

Number the Stars Study Guide

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

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Overview

Number the Stars is a story about courage. In 1943, Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, has been occupied by Hitler's Third Reich. Soldiers stand on every street corner, and life is changed irrevocably for ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen and her best friend Ellen Rosen. Wartime food shortages and the psychological terror of the Nazi takeover have made life difficult for Danish citizens; now the Nazis have decided to relocate all of Copenhagen's Jewish families, and Ellen is Jewish.

Lowry shows that Jews and non-Jews alike among Denmark's population suffer terribly at the hands of the Nazis. The Johansen family lost its eldest daughter, Lise, just two weeks before her wedding day. When Nazis raided a Resistance meeting attended by Inge, she was intentionally run down and killed by a military car. Later in the novel, Annemarie follows her sister's example, risks her own life for the cause of the Resistance, and saves Ellen's family. Annemarie's quick thinking and selflessness make her a heroine, but she is but one among many ordinary Danish citizens who stand against the Nazis. Number the Stars depicts the courage and the integrity of the Danish people, who proved that even during times of terror, human decency can prevail.

About the Author

Lois Lowry was born on March 20, 1937, in Honolulu, Hawaii. She attended Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and the University of Southern Maine, where she earned her bachelor's degree in English in 1972.

Lowry divides her time between an apartment on Boston's Beacon Hill and an 1840 farmhouse in New Hampshire.

Her novel *Number the Stars* won the Newbery Medal in 1990.

Lowry writes about the ordinary events and emotions of everyday life, such as first dates, making friends, embarrassment, and fear of failure. Lowry often contrasts the imagined and wished dreams of the young with the realities that they must confront.



Plot Summary

Number the Stars tells the tale of Annemarie Johansen, a young girl living in Denmark during World War II. The book opens in 1943, three years after German soldiers first arrived to occupy the small country. After three years of living uneasily with this occupying force, the gloves finally come off as the German Nazis begin their campaign to "relocate" all the Jews of Denmark. The Danish Resistance, made up of ordinary citizens like the Johansen family, works steadily to smuggle the Jews out of Denmark and over the sea to nearby Sweden. Annemarie, only ten years old, must find courage and maturity beyond her years within herself in order to help her best friend, Ellen Rosen, escape from the Nazis.

Annemarie and her mother, Inge, set out to smuggle Ellen across Denmark to Uncle Henrik's coastal home. Annemarie will eventually learn that her uncle, a boat captain, has joined with many other captains in a plan to spirit the country's nearly 7,000 Jews over the sea to Sweden before the Germans can round them up. The plot involves tales of real-life espionage, secret compartments, and chemically-soaked handkerchiefs carried by the boat captains to elude German search dogs.

This secret espionage has been occurring around Annemarie for three years, since the soldiers first arrived and killed her sister, Lise. Lise had been attending one of the early Danish Resistance meetings and was run down by a German car after the meeting was raided. Yet Annemarie has no idea the German invasion has touched her family so personally. As far as she's concerned, they're just a presence on the street, and the source of the food privations most Danish families are suffering. Annemarie's parents have protected her from the worst news about the war, telling her only that Lise had been killed in an accident with a car.

When word leaks that the Germans intend to start rounding up the Danish Jews, Annemarie's family takes in her best friend Ellen Rosen, hiding her from the soldiers by telling them she's their daughter, Lise. Annemarie's parents can no longer shield Ellen from the encroaching Nazi peril. In her quest to help the Rosen family, Annemarie learns some important life lessons about the value of human decency in the face of indescribable fear. This coming of age tale, set against a historically-significant backdrop, gives the reader a glimpse of the positive impact human beings can have on the world, even in the direst of circumstances.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen races her best friend, Ellen, down the residential streets of Copenhagen on their way home from school. Five-year-old Kirsti, Annemarie's younger sister, becomes irritated because she can't keep up with the older girls. As Annemarie and Ellen round a corner, they are ordered to halt by two German soldiers holding rifles. Kirsti is not frightened; the German soldiers have been in Copenhagen for three years now, and, to Kirsti, they seem a normal part of the landscape.

Annemarie, however, remembers the days before Germans patrolled the streets with their guns. She recognizes one of the soldiers, having passed him on the street many times before. She has privately nicknamed him "the Giraffe" because of his long neck. However, this is the first time she's ever been stopped by the soldiers, and she's frightened. They demand to know the girls' names, and Annemarie tells them politely. After a few more questions, the soldiers let the girls go.

On their way back to their apartment building, Ellen and Annemarie resolve not to tell their mothers of the incident, wanting to spare them worry. However, Kirsti has already told the story to her mom and Mrs. Rosen, Ellen's mother, by the time Annemarie enters the kitchen. Mrs. Johansen comments in a low voice to Ellen's mother that the soldiers must be on edge because of the recent activities of the Resistance movement.

Mrs. Johansen keeps up with the Resistance movement through an illegal newspaper, *De Frie Danske* (*The Free Danes*), which Peter Neilsen brings to the apartment occasionally. As soon as Annemarie's parents finish reading the paper, they burn it, but sometimes Annemarie hears her parents talking about the news they learn from the paper. She knows the Danish Resistance fighters are brave people, who are determined to undermine the Nazis in any way possible.

Mrs. Rosen insists that Annemarie and Ellen walk a different way to school the next day to avoid the soldiers. Annemarie reminds her that there are soldiers on every corner, but Mrs. Rosen tells her it's safer to avoid soldiers, who will remember the girls' faces. Mrs. Rosen further advises them to blend in with the crowd. Kirsti wishes for a cupcake, but her mother can only give her plain bread. Mrs. Johansen tells Kirsti there will be no more cupcakes until the Germans are gone.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Lois Lowry has chosen challenging subject matter for her young audience - the Holocaust. As a society, we want our children to feel secure, happy and at peace while they're growing up. We would, perhaps, rather protect them from becoming too aware of the evils in the world, yet we cannot protect them from everything. Certainly the Nazis gave no thought to sparing the sensibilities of the millions of innocent children they



killed. In order to prevent such tragedies in the future, it is important that our children be taught the lessons of history - how damaging prejudice can be, and, by contrast, how friendship and courage can empower a nation.

Lois Lowry has selected age-appropriate subject matter, fictionalized from the actual history of the Holocaust. Her story focuses on doing right by our friends and neighbors, and on the necessity of finding courage beyond our years or experience. She tells the story from the perspective of a child who actually lived such events, in order to communicate to the children of today that their safety and peace of mind are gifts to be appreciated.

Annemarie is ten years old, and the book is targeted towards children about that age. Kirsti, the five-year-old sister, represents the utter innocence of the very young. Kirsti is too young to realize she should be afraid of the soldiers. At the opening of the novel, the Nazis have occupied Denmark for three of the five years of Kirsti's existence, and she remembers no other way of living. Her young thoughts are preoccupied with the food shortage and the absence of the sweets, which she remembers vividly, although it's been more than a year since she tasted a cupcake. In contrast, Annemarie is old enough to start realizing that there are dangers in the world and matters more important than cupcakes.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Hans Christian Andersen, the famous storyteller, was a Dane, and fairy tales are a part of the Danish tradition. Tonight Annemarie makes up a bedtime story to please her little sister, who insists on hearing about kings and queens. Kirsti drifts off to sleep, leaving Annemarie to think about the real-life king of Denmark, Christian X. King Christian is well-loved by the people of Denmark. Every morning he rides out from his palace on his horse, Jubilee, to greet his people. He rides alone without a security escort. Shortly after the Germans occupied Denmark, one of the German soldiers had asked who this man was who the people greeted so warmly. When a little boy replied that the man was their king, the German asked, incredulously, why he would ride without a bodyguard. The little boy had answered simply that all of the people of Denmark were his bodyguard.

Annemarie's Papa once told her that both he and Mama would lay down their lives to save the king if necessary. Annemarie replies that she would, too. Then she asks her Papa why the king hadn't been able to protect Denmark from the Nazi soldiers. Papa tells her that the king is wise and knows that tiny Denmark would surely lose such a battle with the Nazi invaders and that many Danes would die unnecessarily. Annemarie reminds him that their neighboring country, Norway, had fought, but the Nazis had crushed Norway. Her mother reminds her that there were Nazi soldiers in Holland, Belgium and France, as well. Not in Sweden, though, replies Annemarie, proud of her knowledge of the world. She had seen Sweden once, looking across the water from her Uncle Henrik's house north of Copenhagen.

That conversation had taken place three years ago, in their apartment as Mama crocheted a pillow case which was part of Lise's trousseau. Lise was Annemarie's older sister; she had been engaged to Peter Neilsen, and Annemarie had looked forward to having Peter for a brother. King Christian, despite being thrown from his horse the previous fall, is still alive. But Annemarie's sister, Lise, is not. She died in an accident two weeks before her wedding. Now Mama and Papa never speak her name, but Annemarie often opens Lise's trunk, which contains the items prepared for her wedding, as well as the beautiful, yellow dress, which Lise had worn at her engagement party. Peter has not married in the three years since Lise's death. He still stops by the apartment often, but his formerly fun-loving manner has become more serious. Papa has become more serious, too; to Annemarie, he seems old, tired and defeated.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The contrast between the happily-ever-after world of fairy tales and the actual world events transpiring in Denmark at the time in which this story is set helps the author to convey some harsh truths about life. Unlike fairy tales, in real life we don't always get our happily-ever-afters. Lise didn't get hers. Annemarie's vivacious sister, who had been



just weeks from embarking into married life, had died in a tragic accident instead. In the three years since her death, Annemarie has watched her parents and Lise's fiancé transform into older, more somber versions of themselves.

Annemarie's perspective is that of a child's. She doesn't yet understand the greater context of the tragedy of Lise's death, but Annemarie is growing up fast, having lost the shelter of youthful innocence that still protects Kirsti. King Christian the Tenth represents the reality of monarchs and heads of state, as a counterpoint to the romantic kings and queens Kirsti loves to hear about in fairy tales. Although King Christian is well-loved, and from Annemarie's perspective, a good man and a good leader, he was still unable to protect his people from German occupation. As the second chapter closes, Annemarie realizes that happily-ever-after is a fairy-tale ideal, which does not always, or even usually, match the reality of life.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

September passes with no more unusual events, although Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti always take the longer route home from school now to avoid "the Giraffe" and his partner. Their mothers still take coffee together every afternoon, although, coffee, like every other luxury food item, is in short supply. Mostly, the mothers drink weak tea concocted from whatever herbs are available. Electricity has been rationed by the Germans, and so the families of Denmark must go without heat and light, relying on candles, extra blankets, and coal stoves, if they can find coal. Annemarie thinks she and Kirsti are lucky to have each other for warmth at night, and thinks of poor Ellen, who has no sisters.

One morning, as they prepare for school, Mrs. Johansen notices that a button has broken on Kirsti's jacket. She instructs the girls to stop by Mrs. Hirsch's sewing shop to buy a replacement button on their way home from school, but when the girls arrive, the shop is boarded up. There is a sign on the door, but it is written in German, and they don't know what it says.

