harmonica from the box. He fears that he and Frankie are not secure in their new home and that he can earn a spot on a harmonica band. He does win but finds out that their new home is everything he and Frankie could have wanted. He eventually settles down to focus on the piano and passes his harmonica on to be donated to a group of school children.

Ivy chooses the harmonica next. She is a young Hispanic girl who has a great talent and is chosen to perform a solo on the radio. Before the performance, her family has an employment opportunity and they move. She struggles to fit into her new neighborhood but earns a set on the school orchestra. When their employer's son, Kenny Yamamoto, arrives home from the war for a brief visit, Ivy gives him the harmonica. When the



harmonica literally deflects a bullet and saves Kenny's life, the spell on Eins, Zwei, and Drei is lifted and they are reunited with their mother and brother.

Meanwhile, Friedrich becomes a famous conductor, Mike becomes a renowned pianist, and Ivy becomes an accomplished flutist. The three perform on the same night at Carnegie Hall, making all their musical dreams come true.

NOTE: This guide is based on the Kindle version of the novel, copyrighted 2015.



The Untitled Opening Section

Summary

The novel opens with an untitled chapter. This section serves the purpose of a preface and focuses on a little boy named Otto. The time is “50 years before the war to end all wars” (2). Otto and his friends, including a little girl named Mathilde, are playing a game and he is determined to be the last person found. He goes into the woods, knowing no one else will dare follow him there. He takes a seat and begins reading a book. The title of the book is *The Thirteenth Harmonica of Otto Messenger*.

The storyline then moves to that book's first chapter, titled “A Witch, a Kiss, a Prophecy.” A king's kingdom will only revert to his child if the first child born is a son. If the child is a daughter, the king's brother will become the next ruler. The queen gives birth to three daughters in a row. Each time, the king sends the midwife to leave the baby in the forest so the animals can kill it. Instead, the midwife leaves the babies with a witch who names them Eins, Zwei, and Drei, or One, Two, and Three. The midwife leaves each baby with a prophecy: “Your fate is not yet sealed. Even in the darkest night, a star will shine, a bell will chime, a path will be revealed.” Then the queen gives birth to a boy and everyone celebrates.

Otto realizes that he has been reading a long time and that no one has called for him to come out of his hiding place. He begins to walk but is lost. He falls and bumps his head. Eins, Zwei, and Drei, the three princesses, find him. He is surprised and tells them about the book. They ask him to continue reading so they can discover what their future is to be.

The next chapter of Otto's book is titled “A Secret, a Spell, a Final Deed.” The king's brother dies, then the king dies, and his son takes over the throne. The midwife reveals the story of the three princesses and the new king sends her to get them. The witch is furious and casts a spell that dooms the princesses to be “spirits” in a woodwind, and that they will remain there until they can save someone's life. The three princesses are then held prisoner in a place where time no longer passes.

The princesses confirm that the story is true to this point and Otto discovers the rest of the pages in the book are blank. The princesses cannot leave the forest except through a messenger. They hope Otto has a woodwind instrument with him. He reveals that the gypsy who sold him the book also gave him a harmonica. The sisters each play the harmonica and Otto is amazed at the beautiful harmony he hears from the single instrument. The princesses then tell Otto to sleep, and he does.

Otto wakes to daylight and discovers a path. When he walks down the path, he hears his name and discovers people are looking for him. He rushes to his father. Later, he tells his parents the story but his parents believe he imagined the scene because of the bump on his head. He tells the story only to Mathilde because no one else believes it.



He continues to play the harmonica and loves how it makes him feel. He always remembers that he is the messenger.

Analysis

The opening of Otto's chapter in the novel takes place 50 years "before the war to end all wars" (2). This war is World War II, which is sometimes referred to as the war to end all wars.

Eins, Zwei, and Drei talk to Otto about the harmonica. He believes it is just an ordinary instrument and he is actually somewhat disappointed about the turn his situation has taken. He seems to expect that there will be some giant event that takes place but the princesses tell him that he just has to breathe in and out on the harmonica, just as he would do if he was breathing normally. This is an indication that, at least to some people, the harmonica will become almost as important as air. The characters that depend on the harmonica in the coming chapters will prove that point as the lives of each is changed as they encounter the harmonica.

The title of Otto's book includes the word "messenger" as if it was a last name. In that title, it seems that the character's name is "Otto Messenger," but the fact that is Otto will become the important messenger in the curse the witch places on the princesses.

It is vital to fully understand the curse in order to understand the importance of the harmonica being passed on to the next characters. The witch's curse is that the princesses are trapped in a small circle of stumps in the forest. The sun rises and sets but actually, time stands still for the princesses and they are simply stuck because of the curse. They are to remain there until they save a life, but they can only do that by placing a part of themselves into a woodwind instrument. The harmonica is technically a woodwind and they put a part of themselves into the harmonica by blowing in it.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Otto's encounter in the woods. Who did Otto meet? How are these characters described?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Otto's book end at the point Eins, Zwei, and Drei are cursed by the witch and left in the forest?

Discussion Question 3

How do Eins, Zwei, and Drei end up in that particular point in the forest and what is Otto's role going to be in their future?

Vocabulary

ardent, monarchy, peculiar, providence, baubles, brink, fortitude, euphoric



Part One, Chapters 1-15

Summary

Section One is titled “October 1933, Trossingen, Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany.” In Chapter One, Friedrich Schmidt is a boy who is about to walk to work at the harmonica factory for the first time without his father, Martin, who has retired. Martin reminds Friedrich that they have talked about this. At his father's prompt, Friedrich says he knows he is supposed to walk with his head up.

In Chapter Two, Friedrich gets around the corner and immediately drops his head to look downward. He does not attend a “regular school” and so he and Martin read the newspaper together each evening. Martin is critical of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. Friedrich hears a song coming from the music conservatory. He is working on music for his audition there and cannot decide if he is more worried that he will fail, or that he will be accepted. Friedrich is lost in the music for a moment. His Uncle Gunter greets him when he arrives at the harmonica factory.

Chapter Three reverts back four years. Friedrich and his older sister, Elisabeth, arrived at school as usual. At her instruction, he usually took a place away from other students in order to remain inconspicuous. But on that day, he was remembering the music from the ballet he had seen the previous evening. Lost in the music, he raised his hands as if conducting the orchestra. He did not even realize the boys were about to attack him until it was too late.

The next day, Martin accompanied Friedrich to school. The principal said Friedrich asked for the bullying by being so strange. Martin and the official argued but the official made it clear he thought Friedrich was also strange and mentioned a psychiatrist. Martin removed Friedrich from school that day. Martin and Friedrich went to the factory and Martin talked to the supervisors. They were obviously moved by the situation. From that point, Friedrich worked at the factory each morning, polishing harmonicas. In the afternoon, other employees put their own expertise to work, teaching Friedrich the basic subjects he would have learned in school. Martin continued to teach him music on the weekends. Friedrich was thrilled.

In Chapter Four, Friedrich arrives at his work station. There is a list of vocabulary words by his station and he knows Mrs. Steinweg will give him a test on them on Thursday. Friedrich gives his math homework to Mr. Karl from the accounting department. He reminds Friedrich to stop by his office later to go over it. A young male clerk named Anselm arrives. He says Friedrich is to go to Mr. Eichmann's office to begin reading *The Odyssey*. Anselm is obviously sarcastic, saying that Mr. Eichmann is being paid to work while he gives Friedrich lessons. Friedrich counters, saying Mr. Eichmann continues to work while Friedrich reads, and that the supervisors approved the plan. Anselm's opinion obviously does not change. He says that Germans have to be together and that there can no longer be “favorites.” After Anselm leaves, Uncle Gunter says he does not



care for the young Hitlerites. He says that Friedrich is a favorite in the factory and that two men have been arguing over which should teach Friedrich his next history class.

Uncle Gunter and Friedrich are obviously close. He reminds Friedrich that he is the person who taught Friedrich to ride a bike and play the harmonica. Uncle Gunter says he will visit that evening because Elisabeth is coming home from nursing school.

A supervisor named Earnst stops by. Everyone knows the political situation is affecting all aspects of life, including the factory. There has been talk that the star (like the Star of David) featured on the harmonica will be removed. Uncle Gunter assures Earnst that the workers know he is doing what he has to do in order to save the factory and all their jobs. Friedrich works through the morning, polishing the harmonicas before shipment and looking at the stars that would soon be gone.

In Chapter Five, Uncle Gunter invites Friedrich to join him at lunch but Friedrich declines. He goes to his favorite spot where some grebes immediately waddle out of the bushes toward him. He pretends to conduct Brahms' Lullaby and soon realizes that a musician is following his commands. The notes sound like a variety of woodwind instruments. Friedrich realizes the sounds are coming from a spooky abandoned warehouse that is no longer used. He follows the sounds to a specific room but finds no one. Everything is covered in dust. He discovers a harmonica inside a desk drawer. There is a tiny red M on one side of the instrument. Friedrich is suddenly afraid and runs back to his workstation.

Friedrich tells Uncle Gunter about the encounter and asks if he might be allowed to keep the harmonica he found. Uncle Gunter points out that the company gives everyone several each year. That evening, he plays the harmonica as he walks home. He is surprised to find he has passed the school yard before he even has time to worry about who he might encounter. His surprise his neighbor, Mrs. von Gerber, by saying hello to her. He feels safe with the music from the harmonica.

In Chapter Six, Friedrich arrives home to discover Elisabeth has prepared a meal. The three of them talk as they begin to eat. When Friedrich says he is preparing for his audition at the music conservatory, Elisabeth says the country needs "its true citizens to rise to their potential to be shining examples" (82). Friedrich is apprehensive that Elisabeth and Martin will argue, so he changes the subject. Elisabeth was supposed to be staying at home for several months. She soon reveals that she has become a Hitlerite and that she will be going to a hospital in Berlin where her services are needed more than here. She will only stay at home for the weekend.

In Chapter Seven, Elisabeth confirms that she believes that Hitler's ideas are correct. One of those is that the harmonica is not a "traditional" instrument and is therefore offensive. She clarifies, saying the kind of music usually played on the harmonica is offensive more than the instrument itself. She insists that the people should obey Hitler's dictates. She says she has the potential to rise in the Hitler Youth party and asks Martin for any records that can confirm her heritage. Uncle Gunter arrives but Martin excuses



himself. Uncle Gunter stays only a short time and Friedrich can tell he is worried when he leaves.

In Chapter Eight, Martin finds the records Elisabeth needs. Friedrich begins to put the items back in their box but finds a death certificate that includes his name and birth date. Elisabeth finds him and they take the paper to Martin.

In Chapter Nine, Martin says Friedrich had seizures in the hours after his birth. The doctor was so certain the baby would die that he created the death certificate, but Friedrich lived. Friedrich's mother knew Friedrich would have a difficult time because of the birthmark because she had an aunt with a similar mark. She did not want him to face the stigma of also having epilepsy. Since the seizures never recurred, she made Martin promise never to tell anyone.

Elisabeth says that Friedrich has a birthmark that is a recurring family defect and that he had epileptic seizures. Under Hitler's rules, both Friedrich and Elisabeth will be forced to have surgeries so they could never have children who might also inherit these defects. Martin asks Elisabeth if she believes the law is right. She says she understands why it is a law. Elisabeth then says that Martin must always speak positively about Hitler in her presence. She says she will be questioned about her family. Friedrich asks if she would report her own father and Elisabeth says the Nazis reward people who are honest about their families. Friedrich is horrified but Martin shouts at him, saying no one will ever say anything else against Hitler in Father's house.

In Chapter 10, Friedrich goes to his room and takes the harmonica apart to clean it. He goes through the scale on it and Elisabeth joins him, saying two of the notes are flat. She notices that the harmonica has an unusual sound. Friedrich says both he and the harmonica are "unacceptable" in this new world. Elisabeth says she believes Hitler is doing what's best for their country. Elisabeth points out that her childhood was altered because she had to become responsible for the house and for Friedrich after their mother died. When she leaves the room, Friedrich realizes that his birthmark also affected Elisabeth's life. He is furious that he was born with the mark.

