

Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow Study Guide

Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

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Plot Summary

Hitler Youth tells the story of the Hitlerjugend, which was formed to indoctrinate German youths with respect to the policies and beliefs of Adolf Hitler and Nazism. The Hitler Youth became an important part of the Nazi war effort.

The Hitler Youth was started as early as 1922. Hitler made political use of the organization in 1932, when a Hitler Youth named Herbert Norkus was stabbed to death by a Communist youth group. Hitler played up public sympathies, and Norkus' death helped to sweep Nazis into parliament in elections of that year.

The Hitler Youth was soon made a compulsory part of a young German's education, with girls joining the Bund Deutscher Madel (BDM), or League of German Girls, the female branch of the Hitler Youth. Boys and girls excited at the chance to serve their country, play sports, and go camping soon learned that the Hitler Youth experience was one of drudgery and unquestioned discipline. While some became disillusioned, most fully embraced the program and swore unquestioned alliance to Hitler. The Hitler Youth were known as some of the fiercest and most fanatical advocates of Nazism. Hitler himself recognized the advantage of instilling Nazi virtues into children as young as possible.

By the late 1930s, Hitler Youth had evolved into a paramilitary organization with the purpose of training young people to join a branch of the German military. Boys joined the Wehrmacht (German army), Luftwaffe (air force), or navy. Especially promising youngsters were invited to join the SS, Hitler's brutal personal army. Around this time, Hitler played to the anti-Semitism of the German people, and Jews were persecuted and either forced out of the country or brought to concentration camps to labor and eventually be executed. The majority of German people had little idea the Holocaust was occurring, due to strict censorship.

In the later part of the war, the Hitler Youth got its own soldier division, the SS-HJ, which fought at Normandy and later the Battle of the Bulge.

Not everyone bought into the lies of the Nazis, and the book chronicles some former Hitler Youth teenagers who fought to bring the truth to the German people. This included Hans and Sophie Scholl, members of the White Rose resistance group at the University of Munich, and Helmuth Hubener, who spread anti-Nazi leaflets. These people were beheaded for their treasonous behavior.

As Germany was invaded by the Russians and Allies at the end of the war, members of Hitler Youth fought until the bitter end, using underground tunnels to conduct sabotage, and dying in vain while trying to stop the Russians at Pichelsdorf Bridge. At the conclusion of the war, Hitler Youths were made to visit concentration camps and witness the horrors of the Holocaust. The Hitler Youth had to live with themselves for having helped a mass murderer kill millions of people.



Introduction and Chapter 1

Introduction and Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

Introduction: On January 24, 1932, a fifteen-year-old teenager named Herbert Norkus left his home to join other members of the Hitlerjugend, or Hitler Youth, an organization of young people dedicated to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party in Germany. His mother had not wanted him to join the Hitler Youth, but Mrs. Norkus had died the year before, and Mr. Norkus gave his son permission.

At this time, the Hitler Youth often had violent encounters with Communist "Reds" on the streets of Berlin, as the Nazis and Communists were vying for control of Germany. Herbert was tasked with passing out Nazi propaganda flyers at homes throughout Berlin. While doing so, Herbert was attacked by a group of Communist youths. He was stabbed six times and killed.

The Nazis used Herbert Norkus' death for political advantage in the elections of 1932, holding elaborate memorials for the boy. The propaganda Herbert was involved in had worked: after the elections, the Nazis held a small majority of seats in the Reichstag, or German parliament.

Chapter 1: On Monday, January 30, 1933, fifteen-year-old Melita Maschmann accompanied her parents to downtown Berlin. At the President's Palace, amid great fanfare and jubilation, Adolf Hitler was to be greeted publicly for the first time as chancellor of Germany. Hitler had just been appointed to the position, the second-in-command, by president Paul von Hindenburg. Melita was greatly inspired by the excitement of it all and the stirring rhetoric of Hitler.

Though her parents did not approve—they, like many Germans, felt Hitler's ascension to the chancellery was a bad sign—Melita wished to join the Bund Deutscher Madel (BDM), or League of German Girls, the female branch of the Hitler Youth.

Two days after this introduction, Hitler gave his first of many radio speeches to Germany. Hitler understood the power and intimacy of the radio address, and he issues speeches promising solutions to the many problems Germans were dealing with, including unemployment and harsh reparations from the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I.

Melita wound up joining the BDM secretly, despite her parents' wishes, as she was so smitten with the power of Hitler and the promise of change he represented.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

On Monday, April 20, 1936, special torchlight ceremonies took place all over Germany to celebrate Hitler's birthday. The narrative focuses on one twelve-year-old boy in Hamburg, Karl Schnibbe, who was elated and who was happy to join the pre-Hitlerjugend youth organization for children ten to fourteen. The boys' section was known as the Jungvolk. Girls, meanwhile, joined the Jungmadel.

Schnibbe was excited by promises of camping trips and athletic events, and was awed when he attended a ceremony centered on the "Blood Banner", a Nazi swastika banner allegedly dipped in the blood of martyrs like Herbert Norkus.

Invitation to the Hitlerjugend involved proving that one was racially pure; specifically, that one was a member of the Aryan race, and that one had no drop of Jewish blood in one's heritage. Jews were expressly forbidden to join Hitlerjugend, causing divisions between boyhood friends. Hitlerjugend initiates also proved physical fitness by engaging in long hiking trips or competitions. They were indoctrinated with Nazi philosophy by listening to the "People's Radio". Naturally, harsh, unquestioned discipline was the order of the day, and those who strayed were severely punished.