The girls wonder where the Hirsch family has gone; Ellen had seen Mrs. Hirsch only the previous Saturday, and everything seemed fine. Kirsti reassures them that the Hirsch's have probably just gone to the seashore for vacation, but Ellen and Annemarie know that nobody in Copenhagen has taken a vacation to the seashore since the soldiers arrived. When they get home, Mama is very concerned by the news, particularly that the sign on the door was in German. She leaves to talk to Mrs. Rosen while Annemarie peels the potatoes, which have become the mainstay of their family dinners.

Mama awakens Annemarie later that night. Papa and Peter are in the living room, which alarms Annemarie. She knows that Peter has broken the German curfew in order to visit them this evening. He has brought her and Kirsti each a seashell and a bottle of beer for each of her parents. Peter has brought the news that the Germans are closing businesses owned by Jews. Annemarie asks if Mrs. Hirsch is Jewish and how she's supposed to earn a living if she can't sell buttons. Her parents assure her that her friends will take care of her. "'That's what friends do' (p. 24). "

Suddenly Annemarie remembers that the Rosens are Jewish, too. Annemarie tells her father that if all of Denmark is King Christian's bodyguard, then all of Denmark should also be bodyguards for the Jews as well. Her father agrees and promises her they will be. Back in bed a few minutes later, Annemarie wonders if she truly would have the courage to die to protect her friends. She snuggles under the blankets, thankful that she is just an ordinary person, who will never be called upon to perform heroic acts.



Chapter 3 Analysis

Despite Annemarie's growing maturity, she is still a child and has not yet fully grasped the terrifying situation in which Denmark finds itself. To Annemarie, courage in the face of adversity and protecting Denmark's Jews from the Germans are still just theoretical ideals. Danger has not yet been placed directly in her path. With the closing of Mrs. Hirsch's sewing shop, there is now an omen of worse things to come. Annemarie, despite her youth, cannot fail to realize that the Hirsch family is not merely on vacation at the seashore, as Kirsti assumes. Annemarie has overheard pieces of gossip and information her parents have discussed. She has put those bits and pieces together with their somber tones and the tension that underlies every conversation and comes to the conclusion that her friends are in danger.

Chapter three is the first time we're explicitly told that her best friend, Ellen, is Jewish. Since the tale is told from a child's perspective, it had not seemed important for Annemarie to mention it previously. Prejudice is not inherent to children; they must be taught it. Annemarie has not been taught prejudice by her parents, and, thus, gives little thought to the religious and cultural differences between her and her friend. Only when she realizes her friend is at risk because she's Jewish does it occur to her that the nation's tensions could invade her very own apartment building. She reveals her naivety at the end of the chapter when she comforts herself with the thought that only the grown-ups and the soldiers be involved in protecting Ellen. Annemarie still believes she is safely out of the line of fire.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Annemarie and Ellen play with paper dolls in the Johansen's living room. Kirsti stomps in angrily, just ahead of her mother. Kirsti is upset because her new shoes are made of fish scales. Mama tries to tell her they were lucky to find shoes at all, but Kirsti is humiliated to be wearing green, scaly shoes. Ellen asks her if she'd like them better if they were black and shiny, and Kirsti says that she would. So Ellen offers to take them home and ask her dad to paint them black with the ink from his inkpot. Mollified, Kirsti asks to join in their game. Annemarie would rather not include her, but there's no one else for her to play with, and it would be too mean to ignore her in the tiny apartment.

They pretend they're taking their dolls to Tivoli, an amusement park the girls remember from better days. She tells Ellen she remembers the fireworks at Tivoli best of all. Kirsti chimes in that she remembers fireworks, too, but her sister tells her that she's never been to Tivoli, and, therefore, wouldn't remember any fireworks. Kirsti reminds her of the late-night fireworks on her recent birthday, which her mother had told her were in her honor. Despite this, Annemarie knew from reading the papers that the supposed fireworks were actually the result of the Danes destroying their naval fleet to keep the ships out of German hands. The memory is upsetting, and Annemarie announces she's done playing dolls.

Ellen has to go home, anyway, to help her mother prepare for the upcoming Jewish New Year. She invites Annemarie and Kirsti to come over and watch her mother light the candles. In the past, the girls have often witnessed Mrs. Rosen light the Sabbath candles on Friday evenings. Annemarie never understood the words of Mrs. Rosen's prayers, because they were in a different language, but she understood the importance of the ritual and enjoyed watching it. So on Thursday, when she sees the Rosens walking toward the synagogue, she looks forward to sharing the evening celebration with them, although she's jealous that Ellen gets to skip school that day.

After school, Mama announces that the Rosens have had to cancel their celebration, telling the girls that Mr. and Mrs. Rosen have been called away to visit some relatives, and that Ellen will be spending the night. Mama's voice is cheerful, but her face looks worried. That night, she makes a special dinner from the chicken the Rosens had planned to cook at home. Kirsti is the only one at the table who doesn't pick up on the tension and worry; she swings her newly-blackened shoes cheerfully under her chair.

Following dinner, Mama takes Kirsti to bed early, so that Papa can speak to Annemarie and Ellen. Papa tells them he wishes he could spare them this knowledge, but he must tell them that the Nazis have been to the synagogue and have taken the list of all the Jews who attend. The Rosens' names are on that list, and everyone on the list has been singled out for arrest. Annemarie wants to know where the Germans are planning to take them all, but Papa tells her he doesn't know. He only knows they are in danger, and



they must help. He tells them Ellen's parents are hiding elsewhere; their apartment is only big enough to hide Ellen. Papa tells them to sleep in the same room that night, and if anyone comes, they should pretend to be sisters. "'Don't be frightened,' he said to them softly. 'Once I had three daughters. Tonight I am proud to have three daughters again'" (p. 38).

Chapter 4 Analysis

Annemarie's family is courageously putting themselves at risk to help their friends, the Rosens. In Denmark, there are many stories like this, of neighbors helping neighbors in resistance against the Germans. The Holocaust brought out the heroism in countless people, who risked their lives to protect the Jews from the fatal persecution of the Nazis. However the author has chosen to omit some uncomfortable facts in this children's book, as many nations and people turned their backs on the plight of the Jewish race. More than just refusing to help, the many civilians in several nations actually chose to join in the persecution, and came to share - or had already felt previously - the racial prejudice of the Third Reich.

This overt cruelty came in many forms, from taunting their Jewish neighbors to turning them over to the death camps. The more subtle cruelty perpetrated by other civilians came in the form of mass denial, of which Annemarie's father seems to share, when he tells her that he doesn't know what the Nazis plan to do with the Jews after deporting them. It was often easier to deny the horrors of the Holocaust than to accept them, but this mass denial helped the Nazis commit their crimes under cover of ignorance.

In fairness to the Gentiles, i.e., Non-Jews, many Jewish families also refused to believe the stories leaking back from the concentration camps. Who would wish to accept that such things could happen in this world? Denial is often part of human nature, but this denial was an affront to those courageous Jews who escaped and survived to tell their story. By refusing to believe those who escaped and bore witness, the whole world, for many years, helped condemn millions to death. By painting this denial in such a warm, positive light, the author has done a disservice to the children in her audience, who deserve to know the truth about the world, ugly as it may sometimes be.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The girls talk quietly in bed that night, reassuring each other that no soldiers would actually come to the door in the dead of night. Only half seriously, Annemarie tells Ellen that if they do come, she should tell them her name is Lise Johansen. Ellen asks about Lise's death, but Annemarie confesses she doesn't really know what happened - only that she had been hit by a car. Annemarie tells Ellen, that her parents don't talk about Lise, and have never once opened the trunk with her things since the day she died. Eventually the girls fall asleep. Ellen is worried about her parents, but Annemarie feels completely secure in the safety of her own home.

Hours later, the girls are awoken by a loud pounding at the door. Her mother turns on the lights in the living room, something she has not done at night since they started rationing the electricity. They overhear the soldiers asking Papa about the Rosens; they tell him their apartment is empty, and wonder if the Rosens might be hiding here. Papa tells them there's no one here but his own family, but the Germans start searching the apartment. In the darkened bedroom, Annemarie notices Ellen's Star of David necklace, and urgently tells her to take it off. Ellen, panicking, can't disengage the clasp, so at the last moment before the soldiers come through the door, Annemarie yanks it off her friend's neck, breaking the chain in the process. She conceals it in her tightly-closed fist just as three Nazi soldiers enter the bedroom.

When the soldiers ask Ellen her name, she tells them it's Lise. But the soldier is suspicious, because unlike Annemarie and Kirsti, Ellen has black hair. He suspects her last name is Rosen, not Johansen as she's told them. Thinking quickly, Papa pulls the family photo album off the bookcase and tears out three baby pictures: each photo has one of his daughter's names written on it, and there is a photo for Annemarie, Kirsti, and Lise. The baby picture of Lise shows that she had black hair. As the Germans examine this evidence, Annemarie realizes why her father had torn the pictures from the book instead of just handing over the album. In the album, underneath the photos, the girls' dates of birth were recorded; Lise would have been twenty-one now had she lived. Luckily, the Germans are satisfied by the photographic evidence. Before they leave, one of the officers tears up the photo of Lise and grinds the pieces into the floor with his boots.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Annemarie's comfortable home and her peace of mind have been violated. No longer can she pretend to herself that her parents are omnipotent and can keep her safe from the Nazis. She is no longer a bystander in the events of the day; she has become an active participant. Her father's quick thinking saves Ellen that night, and perhaps it is from him that Annemarie inherited her own quick mind. She was quick to grasp the

danger that Ellen's necklace posed because the Star of David would have identified her as a Jew. Upon realizing this, Annemarie didn't sit back to wonder and worry if it would be a problem; she literally took the problem into her own hands and solved it, just in the nick of time.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Everyone except the still sleeping Kirsti remains in the living room, talking, after the soldiers leave. Papa admits he hadn't thought they would become suspicious so easily. Ellen apologizes for her dark hair, but Mama tells her it's beautiful and remarks what luck it was that Lise was born with dark curls, which hadn't turned blonde until Lise was two years old. Papa makes a joke about Lise's hair, and Annemarie realizes it's the first time in three years that her parents have spoken of Lise.

As dawn begins to lighten the sky, Papa tells the girls it is too dangerous for them to go to school today, because the soldiers may be at the schools to round up Jewish children. Papa tells his wife, Inge, that they should take the girls to Uncle Henrik's house, based on what Peter had told them earlier. Mama agrees, but insists she take them alone. After protesting, Papa sees the wisdom in her plan, for if they all went together, it would look suspicious, but if she goes alone with the girls, she can act like it's just a normal visit to her brother. They call Henrik, catching him early enough in the morning that he has not yet left on his fishing boat.