In Chapter 11, the conversation is strained on Elisabeth's last night at home. Martin plays Brahms' Lullaby as he had when the children were very young.

In Chapter 12, Elisabeth leaves without saying good-bye. Friedrich and Martin talk about Martin's decision to shop at a store owned by Jews though others are boycotting the store. Martin says he will not be so outspoken in the future, but he will not change his opinions. He says any action the Nazi Party will take against groups such as the Jews, they will also take against people like Friedrich.

In Chapter 13, Friedrich waits at the factory gates for Martin, who had a meeting that day with their family physician, Dr. Braun. When he arrives, he confirms that Dr. Braun will be turning Friedrich's records over to the Nazi Party in keeping with the new law. Martin says the music conservatory might be able to intervene if Friedrich is accepted, but that the government may insist on the surgery. Martin is very upset.



Anselm asks Friedrich to join him for a Hitler Youth meeting. Friedrich politely refuses.

In Chapter 14, Friedrich and Martin go over music Friedrich might perform for his audition. Martin continues to write to Elisabeth though she never writes back. He says he writes about memories of their childhoods and everyday events, but never politics, in the hope that she might someday return to their family.

In Chapter 15, Martin says he is having friends over to play music together. One of them sits on the board of the music conservatory. The other is a Jewish man who is no longer allowed to be a teacher. He says Friedrich should begin the evening by playing Brahms' Lullaby on the harmonica.

Analysis

Each of the three parts of the novel opens with numbered notes and the words to a song. Part One opens with Brahms' Lullaby. This is an important song to the main character of this part of the novel.

Friedrich is about 12 at the time the novel picks up his story. He has been working at the harmonica factory since he was eight years old. In the opening chapter, before the reader knows about Friedrich's background, some readers may believe that he has some sort of mental deficit that makes him so dependent on his father. Other students believed he was strange because of his tendency to get lost in music. These points may affect some readers' image of Friedrich throughout the novel.

Friedrich was bullied because he was different. The birthmark on his face is apparently very visible and has been for his entire life. The other children call him "Monster Boy." At least partly because he has no friends, music became an important part of Friedrich's life. He also longed for friends and created an imaginary friend to talk to when he was not busy with school work. He was very young – just eight years old – and the other students were completely unforgiving. Most of them had no concept of why Friedrich pretended to conduct music and had probably not even heard of the kind of music Friedrich loved. All these differences shape Friedrich's character in important ways.

When Friedrich's father removed him from school, Friedrich was excited. He knew that he would no longer have to figure out how to best avoid the bullies and that he would not have to endure the torments and bullying. However, as the years pass, Friedrich wants the typical thing that most youngsters want. He wants to be a normal kid who attends school in the normal fashion and has friends his own age. He has none of those things because of the birthmark on his face. This is one of several examples of prejudice that are seen in the novel, which is one of the main themes.

There is a great deal of historical information included throughout the storyline, including the settings in Germany during Hitler's rise to power. Hitler sought to purge Germany of everyone who did not fit his criteria. The Jewish people were chief among those to be eliminated by the Nazi Party under Hitler's command. The Star of David is the symbol Earnst and Uncle Gunter discuss. It is included on the harmonicas made at the factory



and Earnst says he expects it will soon be discontinued to avoid the possibility that they will chase customers away. This is in keeping with the attitudes of the time because people were beginning to realize that the government would shut down the factory if the product offended the Nazi Party. The modern-day reader who is not familiar with the historical background may not fully understand this and some other situations the characters face.

Friedrich cannot believe that Elisabeth would turn on her own family because they disagree with Hitler's politics, but the truth is that she probably would. Many young people of this time and place became caught up in the fervor of the Nazi Party and all its promises. What Elisabeth does not understand is that Father has made a living working at the harmonica factory. The money from his work has provided for the family, including Elisabeth. When she talks about Friedrich's birthmark, she obviously hurts his feelings but she rationalizes it by spouting the reasons she has heard from the Nazi Party meetings. Elisabeth is not thinking for herself, as is typical in situations of this kind.

Friedrich is several years younger than Elisabeth and, as the younger, had never thought about what her childhood was like. Elisabeth took on the role of housekeeper and mother though she was still a child herself. She went to school but also cooked and cleaned for the family. She also took piano lessons but says it was because Father insisted. She does not embrace music the way Friedrich and Father do, but that may be because she never really had time to enjoy it when she was young. It may also be the effects of the Nazi Party's attitudes about those things that have jaded her.

An important part of the relationship between Elisabeth and Friedrich is the change that takes place while Elisabeth is at home during this section of the novel. Friedrich remembers that she was his protector when he was very young. He would tell her that he felt like a monster because the children called him a monster. Elisabeth's reply was always that he was not a monster, and that he could believe that because his family would always tell him the truth. He did believe Elisabeth but her attitude has obviously changed dramatically because of her acceptance of Hitler's ideas. She says she will willingly go for the surgery to ensure she does not pass along either the birthmark or the epilepsy that is in their family. This hurts Friedrich in the worst possible way. With her changed attitude, he is forced to realize that he had a negative effect on Elisabeth's childhood and that she believes he is something of a monster after all.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Friedrich bullied at school and what is Father's reaction? How does that reaction change Friedrich's life?

Discussion Question 2

What is Elisabeth's attitude about Hitler's ideas? Why are they so hurtful to Friedrich and Father?



Discussion Question 3

Describe the political climate of this time and place. What are the potential effects on Friedrich and his family?

Vocabulary

palpable, percussive, ethereal, alluring, entranced, anticipation, apprehensive, potential, rationale, pallid, conjecture, forthright, fanatic, fortuitous



Part One, Chapters 16-29

Summary

In Chapter 16, two men arrive. Rudolph sits on the conservatory board. Josef is the Jewish teacher. Friedrich plays a piece on the harmonica first. Josef says it is beautiful and remarks on the unusual sound. Rudolph says the harmonica is a toy and that it is not sanctioned by the Nazi Party. Rudolph realizes he knows Josef and that Josef is a Jew. He makes it clear that he supports the Nazis, saying his brother is an official and that Anselm from the factory is his nephew. He leaves, saying Martin has made a decision about which side he is on.

Josef also prepares to leave, saying people talk about situations and that he does not want to cause problems for Martin. When he is gone, Friedrich asks his father what will happen next. Martin says he will certainly be questioned and that he should not have been so outspoken.

In Chapter 17, Uncle Gunter and Martin decide they must flee Germany. Martin and Uncle Gunter will go to work the following day as usual. They will leave their instruments in a locked storage space at Uncle Gunter's apartment. Friedrich worries what his future will be as he prepares to leave everything he knows.

In Chapter 18, Anselm asks Friedrich to join him at a Hitler Youth meeting that night. Friedrich says he and his family are going to visit his sister in Berlin. Anselm leaves but instead of going to the factory, he heads off toward town. That evening, Friedrich and Martin have dinner and prepare to go to Uncle Gunter's. Before they can leave, two storm troopers arrive. They say Elisabeth is not in Berlin, but is in Munich with Anselm's sister. The soldiers say the family has no reason to travel and that Martin has to go in for questioning. They ask if there is someone to care for Friedrich if Martin does not return. Then they arrest him for "suspicion of activities dangerous to the State" and leave (152).

In Chapter 19, Friedrich arrives at Uncle Gunter's apartment and relates what happened. They return to Friedrich's home and gather the luggage and instruments, then go back to Uncle Gunter's.

In Chapter 20, Uncle Gunter and Friedrich return to Friedrich's house and discover someone has broken in and torn up the house. Uncle Gunter plans to see if he can find out where Martin is being held and he sends Friedrich to work as usual. Most people at the factory are sympathetic. Anselm says he knows Friedrich will attend the next Hitler Youth meeting with him. Friedrich manages not to say what he really feels.

In Chapter 21, Uncle Gunter has learned that Martin is at Dachau, a hard-labor prison camp used to "reeducate" prisoners to think like the Nazis. Uncle Gunter says the sentence varies greatly but they might be able to pay a ransom in exchange for Martin's



freedom. Friedrich has money saved that was to be used for books at the conservatory. Uncle Gunter has some to add to that but says they need more. Uncle Gunter says they should contact Elisabeth for help. Friedrich says she won't help because the ransom is not technically legal, but agrees to write to her anyway.

In Chapter 22, Mrs. von Gerber, the woman who lived next to Martin and Friedrich, knocks on Uncle Gunter's door. She has a basket and says Elisabeth sent her some jars of jam along with a package for Friedrich. Elisabeth asked for her discretion. Mrs. von Gerber says soldiers asked her questions, and that she heard them say they planned to question Gunter.

Friedrich opens the letter from Elisabeth and is disappointed that it is filled with Nazi propaganda with no mention of Martin. There is a post script warning Friedrich not to eat all the cookies she sent with the letter. Friedrich relates the story of how he ate an entire batch of cookies as a child, and that Elisabeth hid the next batch "under the crumb tray" of the bread box (170). Uncle Gunter finds a false bottom under the cookies and discovers enough money to complete their ransom. He says he will try to figure out the best way to deliver it. That night, Friedrich writes to Elisabeth.

In Chapter 23, Friedrich says he should be the one to deliver the ransom. He reveals the rest of his plan and Uncle Gunter finally agrees that he cannot come up with a better idea.

In Chapter 24, Uncle Gunter leaves. Their plan is to meet in a week. Friedrich thinks over the plan. He will travel to Dachau and offer the cookies as a gift to the prison commandant.

In Chapter 25, Friedrich sets the table as if Uncle Gunter is still there, prepares a meal and eats off both plates. He then tears the apartment apart, as if soldiers have searched it just as they did Friedrich's home.

In Chapter 26, Friedrich goes to work as if it is a normal Monday morning. Anselm says there is a Hitler Youth meeting on Thursday and Friedrich says he will attend. While he works, Friedrich remembers Uncle Gunter's admonition that he should not take anything of sentimental value on his trip because the Nazis would certainly confiscate it. Friedrich carefully polishes his harmonica and puts it in a box that would soon be shipped off to a customer.

At noon, Friedrich leaves the factory and boards a train. There is a tense moment when soldiers demand his identification papers. One soldier approves Friedrich's papers but another recognizes him and is obviously planning to detain him. Friedrich imagines music accompanying the snow falling outside, and he begins to conduct as the soldiers call him a "lunatic" and continue to try to search him.



Analysis

The political climate is becoming seriously problematic for anyone who dares speak out against the Nazi Party, Hitler, or any of Hitler's ideas. It is obvious that Martin does not expect Rudolph to react as he does. Martin confronts Rudolph, saying they have talked about politics in the past and that he does not believe Rudolph supports Hitler. Rudolph counters, saying that times have changed and that he has changed his attitudes for the sake of his family. He is obviously being politically correct in the way he words his conversation, but he is also obviously serious about being careful for fear of punishment. Another interesting aspect of this is that Josef is well-versed in Hitler's politics. He tells Friedrich that Hitler loves the composer Wagner, and that means that all Hitler's followers must also love Wagner. He says Friedrich should choose something from Wagner to perform at the conservatory audition.

Martin had pledged to contain himself, mainly for Elisabeth's sake but also because he knows that the political climate is serious. After he has the conversation with Rudolph, Martin knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that he will be questioned. No one but Rudolph, Josef, Martin, and Friedrich know about the conversation so Martin is certain that Rudolph will tell his Nazi contacts about their conversation. While Martin knows how serious the political situation has become, he puts himself in a precarious situation by having Josef and Rudolph in the house at the same time. Even though he believed Rudolph was not a Hitler supporter, it seems irresponsible for him to include Josef in a situation that would so obviously affect Friedrich's future.