Hitler found an opportunity to solidify his power in February 1933, when a Communist set fire to the parliamentary building. Hitler declared a national emergency, suspended people's rights, and soon after was voted by his Nazis to be Fuhrer, or Supreme Leader. As one of Hitler's efforts to promote "Gleichschaltung", or conformity, all youth groups aside from Hitler Youth were disbanded. The Catholic Church was at odds with Nazism, and had to concede certain powers. Jehovah's Witnesses, meanwhile, were treated as harshly as Jews.

The Hitler Youth, with its harsh discipline and aggressive posturing, became known as the Brown Pest to many normal German citizens. Many young people soured on continued membership, including Karl Schnibbe, who tried to skip out on meetings after about a year. He was eventually ousted from the Hitler Youth for insubordination.

On December 1, 1936, Hitler issued a law making membership in the Hitler Youth compulsory, as part of an initiative to educate all young people in the ideals of National Socialism. Parents who did not consent to their children's membership were threatened with prison sentences. A later law ordered parents to comply or else face the prospect of their children being taken away from them.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins with the Scholl family, elder sister Inge, brother Hans, and fourteen-year-old Sophie Scholl. She had graduated from the Jungmadel to the Bund Deutscher Madel (BDM), the girls' arm of the Hitler Youth. Sophie was a talented artist and sensitive person, and inevitably she began to question the ideas of the Nazis.

Sophie began to refuse to participate in school to provide the usual answers about National Socialism. She was threatened with not graduating, so she hid her feelings and studied enough to gain her high school diploma, as she desperately wanted to join her brother Hans at the University of Munich.

Unsurprisingly, the Nazis soon controlled all aspects of public education; they rewrote textbooks and changed curriculum to reflect the Nazi worldview. Teachers were faced with dismissal unless they toed the Nazi Party line. Jewish teachers were dismissed entirely. The enthusiastic members of the Hitler Youth enforced Nazi rules in their classrooms, intimidating teachers by banding together in squads and vandalizing. The police were instructed not to arrest any Hitler Youth. Even religious schools were affected, as Nazis stormed in, tore down crucifixes, and put up portraits of Hitler, for example.

The Nazis were especially keen to teach their theories on race and eugenics. Children were taught that Aryans were superior and people like the Jews were inferior. This naturally caused much animosity between "pure" students and Jewish or half-Jewish children. In April 1933, a law was passed that limited the Jewish populations in public schools and universities. Later, Jews were excluded entirely.

Members of the Hitler Youth had a Party Record Book, a journal in which their progress was recorded through the years, including weight and height, speed, weight lifted, and grades in school. Elite students with good grades were invited to attend special Adolf Hitler Schools. Traditional schooling was eschewed for military drills and physical fitness exercises. The 1936 Olympics in Berlin, in which Germans captured thirty-three gold medals, confirmed for many Germans the superiority of the Aryan race, although African-American Jesse Owens "disappointed" them by winning four gold medals.

Individual freedoms were extinguished under the Nazis. They forbade certain types of music and books, and they censored the radio and newspapers. On May 10, 1933, Nazis organized book burnings across Germany. Young Sophie Scholl shocked her teachers and peers by insisting on discussing Heinrich Heine in literature class, Heine being a Jewish poet who was banned from the curriculum.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

On Saturday, April 1, 1933, a Nazi Storm Trooper posted a sign on the window of an elderly man's shop: "Don't Buy From Jews". This was witnessed by Gaston Ruskin, the grandson of the man, who was nine years old at the time. The Storm Trooper then beat up the Jewish grandfather.

This was part of a larger nationwide boycott on Jewish goods and services. Jewish shops were vandalized with crude Star of David images painted on the windows, et cetera. Hitler and many other Germans blamed Jews for their defeat in World War I, and for economic troubles. They believed Jews held undue sway in banking and other professions.

In 1935, anti-Semitism (persecution and hatred of Jews) became official Nazi policy. German Jews were stripped of their citizenship, and marriage between Jews and non-Jews was made illegal. Passports of Jewish people were marked with a "J." These types of laws were collectively known as the Nuremberg Race Laws.

On the night of November 9, 1938, Jewish homes were vandalized, synagogues were destroyed, and Jewish people were hunted and beaten in a riot known as Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass. The authors notes that, however shocking Kristallnacht was, it was perhaps more shocking that so many Germans stood by and did nothing to stop it. It was eventually revealed that Kristallnacht was organized by Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda. The Nazis took the opportunity of a Nazi officer's death at the hands of a Jew to further scold the Jews and demand compensation for the death.

The author stresses that Kristallnacht sharply divided opinions in Germany. Some "Aryan" Germans called it the Night of Shame and would not celebrate it. Some Jews thought the persecution would be only temporary. Families were also divided. In one instance, a Hitler Youth boy named Albert was ashamed of his father for agreeing to help a Jewish boy named Levi out of Germany. In all, a quarter of Germany's Jewish population fled Germany after Kristallnacht. However, due to widespread anti-Semitism, many Jews had trouble getting visas into other countries.