Annemarie listens carefully to her father's telephone conversation. He seems to be speaking in code, making reference to the carton of cigarettes Inge will be bringing Henrik, plus all the other cartons he can expect to receive shortly. Annemarie knows cigarettes are in as short supply as cupcakes, and then she realizes that the "carton of cigarettes" her mother is bringing Henrik is a coded reference to Ellen.

The girls are cheerful on the train ride. Annemarie loves her uncle's house on the Danish coast, and Ellen, whose mother is afraid of the ocean, has never been to the beach before. At Klampenborg station, German soldiers board the train; they ask Mama her business. Inge replies that she and the children are off to visit her brother for the day. The soldier, hoping to trip her up, asks if she's visiting her brother for the New Year. Mama looks puzzled, reminding him that it's only October. Kirsti pipes up, and Annemarie is afraid she's about to tell the soldier that it is New Year for Ellen. To everyone's relief, the little girl only proudly informs the soldier that she's wearing her new shiny black shoes to her uncle's house. When they get off the train and walk through the familiar neighborhood to Uncle Henrik's house, Mama points out a few of the sights along the way. She grew up in the house they're about to visit and has fond memories of walking through the town with her dog, Trofast.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The parents are no longer pretending for the children's sake. The comfortable fiction they've maintained that everything is under control and everyone is safe has dissolved with the intrusion of the Nazi soldiers. For their own survival, Annemarie and Ellen must



be told of the danger, at least to a certain extent. The danger of not explaining things to them is revealed on the train, during the terrible moment when it seems Kirsti is about to innocently expose Ellen to the soldiers. The girls' parents have to make difficult choices about how much to tell them and how much to protect them from.

The picturesque surroundings of Inge's hometown serve as a poignant contrast to better days. In the past, Annemarie remembers the train rides to Uncle Henrik's, which were always a lot of fun before the German soldiers arrived. The girls today remark on the scenery and the interesting places they pass, but it is like looking out on a world which is barred to them now. Inge admits as much when she optimistically tells Ellen that one day she, too, will be able to visit the Deer Park, but, of course, there is no mention nor thought of visiting it today, for such innocent pursuits are reserved for safer times.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Ellen is in awe of the beautiful house by the sea. For a few moments, the girls are able to forget their troubles as they wade in the chilly ocean. The girls giggle and laugh, and Annemarie points out Sweden to Ellen, as her Uncle Henrik had once pointed across the water and explained to Annemarie that the land visible from the shore is the country of Sweden.

When they return to the house, Mama's anxiety is evident. She wants to know if the girls encountered anyone on the beach, but they assure her that the only sign of life was the kitten Ellen picked up and brought home. Mama insists they stay in the house from now on, but as compensation, she promises them a nice supper. The girls, who have been used to eating nothing but potatoes for months, will get to enjoy fresh fish and applesauce tonight.

After dinner, Ellen asks Annemarie what she did with her necklace. Annemarie assures her she's hidden it somewhere very safe, and promises to keep it for her until it is safe for Ellen to wear it again. It was a gift from Ellen's father, and tonight, Ellen is very worried about her parents' safety and whereabouts. The girls lie in bed awake. They hear Uncle Henrik return to the house, but Annemarie notices that the conversation between Henrik and his beloved sister is not, for once, peppered with their usual laughter.

Chapter 7 Analysis

With a nice meal, full bellies, and all the comforts of home, a sense of normalcy has been restored to the girls' lives. Yet even as they enjoy Henrik's beautiful seaside home, they feel the continual unease brought about by their precarious situation. Annemarie is more comfortable than Ellen, because Henrik's house is familiar to her and holds many pleasant memories. Ellen's thoughts are with her absent parents and her fears for the future. Even Annemarie is not fully comforted by her pleasant surroundings because this visit is different than any previous visit, and she can sense the anxiety in the adults around her.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

As she drowns in bed the next morning, Annemarie hears Uncle Henrik go outside to the barn with his milking pail. She rises without waking Ellen and heads to the kitchen, where she finds Kirsti giving the kitten water from a bowl. Kirsti tells her she's decided to name the kitten Thor, for the God of Thunder. Annemarie is amused by the name, and happily surprised to find a fresh bowl of cream on the breakfast table. Her mother explains that Henrik milks his cow, Blossom, every morning, and occasionally manages to save some milk or some butter from being taken by the soldiers. Annemarie makes a joke about the soldiers relocating butter like they are relocating Jews. They all force a laugh to drive away the gloom, and when Ellen enters the kitchen, the fresh cream brings a smile to her face.

The girls play all day in the pasture behind the house while Mama scrubs and dusts Henrik's untidy home. When Henrik arrives home, Mama teases him about his housekeeping and tells him he should take a wife. The siblings laugh together, but Mama's smile disappears when Henrik tells her that tomorrow will be a good day for fishing. Annemarie realizes it's similar to the phrase her father had used on the telephone with Henrik and wonders what it really means. After all, Henrik is a fisherman and goes fishing every day, rain or shine. Whatever its meaning, Henrik tells Inge that he will be staying on his boat all night tonight. Inge assures him that she has prepared the living room by cleaning and moving the furniture aside. When Annemarie asks what the living room has been prepared for, Uncle Henrik tells her that her Great Aunt Birte has died and her casket will be placed in the living room overnight, as is the custom for Danish funerals. Annemarie listens skeptically because she doesn't have a Great Aunt named Birte.

Chapter 8 Analysis

The tension in the household has remained steady despite everyone's attempts to remain positive. Certainly the food luxuries and the visit with dear Uncle Henrik are pleasant, but Annemarie has already figured out that they are morale boosters designed to ease the tough time. She has not, however, figured out what the adults have planned for Ellen and her family. She is at that difficult age when she's old enough to know something's going on - unlike young Kirsti, who accepts the story of the funeral without reservation - but Annemarie is not old enough for the adults to share their plans. She realizes she's being lied to by the adults she loves and trusts, and that realization undermines her already fragile sense of security.

Annemarie is mature enough not to make a scene in front of Ellen and Kirsti when she hears her uncle lie. Having already been forced to lie to German soldiers herself, she understands that sometimes deception is necessary, and she will find a way to privately

confront her uncle, thus giving him the benefit of the doubt that, although he's lying, his motives are probably good.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

After supper, Annemarie heads out to the barn to have a private conversation with her uncle. He is milking Blossom and being watched intently by The God of Thunder. He smiles at her, but continues to milk silently. Annemarie breaks the silence to accuse him and her mother of lying. In response, he asks her how brave she is. She admits to not being very brave at all, but Henrik says he thinks if the time ever came for bravery, she would be very brave indeed. However, he tells her, it is easier to be brave if you don't know all the facts. She thinks back to the day the soldiers stopped her on the road, and realizes she hadn't known all the facts then, or she would have been a lot more frightened by the incident than she was. Uncle Henrik admits that there is no such person as Great Aunt Birte and asks her to forgive him and Inge for lying because they lied in order to help her be brave. Just then, a hearse pulls up to the house, and he tells her it's time to head inside for their night of mourning.

The wooden casket rests in the living room, surrounded by lit candles. Kirsti is sent to bed, complaining bitterly that she's old enough to stay up with the others and that she's never seen a dead person before. Ellen expresses her condolences to Inge for the loss of her Aunt Birte. Annemarie had said nothing to Ellen and realizes that by her silence, she has become complicit in the lie. Annemarie understands she's protecting Ellen in the same way her mother had tried to protect her. Although she doesn't know what's really going on, she knows it's safer if Ellen believes in Great Aunt Birte.

As the night progresses, other people arrive, who Mama introduces as friends of Great Aunt Birte. As Mama tells her daughter this, they look into each other's eyes, and Annemarie realizes her mother knows her daughter is aware of the lie. That simple understanding, transmitted by a look, makes them equals in that moment. Annemarie helps Mama prepare food in the kitchen for their guests. Just before Henrik has to leave to go to his boat, Ellen's parents arrive, safe and sound, in the company of Peter Neilsen. Mr. Rosen picks up Ellen and holds her as if she were a small child.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The moment of shared understanding that Annemarie finds in her mother's eyes is a turning point in Annemarie's life. At ten years old, she is gradually emerging from the safe cocoon of childhood and starting to look at the world from an adult's point of view. There will be many more milestones in her young life before she becomes a full-fledged adult, but this moment is perhaps one of the most important Annemarie will face. No longer is she the child to be protected, like Kirsti. She is now behaving more like an adult, having crossed that boundary even sooner than her friend, Ellen. As Annemarie remains complicit in the lie designed to soothe the children, she takes on the role of an adult, while Ellen retains the role of a child, who Annemarie now helps to protect.



This role differentiation is highlighted by the safe return of Ellen's parents. Mr. Rosen holds Ellen in his arms as if she is a very young child. The imminent danger confronting the Rosen family has caused him to become highly protective of his daughter, and it has caused Ellen to retreat even more deeply into the world of childhood. It is easier for Annemarie to make the leap to a more mature perspective on the situation, because she is not Jewish, and her family's future is not nearly so frightening as the Rosens'. Although on this night, she is in every bit as much danger as Ellen. If Annemarie makes it through the night, she and her family will be able to return to their homes and lead a more or less normal existence. The Rosens, however, cannot return home. The only thing certain about their future is that it will be filled with danger.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Once everyone is assembled, Henrik leaves for his boat. Annemarie looks at the group assembled in her living room. Among them there is a young mother nursing a baby with her husband at her side, and an old man who dozes alone on the couch. Mama tells her she can go to bed, but Annemarie chooses to stay downstairs with the Rosens and the others. She dozes off in the rocking chair, only to be woken by a familiar, loud pounding at the door. It is a German soldier, demanding to know why so many people are gathered at the house this night. Mama explains that everyone has gathered for the death of Great Aunt Birte.

Suspicious, the soldiers push their way into the house. One of them addresses Annemarie, asking who has died. Annemarie lies in a firm voice. The soldier is not convinced. He approaches the coffin and asks Mama why it is closed. Mama moves towards the coffin as if she intended to open it, telling the soldier he's right, they should be able to look upon dear Birte's face one last time, even if the doctor said her body might still carry the contagious typhus fever, which killed her. The soldier backs away quickly, ordering her not to open the diseased woman's coffin until after they leave.

In the candle-lit living room, after the soldiers have gone, Peter opens a Bible and reads a psalm for the group. The psalm praises God, "*he who numbers the stars one by one...*" (p. 87). The prayer begins to relax the group, but Annemarie is not comforted. How could God number the stars one by one when there are so many? The world tonight seems like a vast, cruel place to Annemarie. When Peter finishes reading, he announces that it is time; he opens the lid of the casket.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Peter's reading of the psalm on this dark night is an act of courage, but it is an act that Annemarie is still too young to appreciate. She, who has just learned what a large and sometimes cruel place the world can be, has not yet come to terms with this new knowledge. She wonders how the adults can possibly be comforted and go on in the face of such cruelty and danger. What she is too young to realize is that the adults have always known of the cruelties of the world. She doesn't yet understand that every day lived in peace is not a guarantee; it is a gift.