The soldiers who arrive to arrest Martin are obviously well-versed in the Nazi Party politics. They are rude and offensive toward Martin and even more openly toward Friedrich. They say he is "deformed" and ask if he is also "affected," indicating they believe he has a diminished mental capacity. Father objects, saying that Friedrich is "brilliant." The fact that the soldiers are so openly hostile makes it appear that they fully believe in what they are doing, but it may also be that they are the kind of people who are drunk off the level of power they have.

Mrs. von Gerber appears only for a couple of brief scenes but she is a complex character, partly because of her brief appearance. Elisabeth visits with her during her brief time at home and that makes it seem that Mrs. von Gerber is probably a Nazi supporter. It seems that Elisabeth would not voluntarily spend time with someone who was not. After Martin's arrest, Mrs. von Gerber has a Nazi flag in her window. That offends Friedrich but Uncle Gunter warns that she might not be what she seems. Then, she is the person Elisabeth trusts to deliver the cookies, letter, and ransom money to Friedrich. Elisabeth asks for the woman's "discretion," which indicates that Elisabeth trusts her not to tell the authorities about the letter. The complicated political climate of Germany during this time makes it necessary for people like Mrs. von Gerber to take on complicated lives just to survive. She is probably more typical of the ordinary German person during this time in history than most other characters in the story.



Part One seems to end abruptly without a reasonable conclusion. Some readers may become frustrated when Part Two and Part Three end similarly. The reader will learn how the harmonica passed from Otto to Friedrich, and what happens to Friedrich and the other characters, but not until the final sections of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Elisabeth and Friedrich. How and why does it change over the course of Elisabeth's brief stay at home?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Martin arrested? Why are Uncle Gunter and Friedrich also in danger?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Anselm? Who is Mrs. von Gerber? Compare the roles of the two characters in Friedrich's life.

Vocabulary

sanctioned, languish, mesmerized, charade, lament, premonition, mulled, temperamental, prone, unscathed, pillaged, solstice, sauntered, conviction, lunatic



Part Two, Chapters 1-12

Summary

Part Two is titled "June 1935, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, U.S.A." The section opens with the numbered notes and lyrics to America the Beautiful. In Chapter One, Mike Flannery has suffered through the heat all night in the Upper Boys' dormitory of Bishop's Orphanage. It is very early in the morning when he hears his younger brother, Frankie, whistle the final six notes of America the Beautiful. It is a signal between the boys that Frankie has an emergency. Mike goes to the second story window. Mike is eleven years old and has red hair. He is almost six feet tall and is self-conscious about it. The emergency is that Frankie heard staff saying that families were coming today to choose boys to take home with them. Frankie fears he and Mike will be separated. Mike says the agreement is that they will remain together. Frankie heads back toward his dormitory. Mike goes back to bed, worrying about their future.

In Chapter Two, Mike and Frankie are waiting outside the office of Pennyweather, one of the orphanage officials. Mike overhears her talking on the phone to someone who seems to be interested in buying the orphanage's old piano. Mike works in the kitchen sometimes and after he is finished, he plays the piano. Sometimes, Frankie joins him and Mike has been teaching him a song they play together. Pennyweather says she has a couple who wants to adopt two boys. When they arrive, the man says he already got two older boys from the state facility to work on the farm, but that his wife still wants a younger boy or two to help around the house. It becomes clear they do not want Mike so Frankie causes a scene and they do not take him either.

When they are gone, Pennyweather tells Mike that there are to be changes at Bishops, including that she will soon send all the younger boys away to make room for more older boys. Mike knows that the time when they will likely be separated is closer than he'd thought.

In Chapter Three, Mike and Frankie are put in the cellar as punishment. They talk about their past, including that their father died in an accident and their mother died of consumption, leaving them in the care of their grandmother. Granny was a music teacher and she taught Mike to play the piano. When Granny was too old to care for the boys any longer, she took them to Bishop's, the only orphanage she could find with a piano. She insisted the boys should stay together and Pennyweather agreed, though she has tried multiple times to separate them.

The boys then talk about their future plans, including that they will live in New York City, and that they will visit Carnegie Hall. Frankie talks about being in the audience, but Mike hopes he will be among the performers some day.

In Chapter Four, Mike and Frankie return to their dormitories. A teenager called Mouse gives Frankie some food and says some of Frankie's friends sneaked food out for



Frankie. Mouse says the situation is becoming more intense. Even though Mike is only eleven, Pennyweather will soon begin putting him among the boys who are hired out for pay. Mouse says he will be making a delivery the next day and Mike agrees to go along. When they are away from the orphanage, Mouse leaves Mike, saying he's running away to New York City. He says he has lived on the streets before and can survive there until he can join the army or the Civilian Conservation Corps.

In Chapter Five, Frankie brings Mike a newspaper article about Hoxie's Harmonica Band. If an orphan boy is accepted into the band, the organizers help him find a home. The band is for boys ages 10-16, but younger boys are sometimes accepted as mascots. Frankie says Mike could solve their problems by being accepted into the band. Mike knows the idea is a long shot. They do not have enough money to buy the harmonica they need and they do not have much time before the younger boys will be sent away.

In Chapter Six, a worker says Pennyweather wants Mike in the dining hall, and that Frankie is already there. A man has fixed the piano, thinking it is to be used by the orphanage. When he is gone, Pennyweather says men are coming to determine the quality of the piano and she knows Mike and Frankie have been practicing a song together. Two men arrive. One is Mr. Golding, an attorney who represents the second man, Mr. Howard. Mike and Frankie take a seat and play America the Beautiful, just as they practiced. The music is so wonderful that cooks are dabbing tears away and the other boys are crowding around the room. Mr. Howard and Mr. Golding then reveal that they are not interested in buying the piano, but that they want to adopt a boy and that he must have musical ability.

In Chapter Seven, Mr. Golding has paperwork ready. Mike believes this could be a chance for Frankie to have a stable home. Mr. Howard insists on talking to the boys alone and Pennyweather leaves the room. Mike says he wants Frankie to be adopted but Frankie objects, saying he does not want to be separated from Mike. Pennyweather returns and Frankie cries. Mike tries to reassure him but he is also sad and they hold onto each other. Mr. Howard and Mr. Golding hold a whispered conversation and Mr. Golding says they need to get the paperwork started.

In Chapter Eight, Mr. Golding is driving when they arrive on Amaryllis Drive. He drops off Mr. Howard, Frankie, and Mike at the home of Eunice Sturbridge. Mr. Howard introduces the boys to Mr. Potter, the groundskeeper and driver, and Mrs. Potter, the housekeeper. Mr. Howard leaves Frankie and Mike to talk to Eunice. They hear her yell that Mr. Howard was supposed to get one girl and she is furious that there are two boys. She comes outside to meet the boys. Frankie is excited, saying she is pretty and thanking her for adopting them. She rushes away, shouting that Mrs. Potter can take care of them. Mr. Howard says that the meeting went "very well."

In Chapter Nine, Mrs. Potter oversees the boys as they bathe. She washes their clothes. That night, they sleep in a large bed in a very nice room. Frankie confides that he fears it is a dream. Mike worries about the same thing.



In Chapter Ten, Mike wakes before Frankie and leaves the room. He finds the library doors open. There is a beautiful grand piano. Mike thinks that he might make a good impression on Eunice if he plays. In a short time, she arrives and is obviously upset. Mrs. Potter intervenes. She says Mike should never touch the piano again.

In Chapter 11, Mr. Howard takes Frankie and Mike shopping for new clothes at Highlander's Department Store. He directs the boys to go to the Young Gentleman's Department and wait for him there while he tends business. A clerk sees the boys' ragged clothes and thinks they are trying to steal something. Mr. Howard intervenes, demanding to see the manager who apologizes repeatedly. Soon, the boys try on an array of clothes and Mr. Howard purchases a complete new wardrobe for each.

In Chapter 12, Frankie spots a store that sells the harmonicas used by the harmonica band. Frankie tells Mr. Howard about their plan for Mike to enter. Mr. Howard says Mike could still enter "for the fun of it" (285). There is only one harmonica remaining by the register so the owner opens a new box of instruments and invites Mike to choose. One box catches his eye and he swears he hears a musical chord. He plays the final notes of America the Beautiful and hears the other instruments in the music store play a chord, but no one is near. By the time he is outside the shop, he is half convinced that he is just suffering from the heat. Outside, Mike feels that his harmonica sounds different from Frankie's. Mr. Howard says it is time to go home, and Mike smiles at the word, hoping things would work out for them this time.

Analysis

The man and woman who stop by Bishops planning to take a couple of boys are typical of what Mike and Frankie fear. They are not interested in having boys who will become members of their family. The man wants older boys to work on the farm and the woman wants someone younger to be in the house, probably to take over the chores around the house. The man says he needs boys strong enough to work but makes no secret of the fact that he cannot pay them anything other than room and board. When they discuss whether to get one younger boy or two, the woman says that it might be easier to have two, like "puppies" that comfort each other. Some readers may believe that the couple is not reasonably believable, but they might actually be accurate. The country has been in the Depression and times have been very difficult for many people, especially rural people without any form of financial security. In Pennsylvania, the farmers escaped the horrible conditions of the Midwest, but times were still difficult on many levels and some lost all sense of sentimentality.

Mike's background in music makes him a strong candidate to be the next person to possess the harmonica. Granny taught him piano along with her other students and he has a talent for music. Music moves him and he understands the need for emotion as well as perfect playing. In addition, Granny had bought harmonicas for Mike and Frankie, but Pennyweather confiscated them, along with most other possessions any boy had when he arrived.



Bishop's Orphanage is an awful place but Mike is fully aware that there are other places that are even worse. Pennyweather is only interested in making money and does not care at all for the boys who live there. A group of ladies donate homemade items, including jars of jams, to the orphanage, and Pennyweather sells them instead of using them for the boys. She is allowed to hire the boys out for wages once they turn 14, but she routinely includes younger boys. The biggest problem is that there is no oversight at this point in history, and Mike realizes that no one cares what happens to any of them.

Mouse is 16 and one of the oldest boys at the orphanage. When he runs away, he says he can live on the streets of New York City until he turns 18, and then can join the military or the Civil Conservation Corps. That second option is a historically accurate program that began as a means of putting people back to work at the end of the Great Depression. This is another of many examples of historical events that are woven into the storyline, giving the novel a stronger feeling of realism.

There is something obviously going on with Mr. Howard and Mr. Golding as they talk about adopting Mike and Frankie. They mention time constraints and that they have not found a single child with the musical ability they seek. These clues make sense in coming chapters.

Mike is similar to Elisabeth in that he feels a heavy sense of responsibility for his younger brother. Both are serious about their roles in the younger sibling's life, but they have slightly different roles. Both feel that it is a burden, but hide that from their siblings. Both are protective and try to keep their younger brothers from facing the difficulties in life. However, Elisabeth has the role of caregiver, preparing meals and taking care of most of Friedrich's daily needs while Mike is trying to figure out how to ensure that Frankie has a secure future. Their similarities came about because of circumstances but Elisabeth's attitude changes as she becomes caught up in the ideas of the Nazi Party.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Mike and Frankie, and how they came to be at Bishop's.

Discussion Question 2

Why is Mike so worried about Frankie's future? What does he see as an ideal future for them? What does he consider the most important things for their future?

Discussion Question 3

Compare the lives of Mike and Elisabeth. How and why are they similar?

Vocabulary

saunter, truant, clambered, progeny, inclination, stipend, endearing, newfangled, intricate, succumbed, modest, benefactor



Part Two, Chapters 13-24

Summary

In Chapter 13, Mr. Potter is accomplished with the harmonica and can make an array of sounds. He begins teaching Frankie and Mike about playing “blues” music. He has sheet music for the harmonica that he loans the boys. For the next two weeks, the Potters care for Frankie and Mike, and Mr. Howard sometimes takes them on outings. Eunice is never with them. On the night before the Fourth of July, Frankie wonders if Eunice might spend time with them the following day, especially since Mr. Howard is out of town.