By 1941, the Nazis developed the final stage of their anti-Semitism by forbidding any Jews from leaving Germany—Jews would either be slaves at work camps or would be killed in death camps. Jews were also forced to wear yellow Stars of David on their clothing to identify them.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

This chapter describes Germany's preparation for what would become World War II and the part the Hitler Youth played in it. The chapter begins with describing young Henry Metelmann, thirteen, listening to his teacher rant about the evils of the Treaty of Versailles, the treaty that ended World War I. The Treaty forced Germany to accept blame for starting the war, it took away their army, and it caused economic depression due to severe war reparations. Many people in Germany hated the treaty and blamed it for the country's high unemployment and other problems, and the Nazis used this hatred in advancing pro-war policies.

Hitler cured Germany's high unemployment by putting young people to work by the millions, through a program called the Reich Labor Service, started in 1935. It required essentially six months of hard labor from every able-bodied boy after high school graduation. This duration would increase leading up to and during the war. Boys would clear swampland, cut down trees, and perform the menial tasks necessary to equip the German war machine. Meanwhile, young women were subject to the Duty Year, a compulsory time in which they had to babysit for mothers working factories.

Hitler next started to build up the army. The army was increased to five hundred thousand men, in violation of the Versailles treaty. Despite this alarming violation, Hitler was able to convince other European countries that he was committed to peace, and that he only wished to restore Germany's standing in the world.

In 1937, Hitler Youth graduated to paramilitary units for military training. These units included the Wehrmacht (army), Luftwaffe (air force), and navy. There were specialist units as well, such as the Motor-HJ, which trained young men to ride motorcycles and repair engines. There was also a "junior Gestapo" unit for Hitler Youth called the Patrol Force.

Military camp life was highly regimented, and discipline was harsh. Physical exercise was a constant, along with training in military engineering, how to read maps, etc.

After training, the Hitler Youth would join the proper army. The most coveted unit was the SS, the most brutal and feared elite group of soldiers. Soldiers in this unit had to meet certain minimum height and other physical specifications, and of course had to demonstrate good Aryan ancestry.

In the first true act of aggression, Hitler's army marched into Austria on March 12, 1938. Austria welcomed them with open arms, and suddenly, with no shot fired, Germany and Austria were unified. In September of 1938, European leaders met, and Hitler convinced them he would not attempt further expansion if given a region called the Sudetenland,

which was full of ethnic Germans. The leaders agreed, but in early 1939 Hitler broke his promise and marched into Moravia and Bohemia.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

In 1938, the biggest Nazi rally yet, the Nuremberg Rally, took place on September 5. About a million Nazi members and loyalists showed up to cheer on the German war machine. The chapter describes the personal experiences of a Hitler Youth member named Alfons Heck at that rally. He was amazed at the impressive tanks and weapons the soldiers demonstrated, and the rush of excitement and joy in the air. The soldiers also fought mock battles to impress the public. Hitler made it a special point to emphasize the Hitler Youth in his speech at the rally.

Hitler next turned his eyes to Poland. German propaganda led people to believe the Poles were mistreating ethnic Germans living in Germany. And Hitler stoked the fire by launching a fake attack on a German radio station and blaming the Poles. Painting Germany as the defender and not aggressor, Hitler invaded Poland. In the subsequent blitzkrieg, or lightning war, Germany quickly overwhelmed Polish forces. Britain and France responded by declaring war on Germany on September 3, 1939.

The Jewish Holocaust began when Jewish Poles were either executed outright by German soldiers or shipped off to forced labor camps. The author notes that many of the BDM and Hitler Youth teenagers who helped the army at this time had little idea of the mass murdering that was and would be taking place.

As adults went to war, Hitler Youth stayed behind and did some adult jobs, like post office work and office assistance. They also collected scrap metal and donated goods for a program called Winter Help. Fiercely independent Sophie School, on the other hand, refused to participate in Winter Help.

As time went on, more and more freedoms were stripped from the German people. They were not allowed to listen to non-German radio. The Gestapo would arrest anyone speaking negatively about Hitler or Nazis. Parents feared speaking openly in front of their children for fear the youth squads would turn them in. Many young children rebelled against their parents, saying they belonged to Hitler now and not their parents.

The Germans continued taking territories, including France in May 1940. They next tried to bomb Britain into submission in a carpet bombing called the Blitz, but British air forces were superior, and Germany abandoned Britain in order to deal with Soviet Russia. They captured Ukraine and other large parts of Soviet territory.

The Pearl Harbor attack happened on December 7, 1941, and the United States entered the war. With this added manpower and resources, Allied forces brutally bombed German towns such as Cologne and industrial centers like Hamburg.

Hitler Youth helped to coordinate the emergency procedures during bombing raids, such as getting people into bunkers. Hitler Youth members also ran camps in the countryside

where young children were herded to to avoid the city bombings. Later in the war, Hitler Youth also manned anti-aircraft guns and dug anti-tank ditches.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

In 1937, young Karl Schnibbe took a field trip to a mental hospital in Hamburg with his class. The class was told by the teacher that the mentally ill were a resource drain on Germany and that they did not deserve to live. This was part of an effort on the part of Nazis to convince people that physically and mentally "unfit" people should be euthanized. Physically and mentally ill people interfered with Nazi attempts to create the perfect master race. Nazis started by sterilizing these types of people, and that evolved into mass murder.