Annemarie will eventually come to appreciate the tremendous courage it takes to be an adult and to face, every day, a world that is fraught with known and unknown dangers. In time, she will appreciate her parents' courage even more, as she realizes that they have been living with everyday perils, and the greater perils of the Holocaust, with the full awareness of the potential repercussions. In short, she is learning the courage to face the world as an adult. When her uncle explains to her in chapter eight that it's

easier to be brave when we don't know all the facts, Annemarie will, in time, come to have a greater understanding of his talk.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

The casket is filled with warm clothes. Peter dispenses them to the assembled group, explaining that their journey will be very cold. The jacket he gives Ellen is patched and worn, and when she sees it, Ellen realizes just how much her life has changed. Resolutely, she puts it on without a word of complaint. Mama wraps the baby in one of Kirsti's sweaters. Peter insists to the baby's frightened parents that he must give her a few drops from the medicine bottle he has in his pocket. Meanwhile, Inge gives everyone a package of the food Annemarie had helped her prepare earlier in the evening. Then Peter gives Mr. Rosen a package to carry to Henrik, telling Mr. Rosen only that its contents are vitally important. Peter announces that he will lead the first group, instructing Inge to wait twenty minutes and then follow with the Rosens. He warns her to take the back pathway so she will not be seen, and to return to the house immediately after she's delivered the Rosens to Henrik.

As they wait the requisite twenty minutes, Annemarie looks at the Rosen family. In their hand-me-down clothes, they look quite shabby. Annemarie remembers how dignified and nice the family always looked, especially on the Sabbath when Mrs. Rosen would light the candles. Mr. Rosen's job as a teacher always lent him additional dignity. She knows without having been told that her Uncle Henrik will be taking the family across the sea to Sweden; she also knows how frightened the Rosens must be, especially Mrs. Rosen, who is afraid of the ocean. But she sees the way in which the family holds itself now, shoulders straight, posture proud, and Annemarie realizes there are other sources of pride besides material possessions and job titles.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Annemarie has witnessed tremendous courage in this room full of frightened people. The fleeing Jews carry themselves with dignity in the face of the fearful unknown, and Annemarie realizes that dignity and pride are internal factors, not dependent on our wealth or possessions. She realizes that her friend, Ellen, showed more dignity by accepting the worn-out jacket than had she rejected it. She also sees the brave way in which her mother and Peter carry themselves and watches as her mother still finds it within her to perform a small act of kindness by giving Kirsti's precious sweater to the baby. This is a valuable lesson for any young child to learn, although it is sad that Annemarie has to learn it this way.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Mr. Rosen slips on the loose step outside the kitchen door, and Mama warns them to feel each step carefully with their feet to avoid tripping over roots or stones in the darkness. Annemarie can see how important her mother's role is because only Mama knows the area well enough to lead people through it in the darkness. The Rosens say goodbye to Annemarie; Ellen promises to come back one day.

After Mama leaves, Annemarie waits in the now-empty living room. She calculates it will take a half hour for Mama to lead the Rosens to the harbor where Uncle Henrik keeps his boat. Coming back alone, she might move quicker. It's 2:30 a.m. now, and Annemarie expects her mother should be back no later than 3:30. She thinks of her Papa, waiting alone in Copenhagen. She thinks it must be scarier to be waiting and wondering, as he and she are doing, than to be actively involved in the danger. "Less danger, perhaps, but more fear" (p. 98). She nods off and awakens in the pre-dawn light; a quick glance at the clock reveals that it's after four. She checks the house, but her mother has not returned. Annemarie flies to the window and looks out. On the ground at the head of the path lies a dark shape. The shape moves, and she realizes it must be her mother lying on the ground.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Annemarie has discovered a truth that any military wife could have told her: it is indeed more frightening to be the one waiting at home, helpless to help a loved one in a dangerous situation. She and her father can do nothing more than worry and wait. Psychologists agree that helplessness increases the sense of trauma for people caught in war-time or similar situations. Human beings need to feel that they have at least a modicum of control over their lives in order to maintain peace of mind. This is actually one of the psychological weapons the Nazis used on the people in their concentration camps. Because the selections they made of who would die at any given moment were so arbitrary, the populace of the camps felt utterly helpless to affect their own futures. This is just one of many aspects that separated the Nazi's cruelty from more typical human cruelty.

Even in the worst environments, there are usually some rules people can follow to maximize their safety. In gang-torn neighborhoods, for example, residents know to avoid wearing colors that represent rival gangs. Organized crime gangs also have rules that can help ensure survival. While these rules are often flaunted by Mafiosos, and frequently not enforced with consistency, nonetheless, the fact that the rules exist goes a long way towards preserving life and peace of mind. Such rules don't ensure people's safety, but they do give people a sense that they have some influence over their destinies. However, the Nazis had no such rules, no internal code of ethics. The

randomness of their violence was a principal psychological factor they used to keep their prisoners in a state of despair, so they would be less likely to fight to survive.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Annemarie runs to her mother. Mama tells her she's okay and warns her to keep her voice down. Hurrying back along the path in the dark after safely delivering the Rosens to Henrik, Inge had stumbled on a root and broken her ankle in her haste to get back to her daughters. Inge has been crawling along the path for an hour. Now, with her daughter's support, she is able to stand and walk to the house. She tells Annemarie she'll need her help washing the leaves and grass off herself before calling the doctor to tell him she tripped on the stairs inside the house. Inge assures her daughter that the boat will sail soon, and her friends will be safe, but as they reach the kitchen door where Mr. Rosen had stumbled before, Annemarie finds a package on the ground. In the darkness, no one had noticed that Mr. Rosen had dropped the important package Peter had given him to deliver to Henrik. Mama is horrified; without the package, all their efforts will have been for nothing.

But Annemarie reminds her mother that she can run like the wind, and that she, too, knows the way through the woods to the harbor. She offers to take the package to Uncle Henrik. Mama wastes no time. She instructs Annemarie to put the package at the bottom of a lunch basket, and to cover it with cheese and an apple. Annemarie does this, adding a loaf of bread. As she prepares to sprint down the path with her basket, Inge tells her daughter that if the soldiers stop her for any reason, she should pretend to be a silly, empty-headed little girl who is taking her uncle the lunch he forgot at home that morning.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Annemarie is now a full-fledged participant in the scheme to elude the Germans. That her mother sees her as capable was already clear from the moment Annemarie ran out to help her mother off the ground. Inge tells her daughter everything that happened, making no attempt to censor herself or keep any information from Annemarie. Inge's judgment proves correct when Annemarie notices the fallen package. Had Annemarie not waited up to help her mother, or not been so observant as they entered the house together, the entire scheme would have collapsed without the important package. Thus Annemarie's participation has already been critical to their success even before she offers to run the package to her uncle.

The change in the mother-daughter relationship is even more obvious from the way Inge wastes no time trying to talk her daughter out of going. Both she and Annemarie are aware of both the danger and the necessity of the trip, so Inge doesn't waste a single precious second deciding if her daughter should go. Instead she uses those precious seconds to devise a plan which will protect her daughter as much as possible from discovery.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Annemarie realizes how cold the dawn is as she hurries along the path. She does her best to run, but it is difficult in the still-dark dawn to run without falling. She tells herself the story of Little Red Riding-Hood to comfort herself in the dark forest. She knows the woods well and is usually unafraid. These woods are not filled with dangerous animals like wolves, but they might be filled with German soldiers. At a fork in the path, she chooses the path that winds deeper into the woods, rather than risk being seen running along the road to the harbor where the other path leads. As the light increases, she picks up speed. She's nearly at the end of the Red Riding-Hood tale, and the harbor is just around the bend. She gets to the part in the story where Red Riding-Hood hears a noise in the woods. Just then, she, too, hears a noise. She freezes, then takes a few cautious steps forward. Just around the bend, she runs into four armed soldiers, holding two huge dogs on leashes.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The author uses the well-known tale of Little Red Riding-Hood, familiar to most readers, to build the suspense in this short, but dramatic, scene. The little girl running through the dangerous woods has obviously much in common with Red Riding-Hood, and by telling herself this story, Annemarie is comforting herself with thoughts of safer times. She is not alone in the woods; in her mind she's safe at home, reading the story to her younger sister. She thinks ironically of how she always changed up the story to make it scarier to Kirsti. This time she changes it to make it less scary, but no fairy tale can save her from the very real danger awaiting her at the end of the path.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Annemarie thinks immediately of her mother's advice. "If anyone stops you, you must pretend to be nothing more than a silly little girl" (p. 113). She remembers the soldiers who stopped her, Ellen, and Kirsti on the street. She and Ellen had stared fearfully, but Kirsti had been too innocent to feel fear. Annemarie draws on that memory and attempts to act just like Kirsti. She wipes the fear from her face and wishes the soldiers a cheerful good morning. They ask what she's doing here, and she tells them she's taking her uncle, who is a fisherman, his lunch. They ask why her he doesn't just eat fish. She giggles as Kirsti might and explains that her uncle hates to eat fish because he's so sick of the smell since he's around it all the time. She chatters on innocently about how much she likes her mother's breaded fish. One of the soldiers reaches for the loaf of bread and breaks it in half. She intentionally reacts the same way Kirsti would, admonishing the soldier for taking her bread. He ignores her, throwing the loaf to the dogs. She tells him she'll miss her uncle's boat, if they don't stop delaying her, but the soldier's now examining the cheese and the mealy apple in the basket.

The dogs are quite interested in the basket by this point, but when the soldier offers them the apple and the cheese, the dogs ignore it. The soldier tells her his dogs smell meat, but she insists there's no meat in the basket. To her horror, he looks underneath the napkin and pulls out the package. He asks what it is, and she responds with irritation, as Kirsti would, telling him she doesn't know. Inside the package, the soldier finds only a handkerchief. Irritated at having wasted his time, he tells her to move along, and the soldiers retreat into the woods. Annemarie replaces the items in the basket and races towards the harbor. Her uncle's boat, the *Ingeborg*, is still there. When her uncle sees the handkerchief his face lights up with relief. He tells her that because of her, everything is going to be all right. He sends her back home with the message for Inge not to worry, and that he will see them this evening.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Annemarie has come so far along the path from childhood to the beginnings of adulthood that she is actually able to play-act being a child in order to hoodwink the German soldiers. Although her behavior is childlike, her decision to behave in that manner is mature beyond her years. It is fortunate for her that the unknown conspirators, who put together the important package were equally cautious. While we have been made aware of the importance of the package, it looks on the surface, like an ordinary handkerchief. We can only imagine at this point how an ordinary handkerchief will help the Rosens to escape, but the fact that whatever power it contains has been so well disguised is an omen of good fortune for the success of the Resistance.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Dinner that night is a cheerful affair, with Uncle Henrik teasing Annemarie about the fact that she milked Blossom herself. He promises to show her how to do it properly. When Annemarie had returned home from the harbor that morning, she found a note from her mother saying the doctor was taking Inge to the local hospital, and that she would be back soon. With all the chaos, everyone had forgotten about Blossom. When Annemarie heard her lowing uncomfortably, she had gone to the barn and done her best to milk the cow. Kirsti wonders when Ellen is coming back; the family has told her that the Rosens came by last night and picked her up. Mama distracts her by asking for her help, while Annemarie and Uncle Henrik head to the barn for the milking lesson.