In Chapter 14, Frankie worries that he is too noisy or somehow to blame for the fact that Eunice never spends time with them. Mike tries to reassure him, saying it will just take time for her to get past the shock of having two boys instead of the one girl she expected. Mike overhears Eunice talking to Mr. Howard. She mentions someone named Henry and says she is seeing Mr. Golding to try to get the situation changed. Mr. Howard says her father only wanted to be sure the house was again filled with children and music.

In Chapter 15, Mr. Howard talks with Frankie and Mike. The talk turns to fears. Mr. Howard says he is afraid of losing the people he cares about. When Mike and Mr. Howard are alone, he tells Mike a story. He says Eunice had married a violinist and they had a son, Henry. When Henry was three, he drowned at a lake while his father was supposed to be watching him. Eunice never forgave her husband and they divorced. When Eunice's father died, he left a stipulation that she had to begin the process of adopting a child within a year of his death. Mike says Eunice is trying to “undo” their adoption. Mr. Howard says he does not believe it will come to that but Mike does not believe him.

In Chapter 16, Mike tries to figure out what would be the best course of action, hoping to ensure Frankie's security. He decides that he has to work hard to earn a spot on Hoxie's Harmonica band so that the organizers will help him find another home. He believes he can visit Frankie between the band's tours, and that Eunice might keep just one boy.

In Chapter 17, Mike gets a chance to talk to Eunice. He pleads with her to consider keeping Frankie, saying he fears what will happen is Frankie is sent to a state orphanage. He says he understands about her grief, but promises that Frankie will not be trying to take Henry's place. He tells her of his plan to join the harmonica band, but says he will go back to Bishop's or to work on a farm, or whatever is required. Mr. Howard arrives to take the boys to the park. Mike leaves Eunice quietly crying but she does not say what her plans are for the boys.

In Chapter 18, Mike runs back to the house, saying he forgot something. Inside, he discovers Mrs. Potter listening as Eunice plays the piano. She suddenly stops playing



and pounds on the keys. Mrs. Potter rushes to her and helps her upstairs. Mike wonders if he pushed Eunice too hard.

In Chapter 19, Eunice remains in her room for days. One evening, she knocks on the door and asks to talk to Mike. She says she will honor his request regarding the harmonica band. She begins to say what her plan would be if it did not work out as Mike hopes, but Frankie interrupts. She thanks him for the flowers and drawings her left for her over the past few days. Soon, Eunice joins Frankie, Mike, and Mr. Howard for a meal in the dining room. She says the boys can begin calling her Aunt Eunie. Mr. Howard has a newspaper article with details for harmonica band tryouts.

They talk briefly about the songs Mike should perform. Eunice agrees that America the Beautiful would be a good choice. Mike spends time working with Mr. Potter. Over the coming days, Mike spends time with Eunice at the keyboard. One day, she spontaneously hugs him. She also spends more time with Frankie.

In Chapter 21, Mike gets to the first round of the auditions. In Chapter 22, members of the judges say he is a “promising” player. The family returns home where Eunice has cake waiting. She says her father always insisted they have cake “before the results” because she had tried (348).

In Chapter 23, Mike, Frankie, Eunice, and Mr. Howard are preparing to attend a performance by the harmonica band. Eunice says she forgot her hat on her desk and Mike returns for it. He finds a letter granting her a reversal of her adoption of Mike and Frankie. Mike does not let on that he saw the document, but he is angry at himself for trusting Eunice and begins to make plans.

In Chapter 24, Mike wakes Frankie in the middle of the night and tells him they have to leave. He says they are going to New York City, just as they always wanted. They climb out a window because Mike hopes to avoid being seen. Mike has never been good at climbing trees and he falls.

Analysis

New York City is mentioned several times in Part Two of the novel. Mike's Granny had talked to the boys about her own experiences in the city, including a visit to Carnegie Hall. From those stories, Frankie imagines himself in the audience, applauding the musicians on stage, but Mike imagines himself among the performers. The city represents hope, but not just because of the potential that they might someday make it to Carnegie Hall. The young orphan known as Mouse has lived on the streets there before and believes he can do so again. Mike latches onto that idea, and believes he can live on the streets with Frankie, and that living that life would be better than the state-run orphanage.

Frankie and Mike are out of the orphanage and into the home of a wealthy woman with all their physical needs met. They are together, which felt like the most important thing to them when they were in the orphanage. But Frankie begins to look longingly toward



Eunice whenever she passes by them. It is clear that he is longing for her attention and that he really wants the three of them to be a real family. Mike admits that he also feels a longing to be a real family again. The chapter ends without letting the reader know where they stand, but that will be resolved in a later chapter.

Mike begins to feel good about some of his memories from his time at Eunice's house, but he is also melancholy about it because he is certain the he will soon be leaving. He talks about holding onto specific scenes so he will have those memories when he is no longer with Frankie, Eunice, and Mr. Howard. The reader has to remember that Mike is a child and this has to be a very difficult situation for him, but he is keeping to the plan for Frankie's sake. That shows a high level of maturity that he continues to exhibit in some aspects of his life, but that is lacking in others, including his naïve belief that he and Frankie can survive on the streets of New York City.

Mike is not a trusting person because he has been forced to fight to keep Frankie with him and safe. When he finds the document reversing the adoption, he is angry that he trusted Eunice, and he decides that he and Frankie have to run away. While it seems that he is getting ahead of himself, it is clear that he has to figure out a way to keep control of what happens to them.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mike go on with his plan to try out for the Hoxie Harmonica Band? What does Mike expect for his future?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Eunice's attitude change toward Mike and Frankie? What prompts the change?

Discussion Question 3

What does Frankie long for from his relationship with Eunice?

Vocabulary

goad, pique, whisked, famished, bargain, unfettered, melancholy, bungled, spontaneous, phrasing, impression, proceed, adjoining, cloche, appeal, preposterous, elegant

Part Three, Chapters 1-12

Summary

Part Three is titled “December 1942, Southern California, U.S.A.” The section opens with the words and numbered notes to Auld Lang Syne. In Chapter One, Ivy Lopez has not yet told her parents that she has been chosen to play a harmonica solo when her class performs on a broadcast performance. Ivy is in the fifth grade and her parents think the harmonica is “frivolous.” Her mother, Luz, sends Ivy to pick up the mail. Ivy knows they hope there will be a letter from Fernando, her brother who is in the military. Instead, her father, Victor, receives a letter from his cousin with a job offer.

In Chapter Two, Ivy goes to meet her best friend, Araceli. They have lived here for a year which is unheard of among the mainly migrant Hispanic families. Araceli gives Ivy a crocheted hat made by Araceli's mother, and announces that they are moving. Ivy is sad but Araceli says they will always be friends. When Ivy gets home, her parents announce that they are leaving the following morning. Ivy's father says it is a good opportunity that includes a house and a permanent position. Ivy wants to argue with her parents but remembers that Fernando told her she would have to be strong to keep the family together during his absence. She agrees that her harmonica performance is less important than the new job.

In Chapter Three, Ivy remembers the first day in this school. Fernando walked her to school, as he always did, so the other students would know she had a big brother looking out for her. On that day, Fernando told Ivy he was joining the military. It was also on that day that Ivy's teacher, Miss Delgado, allowed each student to choose from a box of harmonicas. They were going to raise money for war bonds and, when they reached a specific goal, would perform on the radio. Ivy saw a distinctive harmonica with a red M on the side, and she selected that one. Ivy played Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star and Miss Delgado told her she had a musical gift. Ivy latched onto that.

Fernando did join the military, saying it was his duty as an American. He begged Ivy to play her harmonica each night, giving her a penny for each performance that she put toward her class's war bond drive. When he left, Fernando gave Ivy his jacket, saying she could use it to remember that he was her protector.

In Chapter Four, Ivy and her parents drive past the Lincoln School and Ivy's mother says that is where Ivy will attend. It has a pretty campus and there is a sign advertising upcoming orchestra auditions. Using a hand-drawn map, Papa finds the way to the house that will be theirs. The family that owns the land includes a son who is away at war and two girls, but Papa says they are not home right now. Despite the disappointment over the harmonica performance, Ivy is thrilled with her new home, especially when she finds out she has a bedroom of her own. Mama sews a lot, but says she will set up the sewing machine in Fernando's room until his return.



In Chapter Five, a woman named Joyce Ward arrives with her daughter, Susan. Mama agrees that she will do laundry and ironing for the Ward family. The talk turns to school. Susan says she is also in fifth grade and promises to save Ivy a seat on the bus. Mrs. Ward gives Mama a stack of black fabric so they can obey the rule to black out their windows at night. Mrs. Ward invites Mama to join a group of ladies who volunteer to wind bandages for the Red Cross and Mama agrees to help. They say Ivy is welcome to join Mama whenever she goes to the Ward house. Mrs. Ward and Susan head back to the car. Mr. Ward looks in their direction and Ivy thinks he does not look friendly, but Mama says they cannot judge based on appearances.

In Chapter Six, Papa insists that Ivy join him when he goes to the Yamamoto home, the family who owns the property Papa is overseeing. Papa explains that the Yamamotos are being detained because they are Japanese and the United States is at war with Japan. Papa is to take over care of everything, including paying the farm bills, so the family does not lose their farm. In exchange, the Yamamotos will give Ivy's family a tract of land and the house. Ivy knows that means they will never have to move again.

The conversation turns to why the family is being detained. Mr. Yamamoto fought for the United States in World War I and his son, Kenny, is in the military now. Papa cannot explain why they are in a prison camp. They reach the house and discover someone has painted "Japs" and "yellow enemies" on the Yamamotos house.

In Chapter Seven, Susan's house is beautiful and Ivy is briefly envious of her bedroom. Susan sees the harmonica and asks Ivy to play something. She finds a harmonica in her brother's room and Ivy agrees to begin teaching her to play. They talk about the school orchestra and Susan predicts Ivy will be good at the flute. There are two flags in front of the Ward house, one for each of the family's sons serving in the military. One has a gold star and Mama says that one is for a son who died in the service.

In Chapter Eight, Susan and Ivy meet at an old wagon between their houses. The names Kenny, Tom, and Donald are carved into the wagon. Ivy explains that her brothers, Donald and Tom, were close friends with Kenny Yamamoto when the boys were young. Donald died at Pearl Harbor. Susan reveals that her father believes Kenny is pretending to be patriotic and that he didn't die at Pearl Harbor because he knew the bombing was going to happen. He believes the family members are spies for the Japanese.

Susan says her family has changed. She is not allowed to visit anyone without her mother and is not allowed to have company. If Mr. Ward found out Ivy was there, Mrs. Ward would explain it by saying Ivy's mother had no one to watch her while she works. Susan suggests they begin meeting at the wagon on Saturdays and Ivy agrees. Mrs. Ward rings a bell that is Susan's signal to come home.

In Chapter Nine, Ivy boards the bus and takes a seat by Susan. When they reach the campus, Susan gets off but the bus driver stops Ivy. The driver says Ivy will attend Lincoln Annex, which is an Americanization school. That campus is poor in comparison. There is a chicken farm and fields nearby. Ivy's teacher is nice but Ivy is embarrassed.



She is upset that Susan didn't tell her about the two campuses. Her teacher soon realizes Ivy does not need help with English and that she is bored. She sends Ivy to work with younger students as a translator. That evening, Ivy does not save Susan a seat on the bus. At home, she rushes to Mama's waiting arms.

In Chapter 10, Papa is furious. He says their family has been in the United States for generations and that they are American Citizens. Papa says he will see the school officials, and that Ivy will remain home until he does. Two days later, Papa has seen the officials and gotten nowhere. He says the officials cited the health problems of Hispanic children as one of the reasons for the segregation. Papa says they will test Ivy to see if she can advance to sixth grade, and that parents are organizing to fight the segregation. Her parents briefly discuss leaving but Ivy says they should stay and fight.