The euthanasia, or "mercy death" program began in late 1939. People in mental hospitals or hospices could be killed in order to save the country money and help fund the war effort. A panel would decide the life or death fate of people in these hospitals. This program was known by the code name Aktion-T4. Parents of "incurably sick" patients were told their children would be taken to special hospitals. In reality, these were death camps. People were shot, killed by lethal injection, and later gassed.

Word got out about the death camps. People like Bishop von Galen spoke out about the issue. German people expressed enough outrage that Hitler officially stopped the program, but not before killing tens of thousands of people. However, doctors continued the program well after the official stoppage, and some experts put the total number of dead at two hundred thousand or more.

A leaflet printed with von Galen's sermon had a profound effect on Hans Scholl, brother of Sophie Scholl. The Scholl family was quickly souring to Hitler and the Nazis.

A separate extermination program dealt with undesirable people, primarily Jews, but also political leaders, homosexuals, and others. A unit of the SS called the Einsatzgruppe, or Shock Troops, rounded up Jews in conquered territories and killed them with machine gun fire, hundreds at a time. The bodies were then thrown in mass graves. Between 1941 and 1943, it is estimated that two million people were killed in this manner.

At home, Hitler Youth members and others heard rumors of the mass murders, but most dismissed such rumors as too unbelievable. The Nazis shrouded the mass murders in secrecy and euphemisms. The author describes the "relocation" of the Jewish Lewyn family, including eighteen-year-old Bert. The Gestapo came to the home and assured the Lewyns they were only being moved. Bert was torn away from his family to work at a metal factory, while his family was shipped by train to a concentration camp.

The horrible train ride, during which many people died from suffocation from overcrowded cars, was just the beginning of the nightmare. Jews arriving at the infamous Auschwitz death camp were lined up and assessed by an SS doctor. The



young children, pregnant women, sick, and elderly were taken off to be gassed in a gas chamber. Able-bodied people were put to work in the labor camp.

A group of students at the University of Munich banded together to help spread the word about the evils of these death camps. The group was called the White Rose, and one of its leaders was Hans Scholl.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Hans Scholl was a natural leader who rose in the ranks of the Hitler Youth. But he quickly became tired of the rigid conformity of the system and acted out in minor ways, like designing a flag pattern that was against the rules. After slapping his superior, Hans was booted from the Hitler Youth. His father, an anti-Nazi, was proud of him. Spurred on by their father, Hans and Sophie both pursued freedom and resistance to National Socialism in different ways.

Hitler Youth drop-outs often banded together in secrecy to form their own youth groups. They would provoke or even attack Hitler Youth members. The Patrol Force helped the Gestapo track down these outlaws, and a special youth concentration camp was set up in 1940. The head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, was alarmed at the growing number of youths resisting Hitler Youth. He dubbed these rebels the Swing Youth (after the musical genre), and stepped up efforts to contain them.

Many rebels listened to foreign radio broadcasts illegally. Sixteen-year-old Helmuth Hubener started when his half-brother gave him a broken radio and he repaired it. After listening to several broadcasts, Helmuth was convinced the Nazis were lying to the German public. He invited his friends Karl Schnibbe and Rudi Wobbe to listen as well. Feeling he had to do something, Helmuth wrote anti-Nazi essays and printed them on flyers. The three boys distributed the flyers around town for several months.

But a suspicious co-worker reported Helmuth, and the boys were arrested. Helmuth was tortured for information, as was Karl. But Helmuth never implicated his friends and took all the responsibility for the essays. In the feared People's Court, also known as the Blood Court, Helmuth was sentenced to death. Karl and Rudi received sentences of several years of hard labor. On October 27, 1942, Helmuth Hubener was beheaded at Plötzensee prison in Berlin.

Another resistance group was the White Rose. Hans Scholl and his schoolmates published "Leaflets of the White Rose" and distributed them on the college campus. Sophie Scholl became involved in distribution as well. Activities stopped when White Rose members were shipped off for compulsory war service. Shortly thereafter, the Germans suffered their first major defeat at Stalingrad in early 1943.

White Rose stepped up its efforts, printing thousands of leaflets. They traveled by train and gave the leaflets to students around Germany. But in February 1943, Hans and Sophie were caught distributing leaflets by a pro-Nazi janitor who turned them in. They and several other White Rose members were tried in the People's Court and sentenced to beheading. Hans and Sophie remained defiant, with Hans yelling "Long live freedom!" before he was beheaded.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

The book skips ahead to the D-Day offensive of mid-1944. A young twenty-three-year-old SS commander, Emil Durr, saved his gun crew from certain death at the hands of a British flamethrower tank by charging the tank and holding an explosive to it, destroying the tank. Emil Durr was just one of many fanatical fighters who grew up in the Hitler Youth program.

Hitler's administration increasingly pulled from the Hitler Youth for fresh bodies as it suffered heavy losses as World War II went on. The army created a special youth division, the SS-HJ, recruiting the best and brightest Hitler Youths. Ten thousand SS-HJ recruits were sent off to a training camp near Beverloo, Belgium in the spring of 1943. They trained fiercely for five months.