In the barn, Henrik, Annemarie, and the kitten have a serious conversation. Uncle Henrik reminds her of their conversation about it being easier to be brave if one doesn't know much. Since she was so brave, though, he says he will tell her just a little. She asks Henrik why she hadn't seen the Rosens on his boat, and he explains that he, along with many other fishermen, have built concealed compartments in their boats, big enough to hide several people. Peter and other members of the Resistance bring fugitives to Henrik, and he pilots them safely to Sweden. Annemarie is startled to learn Peter is in the Resistance, but then she realizes it only makes sense. Henrik tells her she didn't hear the Rosens because they were hiding quietly, and that's why the baby had to be drugged, so it wouldn't wake up and cry out. But her friends had been able to hear her, as well as the German soldiers who came to search the boat.

Annemarie begs to know what the handkerchief was for. Henrik explains that when the Germans bring dogs onto the boats, the dogs can sniff out the people hiding in the secret compartments. Peter had taken the problem to scientists and doctors, and they had come up with a clever solution: the handkerchief was coated with a special drug which attracts the dogs to smell the handkerchief, while at the same time ruining their sense of smell for a time, long enough to get through the search. Thanks to Peter, all the captains will have similar handkerchiefs. Annemarie asks if the Germans had brought dogs when they searched her uncle's boat this morning. He says yes, but, fortunately, it was after she had brought him the handkerchief. He tells her everyone on board the boat is now safe in Sweden. He had personally delivered them into good hands.

Annemarie worries about how difficult the journey must have been, hidden in that cold, cramped space. Henrik admits it was a difficult journey, but that it no longer mattered once the fugitives stepped onto the shores of Sweden. He told her it had been a beautiful morning, with a crisp breeze, and that the baby had woken up just as he was saying goodbye. Annemarie wonders morosely if she'll ever see Ellen again. Uncle Henrik assures her that the war will end someday. Their serious conversation ends on a light note as The God of Thunder falls into the milk pail.



Chapter 16 Analysis

The difference in maturity levels between Kirsti and her older sister is now even more pronounced. Annemarie's brave actions have saved the day, allowing her friends to make good their escape. Now even her Uncle Henrik begins to treat her more like an equal. While Kirsti is kept in the house on a pretext, Henrik invites Annemarie out to the barn for an adult conversation. He has not granted her full-fledged adult status, of course, as he gives her a highly edited version of the Resistance movement's plans. Yet he tells her more than he would have told the average ten-year-old girl.

Annemarie has proven, with her actions, that she is certainly not a girl of average maturity. As is so often the case in times of stress, people - both children and adults - have a way of rising to the situation. The courage and maturity Annemarie found within herself is but one such story from this period in history. The greatest tragedies can inspire people to the greatest heights of moral courage and brave action. Annemarie is continuing in the tradition of her people, who worked together to save Denmark's Jews from extinction.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Uncle Henrik was right. The war ends two years later when Annemarie is twelve. All of Denmark celebrates in the streets, at least those citizens who are still there. Many apartments in Annemarie's neighborhood are empty because their Jewish occupants have long since fled. The remaining citizens of Denmark had tended to the abandoned homes for two years, dusting the furniture and watering the plants, as Mama had done for the Rosens. Now these same neighbors enter the empty apartments to hang symbols of freedom in the windows.

The joy of this day is tempered with some painful memories, however. Peter is dead. He was captured and executed by the Germans. The night before he was shot, he had written a letter to the Johansens, telling them of his love for them, and that he was not afraid to die. Peter had written of his pride for helping his country. He had asked to be buried next to Lise, but the Germans who executed him along with many other members of the Resistance had buried them all in numbered graves in the public square. The Johansens had laid flowers on the numbered ground in honor of Peter, and that night, Annemarie's parents told her the truth about Lise's death.

Lise had been part of the Resistance. The Nazis had discovered the secret cellar where the Resistance held its meetings. She had been with Peter that night, but when the place was raided, everyone got separated as they desperately fled for safety. Peter had been shot in the arm, but Annemarie had been too sad at her sister's funeral to notice that he wore it in a sling. Lise had been run down by a German military car as she tried to escape.

Annemarie remembers Lise, in her yellow dress, dancing at her engagement party. She runs to her bedroom and opens the trunk full of Lise's possessions. In the pocket of the yellow dress is Ellen's Star of David necklace. Annemarie takes it to her father and asks him to fix it. He agrees, and tells her she can return it to Ellen when the Rosens come back. Until then, says Annemarie, she will wear it herself.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Annemarie and her country have survived the war, but not without taking heavy losses. The Johansens have lost their daughter and the brave man who was to be their son-in-law. The empty apartments stand as monuments to their missing inhabitants. There is great hope that Denmark's Jews have survived the war, but no one knows their fate with any certainty, and if they have survived, it remains to be seen whether they will be able, or willing, to return.

Now with the war over, some things which had previously been kept secret finally can be revealed. Annemarie learns of her sister's courage in joining the Resistance and

learns that the accident which killed her was no accident at all. The fact that her parents are now able to talk about Lise and the circumstances surrounding her death, however, end the book on a hopeful note that the family will be able to heal itself, and that perhaps Denmark and the rest of the world will find healing as well, one family at a time.



Afterword

Afterword Summary

In an Afterword to the reader, the author describes the research process she underwent prior to writing *Number the Stars*, and delineates for the reader which events in the story were based on actual history. First off, she credits her friend, Annelise Platt, who grew up in Copenhagen during the time of the German occupation and who helped Lois Lowry understand what the experience had been like from a child's point of view. The daily deprivation, the lack of food, clothing, electricity, etc., had all been part of Annelise's experiences. It was from Annelise that the author learned how courageous the Danish people had been under the leadership of their beloved king, Christian X, who did indeed like to ride out alone to greet his people. The story of the boy who told the German soldier that all of Denmark was the king's bodyguard is a true story documented in writing.

Historically, Denmark surrendered to Germany in 1940. The story is set in 1943, just past the halfway point of the occupation. In August of 1943, the Danes did, indeed, sink their entire naval fleet, and Annelise was woken by the lights and explosions. Also true was the part where the rabbi warns the Jewish people of Copenhagen, during synagogue services on the New Year of the Jewish High Holidays, that the Germans were coming for them. The author reveals that the rabbi had been tipped off by a courageous German official who committed treason by revealing the Nazi's plans to the Danish government, who, in turn, warned the leaders of the Jewish community. The German's name was G.F. Duckwitz, and the author hopes his courage in taking a stand against the Reich will be remembered.

In the weeks following the Jewish New Year, nearly the entire Jewish population of Denmark - seven thousand strong - was smuggled across the ocean to Sweden. The handkerchief, which Annemarie smuggled to her uncle was also a legitimate part of history. Swedish scientists created a mixture of rabbit's blood, to attract the dogs' attention, and cocaine, to temporarily numb their sense of smell. The Danish boat captains used these handkerchiefs to prevent the discovery of their hidden human cargo.

Even the character of Peter Neilsen was based on a real-life young man named Kim Malthé-Bruun, a member of the Danish Resistance, who was captured and executed by the Nazis when he was twenty-one years old. The letter he wrote to his mother on the night before his execution sums up, for the author, what she hopes her story will tell people, "you must not dream yourselves back to the times before the war, but the dream for you all, young and old, must be to create an ideal of human decency, and not a narrow-minded and prejudiced one. That is the great gift our country hungers for..." (p. 137).



Afterword Analysis

Given the historical subject matter of the book, it is highly appropriate and welcome that the author chooses to divulge what details were based on fact. It is said that truth is stranger than fiction, and with regards to the Holocaust, no fictionalized version could possibly be more horrible or more awe-inspiring than the reality. By discussing the reality of events, the author provides a valuable lesson to her young readers. For history is too easily forgotten; for example, there are groups of Neo-Nazi youth who refuse to believe that the Holocaust ever occurred. Again, denial comes into play because who would willingly choose to believe that the German people could have or would have systematically set out to murder millions of innocent Jews. In modern-day Germany, to protect against such cultural denial, the government has a law in place that makes it a crime to deny the Holocaust. America, based on our Constitution, would never restrict free speech in such a manner, making books such as *Number the Stars*, which teach our children about history, even more important.

And yet, Lois Lowry's book does not sufficiently educate its readers on the horrors of the Holocaust. Certainly as a children's book author, she must have carefully considered how much information to give her readership, just as Uncle Henrik's character carefully censors some of the more painful details when he talks to Annemarie. One cannot say she is wrong for withholding some pertinent facts - such as what the Germans were really doing to the Jews whom they "relocated" - but one must consider the possibility that she is underestimating her audience by not telling them the whole truth. The Germans certainly didn't spare children from death or torture because they were young and innocent. Any child who grew up during this era had no choice but to deal with some very hard realities, and by not being more open about historical truth, Lois Lowry may rightfully be attempting to preserve the very peace of mind we fought World War II, to create. However, denial of tragedy often leads to repetition of tragedy, and so this book might be more beneficial to its target audience if educators and parents pair it with other historical works, a trip to the Holocaust Museum, and/or a thoughtful discussion about the context of the story.

But denial aside, Lois Lowry's subject matter is both heart-warming and hopeful. Many countries turned their Jewish population over to the Nazis in the hopes that everyone else would be spared. This is one of the saddest truths about the Holocaust, that neighbor turned against neighbor to save their own lives at the expense of their humanity. To read a true story, in which the people of Denmark work together to save their Jewish friends and neighbors, is to be reminded that dark times can also bring out the best in people. In the face of so much darkness, we must have hope in order to carry on and to heal. Stories such as this one help bring about healing by reminding the descendents of the Holocaust Jews that the entire world was not against them, as it must so often seem, but that in reality many courageous people put their lives on the line to help.

The Holocaust was such an unmitigated tragedy that even today it can render people hopeless about the future of our species. The sheer number of atrocities committed



against the Jews and others, and the sheer number of people from all over the world who condoned, assisted, and committed these atrocities can seem overwhelming. So it is truly inspiring to realize - in stories like this one, in the case of Oscar Schindler, or in the case of Werner Heisenberg - how much difference a single person can make to protect us all against the tide of evil. Humanity need not feel helpless in the face of overwhelming evil as long as we have faith that the right person will be in the right place at the right time to help make things right in the end. If we should find, as did Oscar Schindler, Werner Heisenberg, G.F. Duckwitz, and Annemarie Johansen that we are the right person in the right place at the right time, hopefully stories such as these will inspire us, in that moment, to do the right thing.