In Chapter 11, Ivy sits by Susan on the bus. Ivy says she missed two days of school because she was sick. Susan says they are having orchestra tryouts after school and that Mrs. Ward will pick them up. Ivy is nice but still feels betrayed. She arrives at the orchestra meeting and instantly likes Mr. Daniels. When it's Ivy's turn to introduce herself, she says she does not know which instrument she would like because she only plays the harmonica. Someone makes a joke but Mr. Daniels stops it by talking about a classical harmonica player who plays around the world. He asks Ivy to play something and she plays When Johnny Comes Marching Home. Mr. Daniels calls it "brilliant" and suggests Ivy should play the flute. After the meeting, Ivy talks to Susan about her feelings. Susan is relieved to discover Ivy's family will stay and fight against the unfairness of the school system.

In Chapter 12, the family opens letters from Fernando on Christmas Eve. She writes back to Fernando but does not mention that Mr. Ward thinks the Yamamotos are spies. She decides to look over the inside of the house, hoping to prove it is not true.

Analysis

Ivy is a fifth grader and she is struggling to find her place in her family and in life. Her brother, Fernando, is older and knows how to fix things. Her parents each have specific talents that they contribute to the family's well-being, but Ivy has always felt that she does not really have a talent. When Miss Delgado says that Ivy has musical talent, Ivy latches onto that statement. She hopes that this might become the basis for her place in life. Ivy's family have been migrants that moved often up to this point and she has lacked stability in that area of her life, which probably explains why she wants to have something that she can control and can count on.

When Fernando tells Ivy that he is joining the military, he mentions Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor is an American Naval base that the Japanese bombed. It was that act that brought America into World War II. The reader should remember that Otto met the princesses 50 years before World War II, meaning the story is quickly headed for a conclusion.



Ivy's family has been given an incredible opportunity. Not only will her father have a secure job for the foreseeable future tending the Yamamoto's orange groves, but they will become home owners. There is a great deal of responsibility for Ivy's father because he literally is taking over the entire management of the farm. It is also a leap of faith for the Yamamoto family to trust him, though they have few options available to them.

It is immediately evident that something is not right with the Ward family. Susan has a nice house, nice bedroom, and plenty of things so that Ivy finds herself a little envious. Ivy cannot imagine that Susan lacks friends among her classmates. When Ivy agrees to meet Susan to begin teaching her to play the harmonica, Susan grows very serious and makes Ivy promise that she will come. Ivy does promise, but she wonders why Susan seems to needy. In fact, Susan does not have friends and is sorely in need of a friend. Several times over the course of the novel, the reader sees things that are not what they seem. This is one of those examples.

Susan feels bad when she realizes that Ivy had now known about the second campus only for Hispanics. She says the Hispanics have always attended the other campus and that it did not occur to her that Ivy did not know. Ivy becomes determined that they should stay and fight the school district for equal rights. This is typical of all civil rights movements. Some people believe it is acceptable because it has never been challenged. Other people challenge it and fight for change.

Ivy is angry that she has to attend a different school campus just because she is Hispanic. Other ethnic groups attend the main school. Her family members are American citizens and her brother is fighting for the American military, but the school district segregates the Hispanic students. A school official said the Hispanic students had health issues, and that was one of the reasons for the segregation. The level of prejudice is so high that the Hispanic students are unable to ignore it. Ivy has apparently never faced such prejudice and she is unprepared. She feels that Susan betrayed her by not telling her about the separate campuses, but Susan just sees the situation as normal because it is all she knows. By the time Papa has discussed the situation with school officials, Ivy feels that she is dirty even though she just bathed. This reaction is natural as she has to work through her own insecurities. The interesting aspect of this prejudice is that the Yamamoto family is facing an even higher level of prejudice.

The first clue of the problems between the Ward family and the Yamamoto family is seen when Susan describes her father's suspicion that the Yamamotos are spies. Then Susan reveals that her brother died in Pearl Harbor. The Japanese launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, killing many Americans and sinking ships. When the reader learns that Kenny Yamamoto talked Donald Ward into joining the military, it is easier to understand Mr. Ward's grief and anger.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Ivy's family. Why does she feel the need to be strong?



Discussion Question 2

How does Ivy come to have the harmonica? Why does it become important to her?

Discussion Question 3

How do Ivy and Susan become friends? What tests their friendship from the beginning?

Vocabulary

dawdled, frivolous, oblige, gawk, splendor, dungarees, vanity, smirks, gumption, obstacles, motto, reception, adjusted, amplified, designed, hearty



Part Three, Chapters 13-21

Summary

In Chapter 13, Ivy and her mother go through the house, ensuring that no rodents have created a mess. Ivy is also looking for any sign that the Yamamotos are spies. She discovers what seems to be a trap door at the back of a closet. She sees Mr. Ward driving away from the road out front.

In Chapter 14, Ivy decides she should plant flowers and vegetables around the Yamamoto house and make it seem that they were doing their best to look after it. Kenny Yamamoto is to visit soon and he will decide whether to sign the papers that will give Ivy's family the house and land in return for their work. While she is cleaning off the porch, she sees a boy rushing past on a bicycle. She is glad she does not have to rush.

In Chapter 15, Ivy agrees to help Susan catch up on her math. Ivy says she plans to sell produce at Mrs. Yamamoto's old fruit stand by the road. Susan wants to help but does not know if her parents will allow it. Ivy also says she and her mother went through the Yamamoto's house. She assures Susan there are no secret documents to indicate the Yamamotos are spies.

In Chapter 16, Papa says Kenny will arrive the following week. Papa and Ivy discover someone has trampled Ivy's little garden and written on the wall again. Ivy is upset but Papa says they will repair the damage another day. He then asks her to play the harmonica for him and she manages to play America the Beautiful.

In Chapter 17, Mr. Ward says he wants to talk to Kenny Yamamoto about buying the farm. He says he will consider hiring Papa if Papa can let him go through the Yamamoto house to be certain of what he is buying. Ivy reveals what Susan told her, that Mr. Ward thinks the Yamamotos are spies. Ivy becomes determined to check behind the door in the closet to find out what is there before Mr. Ward goes to inspect the house.

In Chapter 18, Ivy uses her father's keys to gain entry into the secret room. She is surprised by what she finds and becomes determined to show her father and Mr. Ward.

In Chapter 19, Mr. Ward arrives at the Yamamoto's house with his lawyer, Mr. Pauling. Papa, Mama, and Ivy are there. Mr. Ward says that people came often to the Yamamoto's house, often late at night, sometimes with briefcases. Ivy reveals the secret door and they open it to discover it is filled with musical instruments. There is also a letter from the United States President, commending Mr. Yamamoto for bravery in World War I. Mr. Ward begins to cry, saying that everyone has the duty to look for spies. He cries for his son. Ivy realizes that he does not look like someone who is unfriendly, but just looks like a father grieving for his son. She takes his hand as they leave the house.

In Chapter 20, Mama has cooked a great deal and Papa paints over the words on the Yamamoto's house on the day Kenny arrives. Ivy and Kenny connect and talk about



music. He asks her to play the harmonica for him and she does. He makes her promise to learn the flute so that he can hear her play when he returns. He asks Papa to send the flutes to his sisters and Papa promises to do so. Kenny is pleased with the family's work and signs the papers for them. He encourages them to fight the school district for their rights.

As he is leaving the pickup, Ivy discovers she really wants to give him something. She hands him the harmonica. He asks if she is certain, and promises to bring it back when he returns.

In Chapter 21, Ivy and Susan are working on the roadside stand where they will sell produce to raise money for the war effort. The boy on the bicycle rides past and Susan is obviously upset. She says that boy delivered the telegram that told them Donald had been killed. Susan, who still has one brother fighting, asks if the boy turned toward her house. Ivy answers that the boy turned, "toward mine" (538). They hurry toward the house and see the boy on Ivy's porch.

Analysis

Ivy's family, like some of the other Hispanic families in that area of California, was largely dependent on migrant farm work for a living. This meant that Ivy's family would remain in one place only as long as the family could find farm work. They typically worked the harvest and then moved to the next farm to work on some other crop. The lifestyle meant Ivy and children like her seldom went to the same school for very long. It was difficult for them to make and keep friends and they were sometimes behind in school so that they struggled to keep up. When Ivy's best friend, Araceli, announces that she is leaving, Ivy is sad. Araceli accepts that one of them was bound to move soon but she pledges that they will remain friends through letters. Ivy does write to her but by the time the section ends, Ivy and Araceli have exchanged few letters and are not likely to talk again.

Ivy wants the security of a long-term home and job so that the family can settle in and she grows to love the idea of living in the house on the Yamamoto's property, especially since it will one day belong to her family. Owning a home is nearly unheard of for people of their financial bracket and their background. There is no doubt her parents see it as a good opportunity as well, but they are willing to move in order to get Ivy back into a decent school. Instead, Ivy makes the decision that they will stay and fight for equality.

The scene in the Yamamoto's secret room is very similar to what happens when Friedrich, Martin, and Uncle Gunter are leaving Germany. Their instruments are very important to them and they want to save them, if possible. They pack them up and take them to a storage locker at Uncle Gunter's apartment, but it is obvious that it hurts Friedrich to think about leaving them behind, especially without knowing when – or if – they will return for them.



Mr. Ward is a local official in charge of looking for suspicious activities and of ensuring that people use their blackout curtains so that airplanes cannot find the houses to bomb them at night. Lots of cities used blackout curtains and they were effective with the technology available during World War II. His diligence seems overboard on the surface but there is a level of truth to his statement that everyone has the duty to watch for suspicious activities. The problem is that many people took that duty to extremes and panic was rampant during this era of history.

Kenny Yamamoto reminds Ivy somewhat of her brother, Fernando. She probably reminds him of his younger sisters as well. He teasingly pulls her braids and asks her to play the harmonica. This forges a connection that Ivy cannot ignore, which is why she gives him her beloved harmonica. This is the vital step in passing it on from the time the princesses presented it to Otto. An interesting aspect of Ivy's decision is that she did not have to give it up. It will soon be revealed that Otto was in a situation that demanded he give up the harmonica. Friedrich was also in a forced situation. Mike and Ivy each have more options about when and how to pass the harmonica along.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Mr. Ward, given the information revealed during this section. Did your opinion about him change over the course of the final chapters?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe Ivy chooses to reveal the music room to her parents at the same time she shows it to Mr. Ward and his lawyer?

Discussion Question 3

Explain the prejudice Ivy faces. Compare that to the prejudice faced by the Yamamoto family.

Vocabulary

burlap, drab, mountainous, abandoned, heavyhearted, evidence, contentment, rambled, peering, scrawled, destruction, indignation, brisk, furrowed, stance



Part Four, Chapters 1-3; Final Untitled Chapter

Summary

Part Four is titled “April 1951, New York City, New York, U.S.A.” The notes and words to *Some Enchanted Evening* appear on the opening page. In Chapter One, Friedrich seats his father and Uncle Gunter at Carnegie Hall where the Empire Philharmonic orchestra will perform. Friedrich is the conductor. Martin says he wishes Elisabeth were with them. She continues to be a nurse and has worked in various hospitals, including with prisoners-of-war. Friedrich and Martin agree that it does not seem that 18 years have passed.

On that day in Germany, Friedrich pretended to conduct the orchestra which made the soldiers mad. But the train was pulling out of the station and they had to get off the train. At Dachau, the commander accepted the bribe. Friedrich was horrified at his father's condition. They had to remain in hiding for days while he recovered enough to travel. In Berne, Friedrich and Uncle Gunter worked in a chocolate factory while Martin gave cello lessons. Friedrich studied music at a conservatory and that step led him to this night.

Friedrich goes backstage and goes over the program. The music includes *Some Enchanted Evening*. Friedrich looks for the new flutist. He has never seen anyone so young in a symphony orchestra, but knows she is talented. He takes the stage and opens the performance, just as he had always imagined as a youngster.