By April 1944, the SS-HJ division was twenty thousand teenagers strong. It was deployed to Normandy, France, in anticipation of an Allied invasion. The Germans had fortified the Normandy Beach so heavily that they did not expect an attack at that specific beach, however. On June 6, 1944, the Allies stormed the beach in what is known as D-Day. The SS-HJ was sent nearby the beach, and when British tanks stormed inland, they attacked them with Panzerfauste (rocket launchers) and destroyed many tanks. The SS-HJ surprised Allies with their intensity and willingness to die.

Nevertheless, the Allies captured Paris soon after and routed the Germans. A total of 8,626 SS-HJ soldiers were either killed, wounded, or missing. The rest were captured. The SS-HJ was reorganized and sent to the Ardennes Forest, where the Germans launched their last major offensive. In the resultant Battle of the Bulge, Americans launched a counterattack and forced the Germans back into Germany.

By this time, most ordinary Germans knew the war was lost. They desperately hoped the Allies would reach them before the Russians, as they figured the vengeful Russians would slaughter them by the hundreds. Hitler, grasping for any control, created the Volkssturm, or People's Army, to resist an invasion of Germany, and many teenagers were forcibly enlisted.

Many Hitler Youth remained faithful to the bitter end. When Russians stormed the northern suburbs of Berlin, Hitler Youth conducted sabotage and warfare by traveling via the subway and sewer tunnels. But the Russians were relentless, and at Pichelsdorf Bridge on April 23, 4,500 young boys were killed in a battle.

Knowing the end had come, Hitler committed suicide in his bunker on April 30, 1945. On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Shortly after Hitler's suicide, the last remnants of the Hitler Youth made a desperate last stand at the Maximilian Bridge, but surrendered when it was clear they were against far superior forces. The American soldiers brought the boys to the infamous Dachau concentration camp, and the boys were aghast at the stacks of dead bodies and the huge crematorium ovens. For decades after, members of the Hitler Youth had to deal with the fact that they had helped a mass murderer kill millions of people.

World leaders agreed that Nazis had to be punished for their actions, and they proceeded with a military tribunal, popularly known as the Nuremberg Trials. Evidence was presented starting in November 1945. Nazi leaders told the court they were simply following orders, but the judges ruled the soldiers should be held accountable for their deplorable and immoral actions.

A year later, twelve Nazi leaders were condemned to death, with another seven given prison terms. Many of the top Nazis had committed suicide prior to being captured, however. Hitler Youth leaders were also tried, including the first leader, Baldur von Schirach, and his successor, Artur Axmann. And the SS-HJ commander, Kurt Meyer, was found guilty of war crimes and sentenced to death, though later it was reduced to a prison term.

Hitler Youths were sometimes tried in subsequent "de-Nazification" trials. They were also forced to watch films of the concentration camps, but many thought it was faked Allied propaganda footage. It took people many years to come to grips with the enormity of what had happened.

The White Rose group was celebrated as a great act of heroism by the Allies and later by the German people.

In all, World War II left fifty-three million people dead, mostly young men. The Allies and the Russians disagreed about what to do with Germany. Russians felt Germany should be severely punished and crippled economically, and the Allies felt a democratic government should be installed. As a result, the country was split in two for nearly forty-five years, into East and West Germany. As for the rest of Europe, the U.S. poured a large amount into rebuilding efforts, led by General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Schools were restarted without Nazi curriculum, and media was encouraged to be free. Today, Germany is a thriving liberal democracy.



Characters

Sophie Scholl

Sophie was a young girl who grew up in 1930s Germany as Hitler led the country toward war. Early on, Sophie displayed a sensitivity and intelligence beyond her years. She was excellent at the arts like music, and she read voraciously.

Like many other girls her age, Sophie became a member of the girls' arm of the Hitlerjugend, the BDM. While initially excited at the promise of learning new skills and making new friends, Sophie's mood quickly soured. She resented the rigid conformity expected in the BDM, and she especially hated being away from her family and living in camp during the BDM's compulsory "Duty Year". She began to accumulate ideas about politics and humanity that were at odds with the official Nazi story. She argued with her teachers and fought against indoctrination into National Socialism. She also disobeyed her superiors by reading banned books, such as poetry by German Jew Heinrich Heine.

She longed to escape the confines of the BDM and join her brother Hans at the University of Munich. Sophie tolerated her teachers and the curriculum enough to graduate from high school, and she joined her brother there. Sophie, Hans, and her schoolmates met in secret to criticize Hitler and the Nazi Party, and soon Sophie learned that her brother was one of the leaders of a resistance movement on campus called the White Rose. Sophie enthusiastically joined her brother in spreading the truth about Nazism.

While distributing leaflets, Sophie and Hans were caught by a janitor and turned in to the Gestapo. The White Rose members were rounded up, and Sophie was sentenced by the People's Court to be killed by beheading. Even as she walked to her death, Sophie maintained a fierceness and defiance that later made her a hero in the minds of many Germans.

Helmuth Hubener

Helmuth was sixteen years old when he was brought a broken shortwave radio from his half-brother, Gerhard Kunkel. Kunkel had obtained the radio while fighting in France. Helmuth repaired the radio and then listened to the German-language broadcast of the BBC News late at night after his grandparents went to bed. Helmuth knew he was taking a risk doing so, as it was illegal to listen to anything on the radio apart from German state media broadcasts.