Characters

Annemarie Johansen

Annemarie Johansen is a ten-year-old girl trying to understand the increasingly complex world around her. Her young life in Denmark had been filled with the normal preoccupations of peacetime until three years ago, when German soldiers arrived and her sister, Lise, was killed. There is much Annemarie is not told by her family at this time. She was seven when Lise was killed and is twelve before learning that Lise was killed at a meeting of the Danish Resistance, to which both Lise and her fiancé, Peter, belonged. As the book opens, Annemarie knows none of this, because her parents try to preserve the normalcy of her childhood during these troubled times.

However, Annemarie has begun to grow up, forced by circumstances to receive a crash course on the ways of war. She is old enough to feel a need to take part in her own destiny, no longer content to leave everything in her parents' hands. She attempts to piece together the puzzle of what's really going on in her family. The mystery would tempt any young girl, as she becomes part of the secret plan that the Danish Resistance movement intends to use to spirit her Jewish friend out of the country.

The plot involves secrecy, and Annemarie is initially irritated that her family withholds the truth from her. However, by the end of the book, she's learned the value of discretion as she herself begins taking on more adult roles. Though she perhaps overdoes it, she begins to protect both Ellen, her Jewish friend, and Kirsti, Annemarie's little sister, from learning more about the dangers they face. She also becomes directly involved in the rescue effort when her mother is incapacitated. By standing in for her mother during a rescue operation, she earns herself a place at the adult's table with her brave contribution to the war effort. World War II, left many young people with no choice other than to grow up too soon and face the harsh realities their parents would have loved to protect them from. As this little girl finds within herself the courage to help her friend survive, she exchanges innocence for wisdom, and facts for truth.

Kirsti Johansen

Kirsti is a charming and vivacious child of five when the story begins. Her innocence and sense of right and wrong are so intact that she has the naïve courage of youth to confront the German soldiers when they mistreat her or others. She lacks the specific knowledge that the adults in the story are privy to--that the Nazis are not interested in right and wrong or in showing compassion. But her innocence shines brilliantly against the backdrop of the German occupation, and Kirsti's character is a poignant symbol of that which the Danish Resistance is trying to protect. By protecting her from the more unpleasant truths of the war, her parents have given her the gift of peace of mind. The fact that they are successful throughout most of the book in protecting their daughter's



innocence is surely a gift to her parents as well, and a hopeful sign that normal life is still possible, even under the threats present during the Nazi occupation.

In the final chapter of the book, Kirsti is seven years old. Her sister describes her as having become more serious over the intervening years. Her parents likely found it impossible to shelter Kirsti from all of the hardships inherent with war. The loss of her youthful vivaciousness can be tallied up with all the other losses sustained by Denmark, and by the Johansen family as a result of the occupation of Hitler's army.

Mrs. Inge Johansen (Mama)

Inge is a character who would fit into any era, time or place. She represents some of the basic goodness in the world: motherhood, friendship, loyalty, courage - a kind woman who enjoys taking care of her children, having "coffee" with her girlfriend, and, when Lise was alive, planning Lise's wedding with her daughter. Inge's character seems simple, but she has great depth. When her life doesn't turn out in the cozy manner she'd might hope for, and when she's called upon to show great courage to resist the Germans, even after they've killed her daughter, she rises to the occasion gloriously.

Annemarie sees into her mother's eyes and knows that she is plagued with fear, but this fear never stops Inge from doing what she must to help her friends. Her extreme courage is a deeper manifestation of her belief in motherhood, friendship, and loyalty. Inge finds her bravery in the act of preserving the Rosens' family unit and helping her good friend remain a mother, instead of losing her only daughter as Inge lost Lise.

Mr. Johansen (Papa)

From what little we know about Papa, he is a brave and a good man - a family man. As the novel is told from Annemarie's perspective, we see only his actions. He doesn't share his thought process or his worries with his ten-year-old daughter, but she does get a glimpse of what he must be going through when she waits up for her mother to return from her dangerous mission. Papa plays his part in the rescue scheme by staying at home and continuing with his normal activities to deflect suspicion.

Annemarie can imagine how hard it must have been for him to allow his wife and daughters to enter the teeth of danger without him. But he has not abandoned them nor is he cowardly; he, like all the other brave Danes, has to grit his teeth and do what must be done in order to save his Jewish neighbors. He defers to his wife's wisdom that it would increase their chances of success if he remains at home. Her logic was correct, and it was brave of him to accept the necessity of his staying behind.

Lise Johansen

Lise dies three years before the start of the book. Her parents are too grief-stricken to even mention her name, so we know her only through her little sister Annemarie's



memories. Kirsti never speaks of Lise because she was only two when Lise died. All we know of Lise for most of the book is from Annemarie, who treasures the gorgeous yellow dress Lise wore at her engagement party. Lise had looked so beautiful and happy as she danced that night; that's the way Annemarie will remember Lise always. The power this image evokes - of a smiling Lise dancing in the arms of her beloved Peter, with her yellow dress flying all around - comes back to haunt the reader at the end of the book, when Lise's parents finally speak of her death to Annemarie. Her mother's words about how young and full of optimism Peter and Lise had been brings back that image and colors it with the knowledge of her involvement in the Resistance. The Resistance, for Lise, was a symbol of her hopes to bring about a better future for the children she and Peter would have. The death of that optimistic spirit is felt most keenly at the end. Neither she nor Peter lived to see the day the war ended, and yet their memory was celebrated on that day.

Peter Neilsen

Peter is a brave young Resistance fighter, whose life and dreams of the future are cut short by Hitler's war. Had he been born in another time, he might have gone on to become a loving husband and father and an integral member of his community. However, life did not present him such an easy option, and Peter devoted his energies, instead, to making his country safe for others to enjoy that kind of life in the future. His character is based on the historical figure of Kim Malthe-Bruun. Like Peter, Kim was not a famous war hero. He was one of many young men in his generation, who rose to the challenge and became heroes in the face of German encroachment. He risked his life to help save thousands, and although he is mourned in death, the Resistance could not have succeeded without men like him.

Uncle Henrik

Uncle Henrik is Inge's older brother. Their relationship is a close one, and Henrik even names his boat after his sister. The siblings represent the bonds of family and community that helped Denmark survive the German occupation with its spirit intact. He also represents the countless boat captains of Denmark - simple fishermen - who put themselves on the line to save the lives of their fellow countrymen. Henrik is the type of person people refer to as "salt of the earth." He knows what is right and what is wrong, and does the right thing instinctively and nonviolently. That is the most impressive part of the Resistance's plan: they saved the lives of the nearly 7,000 Jews living in Denmark without taking up arms against the Germans.

When Henrik speaks to Annemarie about the necessity of sometimes withholding the truth, he is trying to tell her that there are greater truths, such as a human being's right to live in peace, which override the necessity of being honest in certain situations. As a salt-of-the-earth guy, Henrik won't spare a moment of moral agony on the decision to look a German in the eye and lie if it will save the life of a friend. He keeps his priorities in line, and helps Annemarie understand what the true priorities are.



Ellen Rosen

Ellen's character is not well established in the story. Her friendship with Annemarie developed in the days prior to the German crackdown against Jews in Denmark. We are not privy to her girlish likes, dislikes, hopes or dreams. By the time we meet Ellen, circumstances have dictated that her primary focus in life is mere survival. However, her friendship with Annemarie provides the motive for Annemarie to get involved with the Resistance, and Ellen puts a face on the tragedy of Hitler's Holocaust for the reader.

Mr. Rosen

Mr. Rosen is Ellen's father. An educated man who has built a good and comfortable life for his family, he is stripped of all of his accomplishments and material goods by the Nazis, who drive him and his family from their homes. For most of the book, the Rosen family is on a desperate quest to save their own lives.

Mrs. Rosen

Ellen's mother is Inge Johansen's best friend. The two ladies take coffee together everyday, and although the details of their past friendship is not given, the author paints the picture of them being very close. We can imagine Mrs. Rosen was there for her friend when Lise died, and we know that Inge is there for the Rosen family when their lives are threatened by the occupying soldiers.



Objects/Places

Copenhagen

A gorgeous, historic city in Denmark, during World War II, Copenhagen stood as one of the last remaining centers of culture where people could travel to and enjoy, assuming they were able to obtain the requisite travel papers from the German government. The city's spirit of freedom was such that, even under German occupation, life remained much closer to normal than in other German-occupied countries. Certainly the king's voluntary surrender prevented much death and destruction, but the country never really surrendered in spirit. Despite public appearances, Copenhagen remained a place friendly to freedom and freedom fighters.

Uncle Henrik's House

The house on the coast of Denmark where the Johansen's take Ellen to hide her from the German soldiers, this house had once belonged to Annemarie's maternal grandparents. Both her mother and Uncle Henrik were born and raised there.

Ellen's Necklace

The Jewish Star of David necklace that was a gift to Ellen from her father. Ellen seldom removed the necklace, until she was forced to do so, in order to conceal her Jewish heritage from the Nazi soldiers. Annemarie hides it for her in the trunk containing Lise's belongings.

De Frie Danske (The Free Danes)

The illegal newspaper from which the Johansens obtain news about the Danish Resistance.

The Handkerchief

Soaked in rabbit's blood and cocaine, the chemical mixture was designed by scientists to attract search dogs and ruin their sense of smell. Putting this mixture onto an ordinary handkerchief was a stroke of genius by the Danish Resistance, as possession of a handkerchief is not likely to arouse suspicion. It is an historical fact that many Danish boat captains carried such handkerchiefs to prevent search dogs from sniffing out their human cargo. In the story, the handkerchief is critical to the success of the escape plan. If Annemarie had not risked her life to deliver the handkerchief to Uncle Henrik, the German soldiers would have surely found the Jewish fugitives hiding in the secret compartment on board his ship.



Lise's Yellow Dress

The dress Lise wore to her engagement party. Annemarie remembers how beautifully it twirled around as she danced with her fiancé Peter.

Tivoli

The amusement park Annemarie remembers visiting in better days. Since the occupation, the Johansens, like most Danish families, have not been able to enjoy such simple pleasures. Little Kirsti has never in her young life had a chance to visit the park.

The Deer Park in Klampenborg

A park filled with tame and free deer, which Annemarie had visited before the occupation. On the day her mother takes her and Ellen by train to Uncle Henrik's, they pass Klampenborg Station, and Mama tells Ellen that someday she will have the chance to visit the park, too.

Kronborg Castle in Helsingør

One of the sights the girls see from the train. Once upon a time, kings and queens had lived in the historical castle, which sits beside the sea in Denmark. Little Kirsti is much charmed by it.

Trofast

Inge's childhood dog. The name, in English, means "Faithful."

Blossom

Uncle Henrik's cow, which provides milk, butter, cream, and cheese - otherwise unobtainable luxuries since the German soldiers arrived and began confiscating Denmark's food supply for their own troops.

The God of Thunder

The whimsical name that little Kirsti gives to the kitten Ellen brings home.