In Chapter Two, Mike is at Carnegie Hall as well. Frankie rushes to him and Mike notes that Frankie looks well. He is in his first year of law school. Eunice arrives accompanied by Mr. Howard. They plan to go out together after the performance for roast beef and ice cream, the food Granny had always mentioned as part of her stories about New York City. Eunice adds that they will also have cake as a celebration.

Mike heads back stage. On the night he and Frankie tried to run away from Eunice's house, he fell from the tree. Eunice then explained that the adoption reversal was approved, but that she never planned to file the document to make it official. Eunice and Mr. Howard married. Mike was accepted into the harmonica band and he traveled with them for a year before devoting himself to the piano. When the Women's Auxiliary sent out a plea for used instruments, Mike felt “compelled” to give up his harmonica. Mike attended Juilliard School of Music and then moved to New York City. Mike takes the stage and plays *Rhapsody in Blue*. He plays with the orchestra, under Friedrich's direction.

In Chapter Three, Ivy is backstage during intermission. Papa was skeptical that she could make a living through music but Fernando supported her. Fernando had not died,



but had lost two fingers when a mine exploded. Her parents wanted to be with her tonight but were unable to leave California for the long trip.

Kenny had barely survived being shot. Kenny had told the story many times. He always carried the harmonica in his shirt pocket, like a lucky charm. He was hit in the chest by a bullet but it struck the harmonica and stuck there. He was tended by three beautiful young women who pleaded with him to live. When he finally woke, a young nurse named Elisabeth told him that he must have been dreaming about the young women.

Kenny has remained a part of Ivy's life. He bought the flute she plays because he was unable to give her the harmonica back. He helped Fernando get a job and followed through with their promise to deed the house and land to Ivy's parents. Ivy is back onstage when Friedrich begins to conduct *Some Enchanted Evening* with Mike at the piano. Ivy gives herself up to the music, knowing that somehow, they are "connected by the same silken thread" (578).

The final chapter is not titled and is clearly not a part of Part Four. Like the opening chapter, it focuses on Otto. Otto grows up and marries Mathilde. They have a child who has health problems. Otto has to sell their cottage and the family moves to the village. Otto works as a tuner in a music shop until the owner becomes jealous that customers prefer Otto.

Otto discovers an advertisement calling for craftsmen to make harmonicas. Otto creates an instrument and takes it to the harmonica factory. The owner there asks Otto to make more. If he can deliver 13 more in a month, the owner will set up a shop for Otto. The morning he was to make the delivery, he can find only 12. He discovers the family dog has chewed up the other. With no choice, Otto puts the harmonica from the three princesses among the order. He paints a small M on the harmonica, indicating that the holder of the instrument is a messenger.

The story in Otto's book then resumes. When Kenny Yamamoto lived, the three princesses are released. They carry Otto's book as they leave the forest. They are reunited with their family and live out their lives as Arabella, Roswitha, and Wilhelminia.

Analysis

The author brings the story lines together in these final chapters but she does it person-by-person. In an interesting choice, she does not present the characters' final stories in the same order as the original chapters. Otto will be the final story to be wrapped up, and that will happen after the official end of this section of the novel.

Friedrich mentions the young flutist. He says he has never seen anyone as young as her in a symphony orchestra, but that she seems extremely talented. He then mentions an "intensity" that reminds him of himself, when he was young. Friedrich is seeing the harmonica's connection, though he does not understand that.



Ivy briefly mentions that she and Susan have remained good friends over the years, and that she knows where Susan is now and what she is doing. This is a connection that Ivy wanted during her younger years, but that never happened because her family moved so often.

Kenny's experience seems easily explained by saying that he was taking drugs and had been wounded, but he is certain that the women he saw were real. Put in the context of the novel, it is clear that the three were the three princesses.

The connections between the characters go farther than just those who played the instrument. Elisabeth tends to Kenny when he is wounded and talks about her brother and father, both musicians. None of the characters knows about their connections to the others, but most sense it on some level.

Otto makes the harmonicas for a man who owns a harmonica factory. It seems clear that this is the harmonica factory where Friedrich worked and where he found the harmonica. It had to remain in that warehouse for years before Friedrich found it, which is a statement of the complexity of the plan to save Kenny's life.

Discussion Question 1

Describe how each of the characters resolved their issues at the end of the previous sections of the book.

Discussion Question 2

Which of the characters do you believe gained the most through their efforts? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Describe how Otto sends the harmonica into the world. Is there a significance to the M he paints on it?

Vocabulary

laurels, accomplished, venues, fraught, endearment, insufferable, staccato, intermission



Characters

Friedrich Schmidt

Friedrich is a young man who lives in Germany in the late 1930s as Hitler is coming to power. He is a gifted musician but has a birthmark on the side of his face so that other children and even adults made fun of him. In addition, there is a medical report that he had a seizure as a child. Those two things make him one of those who was to be forcibly sterilized so that he could not have children. Friedrich feels so self-conscious that he often loses himself in music and pretends to be a conductor. His music is so important to him that this is how he copes with the problems in life.

Friedrich's father takes him out of school and takes over his education as a means of getting Friedrich out of school. Friedrich works in the mornings at the harmonica factory where his father and uncle work. In the afternoons, he studies the basic subjects under other employees. The political climate becomes so strained that Friedrich's father is constantly in trouble for his outspoken attitudes.

Eventually, Friedrich's father is taken into custody. Friedrich and her uncle realize they have to get out of the country. Friedrich realizes that he cannot take the harmonica with him and he puts it in a box that is to be shipped to America. With the help of Friedrich's sister, Elisabeth, they gather money for a bribe and Friedrich manages to get his father out of prison. Years later, Friedrich realizes his dream of becoming a conductor and he makes an appearance at Carnegie Hall along with two others who had contact with the harmonica.

Mike Flannery

Mike Flannery is a young orphan who is living in deplorable conditions at an orphanage along with his younger brother, Frankie. The two boys are devoted to each other but Mike, the older, feels the mounting pressure to get Frankie out of the orphanage and into a stable home. The boys lived with their grandmother for a time, until her health got so poor that she could no longer care for them. She gave piano lessons and Mike was a gifted musician.

At the orphanage, Mike sometimes plays an old piano that was the main reason their grandmother chose that orphanage for them. When the orphanage director believes she has a chance to sell the piano, she calls on Mike to play for the man she believes is going to buy it. Mike and Frankie play but the man surprises them all by saying he represents a woman who will adopt the two boys. Mike is initially relieved but later becomes fearful that their position is not stable.

Through it all, Mike continues to worry about himself, but he worries more about Frankie's happiness and future. He is a strong character but has weaknesses, mainly related to his concern for Frankie's welfare. Mike's music is important to him but unlike



some other characters, he sees it mainly as a means to provide for his future. Some aspects of this attitude may be linked to the fact that his grandmother provided for the boys by giving piano lessons. Mike is a likeable character but he is not a trusting character. His difficult childhood and lack of stability account for his inability to trust others.

Ivy

Ivy is young girl who lives in California with her parents. Her teacher gives her the harmonica as part of a music program. Ivy shows a great talent for the instrument and is promised the opportunity to play a solo but her family moves before the class performance. Ivy is a strong girl who worries about her family, especially her brother who has joined the military and is fighting in the war. She believes in equality and is furious when she discovers that the school she attends has one campus for Mexicans and another for all the other students. She is equally angry when she learns that her father's employer has been incarcerated simply because he is Japanese but their son, also Japanese, is fighting for the United States military.

Music is important to Ivy as a means of expression and because it brings her happiness. When she turns to music as a potential career, her brother supports her and is the first to believe she could make a life from it. Ivy winds up with Friedrich and Mike at Carnegie Hall as one of the youngest flutists in the orchestra.

Otto

Otto is the first messenger of the harmonica. He is a young boy playing in the woods when he first meets the three princesses, Eins, Zwei, and Drei. He discovers that no one believes his story about them but he holds onto the harmonica, believing that he will know when it is time to pass it along. As an adult, he has a daughter who needs medical attention and the harmonica becomes the 13th of a set of harmonicas he is supposed to deliver to a potential employer. With that delivery, the harmonica falls into Friedrich's hands and Otto's future becomes secure.

Kenny Yamamoto

Kenny is the son of the Japanese couple who owns the land where Ivy's family live during the war. He makes the deal that gives Ivy's father the job to oversee the Yamamoto farm. Kenny is a soldier fighting for the United States and Ivy gives him the harmonica when he is about to return to the fighting. That harmonica saves his life. Kenny is a likeable character who cares about his country and his family. He is grateful for the time he gets to spend with Ivy's family and is obviously a genuine person.



Martin Schmidt

Friedrich's father, Martin, is a gifted musician who is devoted to his family, especially to Friedrich's future. He is angry at the political climate and warns Friedrich that they have to appear to accept Hitler's mandates in order to avoid punishment. In the end, he is too outspoken in that harsh setting and winds up in prison. He is happy when Friedrich follows his dream to become a composer and is present at Carnegie Hall for the performance that includes Friedrich, Mike, and Ivy.

Uncle Gunter

Uncle Gunter is Friedrich's uncle who also works at the harmonica factory while they are in Germany. He is a strong man who cares deeply for Friedrich. Both Uncle Gunter and Friedrich often mention that Uncle Gunter was the one who taught Friedrich things, such as how to ride a bike. He comes up with the plan to get out of Germany and helps Friedrich execute that plan. He is present for Friedrich's performance at Carnegie Hall.

Frankie

Frankie is Mike's younger brother. He is very devoted to Mike and fights any attempt to adopt him out to a family without Mike. He is a flexible youngster who accepts almost anything except being separated from his brother. Frankie is determined to win over Auntie Eunice, the woman who adopts them, even though she is initially very cold toward them.

Elisabeth Schmidt

Elisabeth is Friedrich's older sister. She seems to be devoted to Hitler and his regime, and becomes determined to remain in Germany even when the rest of the family escapes. She becomes a nurse and even works with prisoners of war. She has a brief encounter with Kenny Yamamoto.

Eunice Dow Sturbridge

Eunice is the woman who winds up adopting Mike and Frankie, though she is initially against the plan altogether. She is not a particularly strong character, which is understandable considering that she lost a child. Music was important to her at one time, which is why Mr. Howard felt that Frankie and Mike would be a good match for her. She returns to her love of music and her interest in Mike's musical education is one of the main reasons he becomes the renowned pianist who performs at Carnegie Hall.

Mr. Howard

Mr. Howard is Eunice Sturbridge's neighbor and close friend. He is devoted to her though it takes many years for her to give in to marry him. He is the first person who believes that Mike and Frankie will be positive influences in her life and it is Mr. Howard who brings the boys home, despite her express demand for one girl.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Harmonica

The harmonica symbolizes hope and purpose. The various people who have the harmonica in their possession are able to get through difficulties. 1, 2, and 3 first give the harmonica to Otto with the purpose of freeing themselves from their curse. The curse is broken when the harmonica saves Kenny Yamamoto's life.

Carnegie Hall

Carnegie Hall symbolizes the final destination for the three musicians of the story, Mike, Ivy, and Friedrich.

The Thirteenth Harmonica of Otto Messenger

This is the title of the book Otto begins reading at the opening of the novel and is symbolic of the story that is being written to intertwine the lives of all the people who handle the harmonica.

1, 2 and 3/ Eins, Zwei, and Drei

These numbers symbolize the uncaring attitude the witch has toward the three princesses placed in her care. Instead of giving the girls names, the witch gives them each a number. The three young princesses set the story in motion by giving Otto the harmonica.

The Rhyme about Fate

The rhyme, which appears in the opening chapter of the book Otto reads, is symbolic of the fact that everyone will have new chances in their lives. The rhyme is, "Your fate is not yet sealed. Even in the darkest night, a star will shine, a bell will chime, a path will be revealed." Each character in the novel has darkness that seems to be the end of all hope, but each finds his way to a better place.