But Helmuth was introduced to a whole new world by the BBC broadcasts. After several broadcasts, he came to realize that Germany and the Nazis had engaged in propaganda and lies, deceiving the German people so that they could go to war. The BBC introduced Helmuth to facts and perspectives that the German media otherwise withheld.



Determined, intelligent, and mature, Helmuth felt that it was his duty to somehow spread the truth of Nazism. He invited his friends Karl Schnibbe and Rudi Wobbe to listen to the broadcasts as well. Then Helmuth wrote anti-Nazi newsletters with titles like "Hitler the Murderer". He printed them in secret, and then the three boys furtively distributed the leaflets around their town.

Being very careful, the boys were successful for months at evading capture, but a co-worker of Helmuth's became suspicious of him and reported him to the Gestapo. The Gestapo discovered the original leaflets and printing materials in Helmuth's home. He was arrested and tried before the infamous People's Court, the Berlin court known for handing down death penalties. Sure enough, Helmuth was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death by beheading.

Though the German court rarely tried anyone so young, and especially not when it came to the death penalty, they wanted to make an example of him to dissuade other youths from similar activities. Helmuth was the youngest person sentenced to death for treason by Germany during the war.

Herbert Norkus

Norkus was an enthusiastic Hitler Youth who was stabbed to death by a Communist youth group while distributing pro-Nazi flyers. Nazis commemorated him and made his death an issue in the 1932 elections.

Hans Scholl

The older brother of Sophie, Hans was a handsome young German who had been expelled from the Hitler Youth for defiance. At the University of Munich, he and his fellow students formed the White Rose group to resist Nazism and try to spread the truth.

Karl Schnibbe

Karl was a co-conspirator with Helmuth Hubener, helping to distribute anti-Nazi essays that Hubener had penned. Helmuth refused to name Karl as a co-conspirator, thus saving his life. Karl was sentenced to several years of hard labor for his association with Hubener.

Adolf Hitler

Hitler was the Fuhrer of Germany from 1933 to 1945, and the man most directly responsible for World War II and the Holocaust. In 1922, Hitler formed the Hitler Youth to indoctrinate German youth.



Bert Lewyn

Bert was a German Jew who was separated from his family during the Holocaust. Bert was forced to work in a factory because of his skill with metalwork.

Kurt Meyer

Kurt was the last commander of the SS-HJ, the Hitler Youth division of the Wehrmacht, or German army. He served many years in prison for his war crimes.

Heinrich Heine

Heine was a German Jewish poet of the nineteenth century. Given the Nazi's racial theories, Heine's work was banned from being read. Sophie Scholl defied her teacher by suggesting they discuss Heine's work in class.

Heinrich Himmler

Himmler was the head of Hitler's SS, or personal army. Himmler became alarmed when Hitler Youths began defecting in significant numbers, and he stepped up efforts to corral youth outlaw gangs.



Objects/Places

Berlin, Germany

Berlin was the seat of Hitler's power and the site for many of his rallies. When Berlin was besieged by Russian forces, the Hitler Youth fought to the death.

Hitlerjugend

The Hitlerjugend, translated as Hitler Youth, was a youth organization formed in 1922 to instill allegiance to Hitler and teach the tenets of National Socialism.

The White Rose

The White Rose was a resistance group formed by students at the University of Munich during World War II. Aware of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, they distributed anti-Nazi pamphlets in an attempt to spread the truth.

Jungvolk

As Hitler Youth expanded, its reach got younger. Boys ages ten to fourteen were enrolled in Jungvolk prior to admittance to the full Hitlerjugend.

Gleichschaltung

This phrase is roughly translated as conformity. Hitler made conformity to his rules and ideals a top priority in his dictatorship.

People's Radio

Soon after the Nazis came to power, they forbid Germans from listening to anything but People's Radio, which served to spread Nazi propaganda.

SS-HJ

This was an SS unit staffed by members of the Hitlerjugend. They were near Normandy during the D-Day invasion, and later they were assigned to the Ardennes Forest in the German's last major offensive.



People's Court

Also known as the Blood Court, this German judiciary body, based in Berlin, was infamous for the numerous death sentences it handed down.

Pichelsdorf Bridge

On April 23, 1945, 4,500 boys of the Hitlerjugend died at Pichelsdorf Bridge defending Berlin from a far superior invading Russian force.

Kristallnacht

On the night of November 9, 1938, Jewish homes were vandalized, synagogues were destroyed, and Jewish people were hunted and beaten in a riot known as Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass.

Themes

Fanaticism of the Hitler Youth

Adolf Hitler realized the advantage of indoctrinating the very young into Nazism. Not only would they be his loyal followers for decades, but the young mind is more malleable than the older mind, and thus more susceptible to Nazi propaganda. This was the idea behind the Hitler Youth. Hitler celebrated youth because they represented the future, and because they were among his most adoring fans.

The Hitler Youth were zealous in their support of the Fuhrer. They would salute the Blood Banner (supposedly dipped in the blood of martyrs for the cause), do the Hitler salute, dress up in full soldier uniform, and lose themselves in the jubilation of party rallies such as the Nuremburg rally. Everything in the lives of these youths were designed to increase and maintain their allegiance to Hitler, from memorized slogans and songs to listening to the People's Radio to curriculum designed by Nazi propagandists in school.