The Ingeborg

Uncle Henrik's fishing boat. Like many other Danish boats, it has a secret compartment in which the fugitive Jews can hide during the trip to Sweden.

Setting

Number the Stars is set in 1943 in Copenhagen. King Christian X of Denmark surrendered his land to the German invaders in 1940 because Denmark's army was small and any attempt to match military might with the Nazis would have resulted in destruction and suffering. Even after Copenhagen is occupied by the Nazis, the king continues his habit of riding his horse through the streets of the city every morning, without benefit of a bodyguard. When a Nazi soldier asks a young boy where the king's bodyguards are, the boy replies that all of Denmark is the king's bodyguard. Later, when it becomes apparent that the Nazis plan to relocate the country's Jews, Annemarie says, "Now I think that all of Denmark must be the bodyguard for the Jews, as well."

Across a narrow straight from Denmark is Sweden, which has not yet been invaded by the Nazis. The Johansens' efforts to smuggle Ellen and her family to Sweden in Number the Stars accurately reflect the actions of countless Danes who helped their Jewish neighbors escape the country during World War II.

Social Sensitivity

Number the Stars is a story that honestly approaches the tragedy of the Holocaust and uses the events of the war to show humanity's potential for courage and decency. In the weeks following the Jewish High Holidays in 1943, nearly seven thousand of Denmark's Jews were smuggled across the sea to Sweden. Lowry does not talk about the Nazi concentration camps or the Jews' struggles elsewhere in Europe.

Instead, she chooses to focus on one country—and one particular set of characters—in order to emphasize that ordinary people were involved in the Resistance movement. The Johansens are willing to let Annemarie risk her life to carry the handkerchief to Uncle Henrik. Mother and daughter learn the importance of acting on their beliefs rather than waiting for others to act for them.

Literary Qualities

In *Number the Stars* Lowry uses small details to illuminate larger events. A scene as mundane as Mrs. Johansen and Mrs. Rosen sitting and sipping from cups together is transformed when the reader realizes that the two mothers are actually drinking hot water flavored with herbs. There is no coffee, tea, or sugar in wartime Copenhagen, and this shortage is just one of many revealed matter-of-factly through Lowry's prose.

The children play with paper dolls cut from old magazines; the men who work with Mr. Johansen roll dried weeds in paper in order to smoke; Mr. Rosen corrects school papers at night by candlelight, because there is no electricity; Kirsti gets new shoes, but they are ugly ones, made out of fish skin rather than leather.

Told in the third person, *Number the Stars* reflects a child's view of the Nazi occupation of Denmark. To Annemarie, the Nazis are impersonal and inscrutable figures. The first time the reader sees the soldiers it is through Annemarie's eyes: "There were two of them. That meant two helmets, two sets of cold eyes glaring at her, and four tall shiny boots planted firmly on the sidewalk, blocking her path to home."

The image of these "shiny boots" runs throughout the book; the Nazis themselves have no identities of their own.

Annemarie realizes that the best defense against the Nazis is the preservation of her own identity and ideals. By remaining true to an innate sense of justice, Annemarie and the other members of the Resistance are able to save the lives of many of Denmark's Jews.



Themes

Truth

Truth is a common value stressed in children's literature. As a society, we generally agree that we want to teach our young people the value of honesty. Lois Lowry's approach to teaching about truth is quite different from the typical kids' book, and in some ways, more mature. She speaks to the grey areas in life, where the truth may best be served by lying. The most clear-cut example of this is the Danish Resistance members' interactions with the German soldiers. Peter, Mama, and Uncle Henrik all lie to the soldiers and take pride in their courage for having lied so well. In this way, the adult characters in *Number the Stars* teach young Annemarie that truth is about integrity and standing up for what one knows is right, even if it involves lying. If it is necessary to lie to the German soldiers in order to save Ellen's life, Annemarie must not worry about having lied because with this lie, she maintains her integrity as a human being.

There is another grey area between truth and lies that the novel addresses less satisfactorily. This is the area of withholding truth from children. Society is divided on this issue. Many families routinely withhold information about serious illnesses or financial concerns from their children. This is done in the spirit of wanting to protect the child from unnecessary stress, but children are extremely perceptive, and often sense when they are being lied to by trusted adults. This breach of trust may actually cause a child to worry more than is warranted by the worrisome news being withheld. Parents struggle to find an appropriate balance, such as admitting to the children that there *is* a financial problem, and it *is* a worry, but it is an *adult* worry, and the children should know their parents are doing everything possible to heal the situation.

Finding the right level of truth to reveal is an ongoing balancing act, one which Lois Lowry struggles with in deciding how much information she would share with readers about the Holocaust. In Chapter nine, Uncle Henrik has a long discussion with Annemarie about why it's sometimes necessary to withhold frightening truths, but his reasoning, although well-intentioned, does not ring true; to the contrary, the most satisfying part of that chapter is actually the fact that he finally does share a greater amount of truth with Annemarie.

Perhaps Lois Lowry is right. Perhaps children shouldn't hear the gorier details of Hitler's Holocaust until they're older, perhaps in high school. Yet aren't characters strongly formed by that age? What do we teach them with a lie of omission? Lois Lowry's use of euphemisms such as "relocation" in her book may be intended to protect the children, but it also falls into line with the Nazi's use of such euphemisms. The Nazis used terms such as "deportation" or "special treatment" when they meant to say "starve, torture, and kill." It made it easier for them to overcome their qualms about mass murder to think of it as "relocation." As Hermione Granger says in the third Harry Potter installment, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, "Fear of a name only increases fear of the thing itself." Darkness can only be obliterated when it's brought to the light of truth and



knowledge. By using the Nazis' euphemisms, we assist them in masking their crimes so that they will not be viewed by future generations.

The Holocaust

Of all the wars in human history, rarely do we achieve global consensus as to which side was "right." World War II is a notable exception. It is often portrayed as a titanic struggle between good and evil, and its most prolific author of evil, Adolf Hitler, has become an international icon for malevolence. The industrialization of mass murder, which he nearly perfected is so horrifying to the average person that history has vindicated those who fought against him, however, the courageous souls who opposed Hitler often get overlooked by the success of his genocidal plans. It's hard to feel that we "won" the war when millions of people were tortured and killed.

Yet there exist innumerable stories of courage and even triumph in the face of such societal evil. There is Oscar Schindler, a German businessman who risked his life and spent his entire fortune to preserve the lives of as many Jews as he could by pretending they were in his employ. There is Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who bulled his way through diplomatic channels to save a hundred thousand Jews in Budapest, and ultimately paid for it with his life. He was never seen again after the war; he may have been killed, or the then-young man may have lived out the rest of his years in a Russian prison. Then there is Werner Heisenberg, the brilliant German nuclear physicist who stayed in Germany, risking his reputation, his life, and the lives of his family in order to ensure that Hitler never got his hands on a nuclear bomb that worked. He, too, paid a price, as history has written him off as an incompetent Nazi who wanted to make Hitler a bomb. History is only now beginning to question the validity of that assumption.

All these men are famous and have had movies, books, and plays written about them. Lois Lowry has added another important dimension to the literature about the Holocaust. She celebrates the lives of the countless, ordinary citizens around the globe who rose to heroism in the fight against the Nazis. The characters in her book are heroes of the Danish Resistance, a highly successful movement, which protected its people from the occupying Nazi force. The Resistance was only successful thanks to the efforts of Denmark's everyday citizens. The same can be said of America. It was our fathers, brothers, sons, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers who fought in World War II and kept our country safe for its people. On the warfront and on the home front, we, like Annemarie, could only look to ourselves to find the courage to fight the good fight. *Number the Stars* teaches children that heroes come in many shapes and sizes and tells a tale of heroism worthy of the telling.

Coming of Age

Like many children during World War II, Annemarie is put in a position where she virtually has to grow up overnight. Had it not been for the war, she wouldn't have needed to acquire so much additional maturity in such a short time. Annemarie was



already on pace with a healthy level of development for a ten-year-old. She was full of life and quite mature. She knew it was kinder to include her sister, Kirsti, in her games with Ellen, and she practiced for her weekly track meets with initiative and self-discipline. When the German soldiers become a more menacing presence in her life, she must find within herself the courage to defy them secretly, even though it means risking discovery and putting herself in danger.

Annemarie is actually fortunate she was born in Denmark and thus avoided the greatest perils of those countries touched more directly by the war. Had she lived elsewhere, she might have been denied the opportunity to live through the life lessons that guided her into maturity. The fact that her parents had the option of shielding her from more frightening matters was a luxury in those days. For the Jewish and Gypsy children deported to concentration camps or killed where they stood, there was no such luxury. They didn't have a chance to come of age in the short life spans they were allowed.

Even all these years later, the world has not come to terms with such violence, and genocide continues to be perpetrated on children and adults alike in various parts of the globe. Coming of age stories like this one remind us that each human life is valuable, and that it is worthwhile as a society to provide our children with peaceful, sustainable lives, so that they can follow the often slow and arduous path to maturity.

Coming of age is not restricted to childhood. People continue to come of age in various ways throughout their lives, whether it's becoming a better parent, accepting a promotion, or dealing with a business failure. Human beings need time to live these life lessons, which allow us to develop and to come of age. In the story, the Johansens fight for their daughters' and Ellen's right to grow up and to lead a good life. The sacrifices they make to ensure the girls' futures are what the author wishes us to remember as we lead our lives. We are an interdependent society, and, without each other's help, none of us would have the luxury of growing into better people. The sacrifices made by so many during World War II, can be honored by any of us when we take the extra time to invest in a human being's development--be they our children or our employees, they are worthy of our time.



Themes/Characters

Ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen is the protagonist of *Number the Stars*; all the action of the book is seen through her eyes. Annemarie can remember a time when Nazis in shiny boots were not standing on every street corner; she remembers "the music and the brightly colored lights, the carousel and ice cream" at the Tivoli Gardens. Throughout the book, Annemarie worries that she will not have the courage to stand up to the Nazis. When she is tested, however, she instinctively acts bravely.

The Johansens are a close-knit, loving family. Mr. and Mrs. Johansen have lost one daughter to the Nazis, yet they continue to fight for the Resistance. Like the parents in many of Lowry's books, they are loving and wise, and the reader can see their influence on Annemarie's actions. Annemarie's five-year-old sister Kirsti is too young to comprehend the political situation, and is capable of innocently blurting out secrets, a danger that serves to heighten the tension of the book.

Ellen Rosen's father is a schoolteacher and her mother is one of Mrs. Johansen's best friends. When the Nazis announce their plans to relocate Copenhagen's Jews, Inge's fiance Peter Neilson—himself wounded in the raid that killed Inge—leads Ellen's parents into hiding, while Ellen moves in with the Johansens, pretending that she is their daughter.