The Blank Pages of Otto's Book

Those blank pages are symbolic of the fact that a person's future is not predetermined. The three princesses hope to discover what is going to happen to them but instead discover that they are able to take control of their own futures.



Dachau

Dachau is a prison camp run by the Nazi Party and is symbolic of the reign of terror the Party has over those who do not conform to the Party's politics. Martin Schmidt is sent to Dachau after a Nazi supporter finds Martin is still friends with a Jewish musician. His arrest and imprisonment leads Martin, Friedrich, and Uncle Gunter to flee Germany, which is a positive move for Friedrich's music career.

Kenny's Near-Death Experience

Kenny is shot in the chest but the harmonica stops the bullet, and his near-death experience is a symbol of the princesses' completed journey. The three princesses push Kenny to live, and he does, which breaks the witch's curse and allows the princesses to go back to their family.

Hoxie's Harmonica Band

The all-boy harmonica band symbolizes hope for Mike and Frankie. The band's organizer helps orphaned boys find homes if they earn a place on the band.

Lincoln School/Lincoln School Annex

The fact that the school district has an annexed campus for Hispanic students is a symbol of prejudice. Ivy and several other characters face prejudice, which is one of the novel's themes.



Settings

Germany

Germany is where Friedrich lives during his early life and where the harmonica factory is located. The political climate changes dramatically over the course of Friedrich's early life as Hitler comes into power and the Nazi party takes over the government. When Friedrich's father becomes outspoken, he is arrested. His arrest prompts Friedrich, his father, and Uncle Gunter's decision to leave Germany.

The Harmonica Factory

This is where Friedrich, his father, and Uncle Gunter all work. The people at the factory have taken a strong liking to Friedrich and several have taken over teaching him specific subjects that he would have studied if he were still in school. There is an abandoned warehouse on the property and that is where Friedrich finds the magical harmonica.

Amaryllis Drive

Eunice Sturbridge lives in a large house on Amaryllis Drive. The neighborhood is affluent despite the fact that America is just beginning to recover from the Great Depression. Eunice's house is large and very nice with room for chandeliers and a grand piano. Mr. Howard also lives in the neighborhood, in a similar house. The nice neighborhood and house is a stark contrast to Bishop's Orphanage where Frankie and Mike had spend the past months, and to the small apartment where Granny lived and where the family barely managed to pay the rent.

The Yamamoto's Farm

Ivy and her family move to a farm owned by the Yamamoto family. The Yamamotos are being held because of their Japanese backgrounds after the Japanese bombed Americans at Pearl Harbor. The farm includes orange orchards and the Yamamoto's house, but also includes a small tract of land and another house. The Yamamotos give Ivy's family that house and land as a reward for taking care of the property while the family is away.

Bishop's Orphanage

Mike and Frankie live at Bishop's Orphanage after their Granny becomes too old to care for them. The orphanage is a horrible place and the director cares only about making money. There are separate dormitories for the younger boys and the older boys, and

Mike learns that the director is going to send the younger boys to a state facility because she can make money by hiring the older boys out as laborers.



Themes and Motifs

The Power of the Harmonica

The harmonica has powerful properties, including the ability to bind the owners to each other. This power is seen as Friedrich, Mike, and Ivy come together at the end of the novel. Each has followed his dream and is performing at Carnegie Hall.

The three princesses give the harmonica first to Otto. They call him the first messenger and tell him that he has a responsibility to pass the harmonica along at the proper time. He does not know when that will be, but he passes it on when he has no choice about it. That is how the harmonica winds up in the warehouse on the harmonica factory property. When Friedrich is outside the factory at lunchtime, he is drawn to the room. There is a thick coating of dust, indicating that no one was playing the harmonica. In addition, the warehouse has a spooky reputation and most of the workers avoid being in there at all. Friedrich is very young but the harmonica draws him inside and prompts him to take up the instrument for the first time.

When Friedrich is leaving Germany, he packs his harmonica into a box and sends it with a shipment headed to America. That is how it winds up in the music store where Frankie and Mike are planning to buy harmonicas. Mike is to choose a harmonica from a newly arrived box, and he picks Friedrich's harmonica. With that selection, Mike discovers that the instrument has a wonderful sound that puts him in a position to win a spot in a coveted harmonica band. When Mike shifts his attention to focus solely on the piano, he donates the harmonica in a batch bound for a school. That is how Ivy winds up with it.

When Ivy is told to look through the box for the harmonica of her choice, the magical harmonica beckons her. She realizes that it is more beautiful than the rest and her practice on that instrument puts her in a position to be in the school orchestra, which leads her to become an accomplished flutist.

Ivy hands the harmonica off to a young soldier named Kenny Yamamoto when he briefly spends time with her family. When he is back in the war, the harmonica literally saves his life. That action brings the harmonica a full circle to serve the purpose the princesses had in mind all along. They said the harmonica would save a life, and that their destinies would be changed because of that. When Kenny's life is saved, the princesses were reunited with their brother and mother, and were free to live their lives away from the wicked witch.

A Person's Future

Some people believe in the idea of a predetermined destiny while others believe that a person is in charge of his own future. Several of the characters in this novel have to face uncertain futures and fears about what will happen to them. All these characters



eventually come to discover that they can take matters into their own hands and can often change things for the better.

Eins, Zwei, and Drei are the first characters that face uncertain futures. All three princesses are abandoned at birth and then are cursed by a witch. When Otto finds them, he is reading a book that includes the story of their lives up to that point in time. The three princesses believe they will learn what is going to happen to them by reading the rest of Otto's book but Otto discovers that the rest of the pages are blank. Those blank pages are symbolic of the fact that the princesses are in charge of their own futures and that they can take responsibility for their own futures by breaking the witch's curse.

Otto is another character who takes control of his future. He has a daughter who needs medical care but he cannot pay for it until he sells harmonicas to a company, ensuring that he and his family will have a secure financial future. Otto is also the first to pass the harmonica along, though his decision seems more like an accident or fate than a free choice on his part.

Friedrich is the next who has the harmonica. As in each case, he seems destined to find the harmonica as it literally calls to him from an abandoned room in a warehouse. Friedrich's future is dismal, mainly because of his birthmark. He feels that no one can see past it to see the person he really is. He is also living under the harsh rule of the Nazi Party. With the advice and help of his uncle, Friedrich helps get himself and his father out of the country and they live a better life.

Mike is the next to have the harmonica. He and his little brother, Frankie, live in an orphanage. Mike fears for their future but mostly he worries about Frankie and becomes determined that he will ensure that Frankie gets adopted, regardless of Mike's fate. Mike tries to get himself out of the house, hoping that Eunice will go forward with adopting Frankie, but he then tries to run away when he becomes afraid that Frankie is going to be sent to a state-run orphanage that is known for its brutality. Though Mike's plans do not come to fruition, he and Frankie live out very happy lives and never return to the orphanage.

Ivy is the next to have the harmonica. She is happy at the time she gets the instrument but discovers that she faces prejudices when she moves to a new school where Hispanic students are pushed aside to a different campus where the education and opportunities are substandard. Ivy stays to fight for her future but, more importantly, she hands the harmonica off to a young soldier named Kenny. Kenny is an American soldier with Japanese parents and he returns to the fighting with the harmonica in his pocket. The harmonica literally saves his life, which greatly impacts Kenny's future but also changes the future for the three princesses who have broken the witch's curse.



Facing Prejudice

Several characters face various kinds and levels of prejudice, all impacting their lives and changing the course of their own lives and the lives of others. Two of the most important examples are seen in the chapters the focus on Friedrich and on Ivy.

Friedrich is a young man who has lived all his life with a birthmark on his face. People stare at him because of it. His peers make fun of him and bully him to the point of brutality. The situation at Friedrich's school becomes so horrible that Friedrich's father takes over Friedrich's education. The people at the harmonica factory where Friedrich and his father work take turns teaching him the basic subjects he would take in school and Friedrich's father takes over his music education.

Friedrich is growing up in Germany as the Nazi Party comes into power.

One of the party's goals is to create a pure race of people. That means eliminating those who have flaws or undesirable ethnic backgrounds. Friedrich's birthmark and the fact that he had a seizure as a child makes him a candidate for forced sterilization. In addition, Friedrich's father is too outspoken to survive in this political climate. Anyone who dares defy the strict rules or who voices opposition are imprisoned or killed. These factors come together to make it clear that Friedrich and his father are not likely to survive.

Ivy is the youngest daughter of a Hispanic family. She is happy living in the town where her teacher first gives her the harmonica, but she finds a very different situation when her family moves. At the new town, Hispanic students attend a different campus where they receive a substandard education and are treated poorly by the other students. The school district uses the excuse that these students have to learn English, but Ivy speaks perfect English. She is so far ahead of her class that the teacher suggests she should spend her afternoons helping younger students. Ivy's father formally objects, but the school officials stand firm. For a brief time, Ivy's parents consider leaving the district, despite that her family's situation is much better overall in this new place. Ivy says she wants to stay and fight for what is right, and the family does.

Ivy experiences another important example of prejudice when she realizes that anyone who lives in America but has a Japanese background is imprisoned. That action originated when the Japanese military, already involved in war with other countries, dropped bombs on America. The fact that Japan attacked Americans on American soil prompted a phobia about anyone who was ethnically Japanese. This includes a family who hires Ivy's father to oversee their farm while they are away. Ivy clearly understands the prejudicial action because her family has been labeled with stereotypes because they are Hispanic. When Ivy meets Kenny Yamamoto, she is captured by the fact that he – like Ivy's brother – is serving America's military even though his family is being treated so poorly. Ivy's connection with Kenny prompts her decision to give him the harmonica, which saves his life.



Changing Relationships

Time passes for all the characters, which means their relationships also change. But for some of the characters, key relationships undergo dramatic changes that alter their lives and their attitudes.

Friedrich and Elisabeth are young when their mother dies, leaving them alone in their father's care. He works full time which means Elisabeth, who was still a child herself, has to step up to help with the house. By the time she is a teenager, she is literally Friedrich's main caregiver. She does the cooking for the family and does her best to help Friedrich as he faces the taunts of the other children. When other children call him "monster," Elisabeth tells him that his family does not think he is a monster, and that his family always tells him the truth. It seems clear that Elisabeth loves Friedrich so much that she would do anything to protect him. It also seems clear that she believes there is nothing wrong with him and that the bullying attitudes are wrong.

Their relationship takes a dramatic turn when Elisabeth becomes a member of Hitler's Youth. She and Friedrich discover Friedrich's death certificate which proves that he had seizures when he was an infant. As Martin is talking about that, he reveals that another family member had a similar birthmark to the one that has caused Friedrich so much grief. With that information, Elisabeth says that she and Friedrich should be sterilized so that they cannot pass those traits on to another child. She has no concern for the fact that Friedrich might want to have children or that she is basically saying that his deformities are unacceptable. She goes so far as to tell Friedrich that her childhood had been dramatically altered because of her responsibility toward Friedrich, including that she had been in a position to always stand up for a younger brother that other children called "monster." Her attitude has changed so dramatically that Friedrich is devastated. He realizes that he had never thought of Elisabeth as having anything other than unconditional love for him.

While Eunice is really a secondary character in the overall storyline of the novel, her changing relationships impact the main characters, especially Mike and Frankie. When Mike and Frankie arrive at her home, Eunice is furious. She had been forced into adopting a child but she wanted a girl so the child would not remind her so much of her son, who drowned when he was just a toddler. When she realizes that she has been presented with two boys instead of one girl, she shuts down, refusing to have anything to do with the boys for their first weeks together. Eventually, Mike talks frankly about their lives before she took them in, and their futures if she turned them out. That changes Eunice's attitude about them and about herself. Those changes continue as she marries Mr. Howard and makes a good home for Mike and Frankie.