Some Hitler Youth went so far as to disown their own mothers and fathers who might have expressed criticism about Hitler. They were known for their fierceness in battle and their willingness to die for the cause, as with Emil Durr when he sacrificed his life to blow up an oncoming flamethrower tank. Parents were afraid to speak freely around their Hitler Youth sons and daughters because in their zealotry, the children might report their parents to the Gestapo. Being a member of the Hitler Youth gave these young people power over parents, teachers, and others, and they did not know how to handle such power.

Doubts About Nazism

Germany's embrace of Nazism was certainly not uniform. Several people had ethical, rational, or other doubts about National Socialism, and the author charts some of these stories along with the stories of those who embraced Nazism whole-heartedly.

Many members of the Hitler Youth followed a similar pattern: they were drawn in to the Hitler Youth by the promise of adventure, friends, freedom from parents. But once they spent time in the organization, including time at the forced labor camps, they became disillusioned. Instead of freedom, they found rigid conformity and harsh discipline. Boys like Karl Schnibbe defied their band leaders and were dismissed from the organization. Others like Sophie Scholl were able to tolerate the program until they graduated.

As a budding intellectual, Sophie Scholl had a particular problem with the philosophy and ideals behind Nazism. She doubted the lies taught to her in Nazi-run schools and on state radio. She did not believe in the value of burning books, particularly. Like-minded students like Scholl formed the White Rose resistance movement at the University of Munich.



Another doubter was Helmuth Hubener, who heard the truth from the BBC on the radio and decided to distribute pamphlets of anti-Nazi essays he had written. Of course, doubters were dealt with quite harshly under the Hitler dictatorship, and people like Hans and Sophie Scholl and Hubener lost their lives fighting for what they believed in.

Ignorance

Throughout the history of the Hitler Youth is a pattern of ignorance on the part of the willful participants. This is particularly true in the case of the mass murders taking place under the Nazi regime, first with those deemed physically or mentally unfit, and secondly with the Jews and other undesirables gassed to death in concentration camps.

The Nazis kept the true nature of the concentration camps a close secret, with tightly controlled media and euphemisms like "relocations" or "resettlements" (even "concentration camp" is of course a euphemism). But considering the enormous scale of the murders, news indeed filtered through to the German people. This news was either denied as truth or ignored altogether. The Germans did not feel their army was capable of such atrocities. And while there was rampant anti-Semitism, few regular German citizens would advocate such a systematic execution of an entire "race" of people.

The Hitler Youth were just as much mired in ignorance as the rest of the population. The author tells stories of Hitler Youth members who simply could not believe the rumors of mass murder. Even after the war, when confronted with actual film footage of concentration camps, diehard Hitler Youth members dismissed the films as Allied propaganda. Only those boys who were literally brought to sites like Dachau and ordered to open the crematorium ovens themselves realized the full extent of what they had enabled. For others, it took many years to understand the enormity of the situation, and the part they played in it.

Style

Perspective

The author of *Hitler Youth* is Susan Campbell Bartoletti. She has a series of award-winning children's nonfiction, fiction, and picture books, and before she started her writing career, she was a teacher for eighteen years. She is thus well equipped to be presenting difficult material like the Holocaust and World War II to a younger audience.

Bartoletti offers a mostly neutral, balanced, and objective perspective on the circumstances surrounding the Hitler Youth. While it might be easy to condemn Nazism and the horrors of the Holocaust, Bartoletti attempts to portray the reasons why pro-Nazi German citizens felt the way they did. For example, she relays the excitement of many youths at the prospect of summer camp. For German boys and girls, membership in the Hitler Youth sounded like a vacation full of outdoor adventures. Any moral/ethical judgements are thus left up to the reader after he or she is armed with the facts and the perspectives of both sides.

To obtain a balance of perspectives, Bartoletti conducted extensive phone interviews with actual living former members of the Hitler Youth, including men like Karl Schnibbe. Bartoletti often provides a direct quotation from people like Schnibbe, allowing them an unfiltered opportunity to speak for themselves.

Tone

Hitler Youth is a book intended for children and teenagers, perhaps late elementary school and older. As such, author Bartoletti is very careful to lay out the basics of World War II, considering her young reader may or may not have a familiarity with the war. For example, she explains in simple terms who Adolf Hitler was, how World War I indirectly led to World War II, the state of Europe in the 1930s, and other concepts.

Bartoletti's tone is objective, measured, and reasonable. It is clear the history is well-researched, and in most cases Bartoletti lets the historical events speak for themselves, adding little of her own commentary. She makes no obvious value judgements about the Holocaust, for one example, but simply presents the details of what life was like in the concentration camp, or how the Nazis "graduated" from machine gun executions to the gas chamber. Indeed, Bartoletti includes all but the most grisly details in the narrative. As such, the book is probably not appropriate for very young readers.

It is evident that Bartoletti is more interested in the human stories of the war, and particularly the members of the Hitler Youth, rather than the details of the war itself, the major battles, etc. Any discussion of the larger history of World War II soon returns to the thoughts and feelings of particular people, giving the story an intimate, human component.



Structure

The book is divided into ten chapters along with an introduction. The narrative proceeds in roughly chronological order, beginning with the death of Hitler Youth member Herbert Norkus in 1932 that played a part in the Nazi's takeover of the Reichstag in the 1932 elections. The book ends with a brief wrap-up of the decades following World War II, including how Germany was divided into two sections and then reunified, and how the German people finally denounced Nazism and embraced individual liberty.