The Nazis—infuriated that the Rosens have disappeared—arrive at the Johansens' house one morning at 4 a.m., looking for missing Jews. When the Johansens try to pass off Ellen as their third daughter, the soldiers point out that Ellen has dark hair while Annemarie and Kirsti are blondes. In response, Mr. Johansen produces baby pictures of his three daughters, showing them that Inge was dark-haired as an infant. The Nazis reluctantly accept this as proof but spitefully mutilate the pictures before leaving.

The next day Mrs. Johansen takes Annemarie, Kirsti, and Ellen into the countryside to her brother Henrik's farmhouse. Uncle Henrik is a fisherman who has been transporting Jews to Sweden, hiding them in a secret hollow at the bottom of his boat. At the farm Ellen is reunited with her parents, and that night Mrs. Johansen leads the Rosens down a dark trail to the waterfront.

The Rosens reach the boat safely, but have forgotten to deliver an important sealed packet sent from Peter to Uncle Henrik. To complicate matters, Mrs. Johansen breaks her ankle and is unable to carry the packet herself. Because she is familiar with the path to the boat, Annemarie offers to take the packet to Uncle Henrik. When she encounters a party of Nazis with dogs, Annemarie feigns innocence and models her little sister's behavior. Even though she is frightened, she acts impatient—Just as she knows Kirsti would. As Peter planned, the Nazi dogs sniff the packet, which contains a scented handkerchief, and are thrown off the Rosens' scent.

Only later does Annemarie discover the significance of the scented handkerchief. When she finds out that the Rosens have made it safely to Sweden, she realizes that all of her

family have been courageous. 'That's all that brave means—not thinking about the dangers. Just thinking about what you must do,' she says. Annemarie, Uncle Henrik, Peter, and the entire Johansen family are memorable examples of ordinary people willing to risk their lives for what they know is right.



Style

Point of View

The point of view is strictly Annemarie Johansen's, but it is not told in the first person. The story is told through a third-person narrative, but the narrator is not omniscient and at no time intrudes into the story. We learn what Annemarie learns as she learns it. Since the adults in her life try to protect her from finding out too much about the gravity of their situation, the reader, like Annemarie, can only watch and pay attention for clues in the hopes of figuring it all out. Fortunately the author is aware of how perceptive children can be, and so, despite the fact that the adults are less than forthcoming with the little girl, both Annemarie and the reader see enough to grasp the truth of her friend Ellen's peril, and are able to figure out how the Resistance intends to help Ellen and her family escape.

Annemarie's point of view matures as the story progresses, as she changes from a naive child to a more mature young lady because of the difficult situations she encounters in German-occupied Denmark. Not only does her perceptiveness increase with her added wisdom, but the adults, responding to her obvious maturity and courage, begin to share more information with her about the events of the plot. Thus by the end of the story, all the pertinent details have been revealed in an age-appropriate manner. All in all, Lois Lowry has done a tremendous job of imagining how tragedy might look through the eyes of a child.

Setting

Number the Stars is set in 1943, during the German occupation of Denmark. The protagonist, Annemarie, lives in the scenic town of Copenhagen. The setting is critical to the story, as the plot derives from the struggles the Danish people faced in secretly defying the German army. The author, Lois Lowry, brings many historical facts into play, creating a fictional, but realistic, story of what life might have been like for a ten-year-old girl living in an occupied country. Lowry uses real historical leaders such as King Christian X, of Denmark, who surrendered his country peacefully to the Nazis in order to avoid bloodshed. The Danish Resistance was born at this critical juncture in history to carry out the true will of the king and his people, which was to defy the Nazis' plans to take over the world and destroy the Jewish race.

The Resistance was made up of everyday, average Danes such as the Johansen family and Peter Neilsen. By placing her storyline in the center of this secret conflict, Lowry proves that these everyday, average Resistance fighters were anything but average. The stark historical backdrop that makes up the setting provides the novel's characters with the opportunity to transcend their normal lives in order to fight for what they believe is right.



Language and Meaning

Because *Number the Stars* is a children's book with a ten-year-old protagonist, the language used by the author is necessarily targeted towards a younger audience. Lois Lowry does not condescend to her readers with overly-simplistic subject matter, but her choice of words is consistently simple, designed to be easily understood by children of various ages. Since the point of view is Annemarie's, the author's goal is to utilize the type of language which a ten-year-old girl might actually use. Lowry consistently achieves that goal throughout the book. Annemarie always sounds like a ten-year-old, and, to Lowry's credit, she avoids using modern slang that would not have sounded appropriate coming from a Danish child back in 1943. In fact, she avoids the use of any childish slang at all, possibly because the author has a formal writing style, but more likely because childhood slang is a product of peacetime and leisure. Annemarie and the other children of Denmark had neither the peace nor the leisure to develop childhood word games or coded language.

However, the members of the Resistance movement do use coded language, which the author includes in the interest of conveying the necessity for secrecy when conspiring against the Germans. In the interest of historical accuracy, Lois Lowry includes a few words in German, spoken by the occupying soldiers, as well as culturally specific names of people and places in Denmark, to convey to the reader a sense of the Danish way of life.

Structure

Number the Stars is divided into seventeen chapters, with a historical Afterword from the author at the end. The story is linear and takes place over a period of a few months in the life of ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen during the Nazi occupation of Denmark. The story opens three years into the occupation, but the war has yet to touch young Annemarie's life other than through the growing privation caused by the Germans' strict food and energy rationing. The plot builds gradually, as the author lays the groundwork, showing how the menace of war creeps into Annemarie's life.

The incidents which take place near the beginning are relatively minor and spaced out over a period of months. However, the Jewish New Year in October marks a climactic turning point, after which the rest of the events unfold in the short space of two days; thus, Chapters 4 through 16 are dedicated to the events of a forty-eight hour period. Chapter 17 jumps ahead two years to the end of the war, allowing the author to provide closure in her denouement. Finally, Lois Lowry includes a detailed Afterword in which she explains to the reader what events were real, and how she pieced these historical facts together to create a solid underpinning for her fictional story.

Quotes

"'Halte!' the soldier ordered in a stern voice.

The German word was as familiar as it was frightening. Annemarie had heard it often enough before, but it had never been directed at her until now." Chapter 1, p. 2

"Now she was ten, with long legs and no more silly dreams of pink-frosted cupcakes. And now she - and all the Danes - were to be bodyguard for Ellen, and Ellen's parents, and all of Denmark's Jews." Chapter 3, p. 26

"The Danes had destroyed their own naval fleet, blowing up the vessels one by one, as the Germans approached to take over the ships for their own use.

'How sad the king must be,' Annemarie had heard Mama say to Papa when they read the news.

'How proud,' Papa had replied." Chapter 4, p. 32

"Annemarie relaxed the clenched fingers of her right hand, which still clutched Ellen's necklace. She looked down, and saw that she had imprinted the Star of David into her palm." Chapter 5, p. 49

"Why was Papa speaking that way, almost as if he were speaking in code? What was Mama *really* taking to Uncle Henrik?

Then she knew. It was Ellen." Chapter 6, p. 53

"Papa had said something like it on the telephone. 'Is the weather good for fishing, Henrik?' Papa had asked. But what did it mean? Henrik went fishing every day, rain or shine. Denmark's fishermen didn't wait for sunny days to take their boats out and throw their nets into the sea." Chapter 8, p. 71

"Annemarie felt a surge of sadness; the bond of their friendship had not broken, but it was as if Ellen had moved now into a different world, the world of her own family and whatever lay ahead for them." Chapter 10, p. 82

"Peter's voice was firm. 'We can't take a chance,' he said. He inserted the dropper of the bottle into the baby's tiny mouth, and squeezed a few drops of liquid onto her tongue. The baby yawned, and swallowed. The mother closed her eyes; her husband gripped her shoulder." Chapter 11, p. 90

"She walked with them in her mind, feeling the way through the darkness. It would take them, she thought, half an hour to reach the place where Uncle Henrik was waiting with his boat." Chapter 12, p. 97



"Her mother tried to stand, but fell back against the steps with a groan. 'My God,' she murmured again. 'It may all have been for nothing.'

Annemarie took the packet from her mother's hand and stood. 'I will take it,' she said. 'I know the way, and it's almost light now. I can run like the wind.'" Chapter 13, p. 104

"But both dogs still looked intently at the basket, their ears alert, their mouths open. Saliva glistened on their smooth pink gums." Chapter 15, p. 116

"For nearly two years, now, neighbors had tended the plants and dusted the furniture and polished the candlesticks for the Jews who had fled. Her mother had done so for the Rosens." Chapter 17, p. 128



Topics for Discussion

1. Why does Mrs. Rosen tell Annemarie that "it is important to be one of the crowd, always"? Can you think of any times when this advice is not valid?
2. Why is Annemarie so upset that the Nazis have been in her country for three years and still cannot speak her language?
3. Why do Uncle Henrik and Mrs. Johansen pretend that their Great-Aunt Birte has died?
4. How does Uncle Henrik explain bravery to Annemarie? Do you agree with his definition?
5. Why do Peter, the Johansens, and Uncle Henrik risk their own lives to save their Jewish friends?



Essay Topics

Annemarie and her family lied several times in the book. Was it all right for them to lie to the soldiers?

Do you agree with Uncle Henrik that it's easier to be brave when you don't know all the facts? Why or why not?

Annemarie was forced to go without many things during the war. Does this make you appreciate the things you have more than you did before? What would you have most hated to go without if you were Annemarie?

How do you think fairy tales might be different from real life stories?

Why do you think Annemarie's parents didn't want to talk about Lise?

Imagine what Ellen went through on board the boat to Sweden. Write about the trip as if you were Ellen. What was it like for her?

In the book, the adults also lied to Annemarie to keep her from worrying too much. Do you think this was right, wrong, or a little of both? Why?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. It has been said that Kirsti heightens the tension of the book because she is an unpredictable character.

Find examples in the text where this is true. Rewrite one of the scenes in the novel—such as the Nazis' search of the Johansen household—from Kirsti's point of view.

2. What role does Denmark's King Christian X play in *Number the Stars*?

Research King Christian and compare Lowry's portrayal with the historical facts that you gather.

3. Research and report on the World War II Resistance movement in another occupied European country, such as France or Austria.

4. Read Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*, the story of a Jewish teen-ager who is hidden in a Dutch attic during World War II. Compare this real-life story with Lowry's tale. Do you think *Number the Stars* conveys the horrors of the Holocaust as effectively as Anne's diary? How do the young protagonists, Anne Frank and Annemarie Johansen, compare?

What special lessons about courage does Anne teach? What lessons does Annemarie teach?

5. Read one of Lowry's other books for young adults. Compare her writing style in this book with *Number the Stars*—in particular her creation of compelling characters, and her use of telling details.

Further Study

Haley-James, Shirley. "Lois Lowry."

Horn Book 66 (August 1990): 422-424.

An inside view of the author, written by a close friend.

Lowry, Lois. "Newbery Medal Acceptance." Horn Book 66 (August 1990): 412-421.
Lowry talks about winning the Newbery Award for Number the Stars.



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