Ivy and Mr. Ward are another example of this theme. Ivy's first impression of Mr. Ward is that he is mean and unfriendly. As she learns that he believes the Yamamotos are spies, her negative opinion only deepens. When Ivy reveals the secret room and Mr. Ward is forced to realize that he was very much wrong, he begins to cry. His grief for his son is evident and Ivy knows that grief has colored his attitudes and actions. She talks about



the fact that he suddenly does not look unfriendly any longer, but just looks like a father who is grieving for his lost son.

Happily Ever After

Time passes for all the characters, which means their relationships also change. But for some of the characters, key relationships undergo dramatic changes that alter their lives and their attitudes.

Friedrich and Elisabeth are young when their mother dies, leaving them alone in their father's care. He works full time which means Elisabeth, who was still a child herself, has to step up to help with the house. By the time she is a teenager, she is literally Friedrich's main caregiver. She does the cooking for the family and does her best to help Friedrich as he faces the taunts of the other children. When other children call him "monster," Elisabeth tells him that his family does not think he is a monster, and that his family always tells him the truth. It seems clear that Elisabeth loves Friedrich so much that she would do anything to protect him. It also seems clear that she believes there is nothing wrong with him and that the bullying attitudes are wrong.

Their relationship takes a dramatic turn when Elisabeth becomes a member of Hitler's Youth. She and Friedrich discover Friedrich's death certificate which proves that he had seizures when he was an infant. As Martin is talking about that, he reveals that another family member had a similar birthmark to the one that has caused Friedrich so much grief. With that information, Elisabeth says that she and Friedrich should be sterilized so that they cannot pass those traits on to another child. She has no concern for the fact that Friedrich might want to have children or that she is basically saying that his deformities are unacceptable. She goes so far as to tell Friedrich that her childhood had been dramatically altered because of her responsibility toward Friedrich, including that she had been in a position to always stand up for a younger brother that other children called "monster." Her attitude has changed so dramatically that Friedrich is devastated. He realizes that he had never thought of Elisabeth as having anything other than unconditional love for him.

While Eunice is really a secondary character in the overall storyline of the novel, her changing relationships impact the main characters, especially Mike and Frankie. When Mike and Frankie arrive at her home, Eunice is furious. She had been forced into adopting a child but she wanted a girl so the child would not remind her so much of her son, who drowned when he was just a toddler. When she realizes that she has been presented with two boys instead of one girl, she shuts down, refusing to have anything to do with the boys for their first weeks together. Eventually, Mike talks frankly about their lives before she took them in, and their futures if she turned them out. That changes Eunice's attitude about them and about herself. Those changes continue as she marries Mr. Howard and makes a good home for Mike and Frankie.

Ivy and Mr. Ward are another example of this theme. Ivy's first impression of Mr. Ward is that he is mean and unfriendly. As she learns that he believes the Yamamotos are spies,



her negative opinion only deepens. When Ivy reveals the secret room and Mr. Ward is forced to realize that he was very much wrong, he begins to cry. His grief for his son is evident and Ivy knows that grief has colored his attitudes and actions. She talks about the fact that he suddenly does not look unfriendly any longer, but just looks like a father who is grieving for his lost son.

Styles

Point of View

The story is written in third person from varying perspectives. The opening chapters are presented from Otto's perspective as he plays the game, reads the book, and meets the three princesses. He seems to be a reliable character and his perspective seems true.

Section One is related from Friedrich's perspective. He is a young man devoted to music and his family. He is somewhat naïve in his view of the world as a young man because he has no friends his own age. He is, however, jaded by the fact that most people judge him because of the birthmark on his face. This makes his perspective suspect in some ways but he seems to present information as honestly as he knows how.

Section Two is from Mike's perspective. Mike lacks in trust which makes him a difficult character to judge. He is young enough that he has dreams and he hopes that he and Frankie will find a permanent home with Eunice Sturbridge, but his lack of trust makes him ready to believe that it will not happen.

Section Three is from Ivy's perspective. She is young and has not experienced overt racism until her family makes the move in 1942. There, she discovers that Japanese families are being incarcerated just because of their ethnicity and regardless of their citizenship. She also discovers that Hispanics are sent to a different school, again because of their ethnicity and regardless of their citizenship status. She learns about trust and friendship, and she learns that she is stronger than she had expected. She is a reliable character but her perspective is also flawed, mainly because of her age and her fears.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in modern-day American English though the story is set in the early and mid-1900s. There are several ethnic groups represented and some of the story occurs in Germany. None of the language represents these facts.

The language is straightforward and the action moves at a fairly fast pace. One of the most frustrating aspects for some readers is in the chronological structure. The novel opens with the story of Otto as he first meets the princess, then moves to Friedrich. Friedrich's story ends when he arrives at the prison where his father is being held. The story then picks up with Mike and Frankie but ends as they are running away. Ivy's story is next but it ends with her realization that there is a messenger at her home, likely bringing news about her brother who is in the war. Each of these sections ends on a virtual cliffhanger with plenty of unanswered questions. The resolutions for Friedrich, Mike, and Ivy are presented in Section Four as they come together to perform at



Carnegie Hall but Otto's story and the question of how he passed on the harmonica is not seen until the final section of the novel.

The book Otto begins reading at the opening of the novel is titled "The Thirteenth Harmonica of Otto Messenger." This is one of many examples of significant language seen in the novel. The title reflects the fact that Otto is reading the book and that he will become the messenger who sends the harmonica out into the world.

The reader with an average vocabulary will find few unfamiliar words. The writing is clear with traditional punctuation. There is narrative and dialogue, and both are easy to follow.

Structure

The opening chapter of the novel has no title but includes the opening pages of a book that Otto is reading. That book is titled "The Thirteenth Harmonica of Otto Messenger." The opening chapter of Otto's book is titled "A Witch, a Kiss, a Prophecy." The next is "A Secret, a Spell, a Final Deed." The author makes an interesting choice by titling the chapters of Otto's book but not titling the chapters of the novel. Otto's book is presented in white letters on a black background, making it easy for the reader to tell which pages are from Otto's book.

Section One is titled "October 1933, Trossingen, Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany." The section opens with the words and numbered notes for Brahms' Lullaby. There are 26 chapters that focus on Friedrich's life as he and his family struggle through Hitler's early years in power. Section Two is titled "June 1935, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, U.S.A." The section opens with the words and numbered notes to America the Beautiful. The section includes 24 chapters focusing on Mike Flannery and his younger brother, Frankie. Section Three is titled "December 1942, Southern California, U.S.A." The sections open with the words and numbered notes to Auld Lang Syne. There are 21 chapters and the section focuses on the life of Ivy, a young Hispanic girl.

Section Four is titled "April 1951, New York City, New York, U.S.A." The section opens with words and numbered notes to Some Enchanted Evening. There are three chapters in this section. The first focuses on Friedrich and his arrival as a conductor at Carnegie Hall. The second chapter focuses on Mike Flannery as he prepares to perform on the piano at Carnegie Hall the same night. The third focuses on Ivy, a very young flutist who is performing with the orchestra at Carnegie Hall.

The final section of the novel is not titled at all. There is a blank page after the previous section and the final chapter focuses on Otto and the story of how he came to send the harmonica to a factory.



Quotes

But you must promise to pass along the mouth harp to another, when the time is right. For our journey to save a soul on the brink of death cannot begin until you do.”

-- Drei (The Final Chapter of the Untitled First Section paragraph 20)

Importance: This scene is during the encounter between Otto and the three princesses. Otto has shown them that he has a harmonica, which they refer to as a mouth harp, and the princesses realize that this instrument can be used to break the witch's spell. Kenny Yamamoto's near-death experience is the culmination of this moment.

Hitler takes away all civil rights and gives his storm troopers the freedom to question anyone for any reason. Hitler wants to cleanse the population for a pure German race!”

-- Martin Schmidt (Chapter Two of Part One paragraph 4)

Importance: Martin is furious with the politics of Hitler and the Nazi Party. He already sees that Hitler's attitude will eliminate the average person's rights and he may see that Hitler's plans to “cleanse” the German race will impact the family on a very personal level.

The familiar and comforting streets of Trossingen suddenly felt dangerous.

-- Narrator (Chapter 19 of Part One paragraph 17)

Importance: Friedrich and Uncle Gunter are traveling back to Friedrich's home to pick up their belongings. This is right after Martin's arrest and Friedrich is realizing that their own lives are no longer secure

He massaged the M on the side, tucked it into a box, and felt a pang as he put on the lid. He nestled the box in a slim case with a dozen others that would soon be packed into a crate, carted to the electric train, pulled by a steam engine to a cargo ship, and ferried from Germany across the ocean and out into the world.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 26 of Part One paragraph 9)

Importance: Friedrich has just packed the harmonica up as his final action at the harmonica factory, which is how it arrives in a music store where Mike chooses it for his own. Friedrich's next thought is that he hopes the next person to play it enjoys it as much as he did.

He'd promised Granny he'd look out for Frankie and take care of him. That responsibility had become another layer of skin.”

-- Narrator (Chapter One of Part Two paragraph 26)

Importance: This is referring to Mike in the moments just after he learns some of the boys will likely be fostered out the next day. This responsibility weighs heavily on Mike and colors most of his decisions. It is a heavy burden, especially considering Mike is only 11.



"I'm scared if I close my eyes and go to sleep, I ... I might wake up at Bishop's."
-- Frankie (Chapter 9 of Part Two paragraph 44)

Importance: Frankie and Mike have unexpectedly landed at Eunice's house and both are afraid to believe in their good fortune. There will be twists and turns, but they will live out happy lives here.

"When I play the harmonica, I feel like I'm traveling on the notes. To faraway places."
-- Ivy (Chapter One of Part Three paragraph 8)

Importance: Ivy has just learned to play the harmonica but discovers that she has a real talent for music. She tries to explain the importance to her parents but no one really understands.

"It is wiser to stay where there are more opportunities for all of us, and to fight for what is right. I Promise I will do that."
-- Ivy's Father (Chapter 10 of Part Three paragraph 40)

Importance: The family has learned that Hispanic children attend a different school with a substandard education and briefly considers leaving, despite the fact that they have a better job and an important opportunity to own their own home. Ivy asks that they stay and Papa agrees that they will fight the injustice to seek equal rights.

"He didn't seem unfriendly any longer. He looked like a father who had lost his son to war."
-- Narrator (Chapter 19 of Part Three paragraph 75)

Importance: Mr. Ward has just seen the music room in the Yamamoto's house which explains away his suspicions that they might be spies. Ivy and her mother see him then for what he really is - a man who is grieving the loss of his son.

"On an evening embroidered with the thread of destiny, in a theater crowned with a halo of light, Friedrich Schmidt escorted Father and Uncle Gunter to the best-in-the-house seats."
-- Narrator (Chapter One of Part Four paragraph 1)

Importance: The three men are at Carnegie Hall where Friedrich is the conductor for that night's performance. This is the first time the reader knows for certain that all three men survived to escape Germany. The use of the word "destiny" is an indication that all the main characters are going to come together for the novel's conclusion.

"Mike felt strangely compelled, as if he should pass his harmonica along, as if someone were waiting for it. So he gave it up, sending it on a journey to another child who needed the world to seem brighter with more possibilities, and wanted to satisfy the feeling in his or her heart, just as Mike had."
-- Narrator (Chapter 2 of Part Four paragraph 30)



Importance: This is the first time the reader learns how Mike passes the harmonica along so that it winds up in Ivy's hands. He remembers that the harmonica was very important to him and has no idea that the young flutist in tonight's orchestra was the next person to have it.

During his moments of lucidity, he watched them straighten his sheets and sit at his side, leaning toward him, expectant. And he heard them whispering, 'Live. You must live.'"

-- Narrator (Chapter Three of Part Four paragraph 16)

Importance: Ivy is recounting the story of Kenny's near-death experience during the war. The harmonica, in his shirt pocket, literally stopped a bullet. Kenny remembers three women who cared for him and urged him to live, but nurses tell him later that the women did not exist. It is obvious that the three princesses were caring for Kenny, saving him so that the witch's curse is broken.