Chapters tackle specific time periods or stages in the evolution of World War II Germany and the Hitler Youth. For example, Chapter Four is subtitled "Nazi Persecution of the Jews," and it deals with Nazi anti-semitic laws in the mid 1930s, culminating in Kristallnacht.

Most chapters begin with a very specific time, place, and person. For example, Chapter One begins with Melita Maschmann attending a Nazi rally on Monday, January 30, 1933. This level of specificity draws the reader into the narrative, and then the author paints with a broader brush to supply the historical events and context necessary for comprehension. Then, within chapters, Bartoletti frequently switches between personal stories and the more general historical events.

Also included in the book: an Epilogue which details what became of the specific Hitler Youth members mentioned in the book; a timeline of major Hitler Youth events; Author's Note information about how Bartoletti collected the oral interviews and photographs found in the volume; and a Bibliography so that the curious reader can read up on certain topics in more detail.



Quotes

"Herbert [Norkus] belonged to the Hitlerjugend, or Hitler Youth, an organization of teenagers dedicated to Adolf Hitler. Hitler was the leader of the rising National Socialist Party, known as the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or Nazis for short."
Introduction, pp. 9-10

"Unaccustomed to democracy, many Germans had little faith in their president and elected Reichstag. They longed for a strong leader who promised them jobs and a better life, even if he had extreme ideas. Tired of poor living and working conditions, they wanted a simple but drastic solution. And so, on February 1, 1933, as Hitler's voice boomed over the radio, the German people felt grateful for his leadership."
Chap. 1, p. 20

"During the trial period, each boy and girl [of the Hitler Youth] had to pass a written examination to make sure they had mastered Nazi ideas about race and politics. They also had to prove their racial background. Although membership was voluntary, not every child could join the Hitler Youth. Only healthy boys and girls of proven 'Aryan' descent were permitted to join."
Chap. 2, p. 25

"The Hitler Youth enjoyed the power they had over teachers and other authority figures. Dressed in full uniform, entire Hitler Youth squads—as many as one hundred boys—showed up at classroom doors to intimidate teachers who did not espouse the Nazi worldview."
Chap. 3, p. 39

"Under the Nazis, normal life became impossible for young people and their families as they lost their basic freedoms. The Nazis censored every newspaper, radio broadcast, movie, sermon, and classroom lesson. They also censored conversation: Anyone who dared to criticize Hitler or the Nazi Party faced imprisonment or execution."
Chap. 3, p. 46

"Hitler and the Nazis blamed the Jews for Germany's defeat in World War I and for the economic troubles that followed. They warned that the Jews were plotting to take over Germany. They claimed that the Jews profited during times of high inflation because they owned so many shops and businesses. They also claimed that the Jews dominated professions such as banking, law, medicine, and journalism."
Chap. 4, p. 50

"The Nazis believed that the [work] camps instilled obedience, discipline, and respect for hard physical labor. They also believed camp life fostered a sense of camaraderie among young people from all classes, since rich and poor alike lived side by side performing the same manual labor and sharing rations."
Chap. 5, p. 66



"On September 3, 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany, but it was too late for the Poles. The Nazis were conducting a new kind of war called a blitzkrieg, or 'lightning war.' In this type of swift warfare, German dive-bombers attacked Poland from the air to support the tank assaults on the ground. Then the infantry followed to occupy the territory. Within one month, Poland surrendered."
Chap. 6, p. 78

"After witnessing a mass shooting, Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, decided that guns wasted too much time and too many bullets. He wanted a cleaner, more efficient method. As a result, six concentration camps were expanded and converted into death camps equipped with large gas chambers and huge crematoriums. The euthanasia program had given the Nazis the technology to create mass-murder factories."
Chap. 7, p. 101

"For six months, Karl, Rudi, and Helmuth were held in solitary confinement. During this time, they suffered more brutal interrogations. In August 1942, the boys were handcuffed and transported to Berlin for their trial. It would take place before Nazi Germany's highest court, the feared People's Court, also known as the Blood Court, since it often handed down the death sentence."
Chap. 8, p. 117

"To recruit potential soldiers, Waffen-SS officers visited the Reich Labor Service camps. There, they picked the best from among thousands of teenage boys fulfilling their compulsory labor service. They told the boys about the joy and excitement of combat. They promised the boys that they could advance through the ranks and become officers. The Nazis also recruited qualified boys during Hitler Youth meetings and roll calls, often without their parents' consent."
Chap. 9, p. 131

"More people were killed in World War II than in any war in history. The war left 53 million dead, mostly young men in their late teens and early twenties. Millions more were crippled physically. Others suffered emotionally from their combat experiences, whether on the front lines or in bombed-out cities."
Chap. 12, p. 153

Topics for Discussion

What was camp life like for members of the Hitler Youth?

What was the SS-HJ, and what part did it play in World War II?

Describe the events of Kristallnacht and why the Nazis helped to organize this event.

Describe the effect that Nazism and conflicting opinions about its merits had on families in Germany.

What was White Rose? What did its members do to defy Nazism? How did White Rose end?

Describe the historical importance of Helmuth Hubener.

Why did Soviet Russia and the Allied forces differ about what to do with Germany after World War II? How was this difference of opinion resolved?