

The Upstairs Room Study Guide

The Upstairs Room by Johanna Reiss

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Plot Summary

The Upstairs Room, by Johanna Reiss, is a story told from the view of a Jewish girl, Annie, who is only six years old when Hitler first begins to destroy the Jews. Annie and her family must go into hiding with Gentile families in order to avoid the concentration camps. By the time the war is over many people have lost their lives, but Annie survives to tell her story.

The story begins in the year 1938 as six-year-old Annie is listening to a radio program about the war and what is happening to the Jews because of a man named Hitler. Annie doesn't understand everything that is being said but she knows that her father and many of the other adults in Holland are worried. As the months pass notices soon pop up in Annie's town telling the Jews what they can and cannot do. Soon Annie's father is no longer allowed to conduct business. Annie's mother becomes ill and is admitted to the hospital. More Jews are taken away on trains to Hitler's work camps. Annie's father puts his family into hiding, although they cannot all go together. Annie's older sister stays behind to take care of their mother who is still in the hospital. Annie and her sister Sini are soon sent to live in a town called Usselo with a family named Hannink.

The Hannink family is kind and lets the girls live in the house until they are worried about being discovered by the Germans. Annie and Sini have to go and spend a day in an underground hiding place until Mr. Hannink can move them to a family named the Oostervelds. The Oostervelds, Johan, his wife Dientje, and his mother Opoe, are very kind although they are not as well off as the Hannink family. Soon the family comes to love the girls.

Despite how much they are cared for the girls are not allowed to be seen and Sini and Annie begin to suffer from being locked away. After they are finally liberated by Canadian troops Annie has almost lost the ability to walk. Sini and Annie are happy to be free but don't want to go home and leave the Oosterveld family. Their older sister Rachel comes to take them home and they refuse to leave for a time until Rachel and their father have their home ready. In time the family moves to America.

Years later Annie brings her children back to Holland for a visit and shows them where she hid as a girl. She tries to crawl back into the small space behind the closet but is unable to stop crying.



Chapter 1-3

Chapter 1-3 Summary

The Upstairs Room, by Johanna Reiss, is a story told from the view of a Jewish girl, Annie, who is only six years old when Hitler first begins to destroy the Jews. Annie and her family must go into hiding with Gentile families in order to stay out of the concentration camps. By the time the war is over there have been many lives lost but Annie survives to tell her story.

In chapter one the story begins in the year 1938 and Annie is just six years old. She doesn't understand what makes her father and the other adults so upset but Annie knows that Hitler is doing bad things. Annie hears on the radio about something called "Kristallnacht" (page 2). When Annie asks her parents what it means she is not given an answer. Annie is glad that they live in Winterswijk and are not very close to the German border since Hitler seems to dislike all the German Jews. At night Annie would look out her window and sometimes the neighbors, the Ganses, would tell her to get back in bed. Annie didn't mind being told this as long as her older sisters, Sini and Rachel, weren't told. Sini was sixteen and Rachel was twenty-one. In the house there was also a live-in maid who was like family.

One night a meeting is held in Annie's house and she can hear the adults arguing but can't hear all of the conversation. It is about the Germans and the way the Jews there are being treated and the fact that Annie's family is Jewish. A few months later Annie's Uncle Bram and his wife went to America. Uncle Bram explained that Hitler couldn't hurt the Jews in America. Annie's father tries to talk his wife into going to America but she refuses saying she doesn't feel well enough to start over in a new place.

In the fall of 1939 Rachel gets her teaching degree and Sini starts working on a farm. Soon Annie hears the adults talking about Germans invading Poland. That winter the radio continues to give news of the war and Annie is happy when her mother tells her to go to bed so that Annie can't hear the bad things that are happening. Annie's father is desperate to leave but her mother, Sophie, says that she can't leave because she has continual head aches. Instead, Annie's father begins building a house outside of town where Sophie says the family would be safe. While Annie and her family are in town they happen upon some Nazi soldiers and one of them spits at Annie and her family.

Over the next few months Annie's father is no longer allowed to do business and the maid informs the family that she could no longer work for them because of how people are treating the Jews. Rachel also receives a letter saying that she can no longer hold a teaching job because she is a Jew. Annie goes to school and her best friend, Willy Bos, is no longer allowed to sit next to Annie and tells Annie it is because she is a Jew. Finally Annie's father says he is taking the family to America regardless of whether Sophie comes or not but it is too late and there is no way out of the country for the Jews.



In the beginning of 1941 there were more and more announcements regarding the Jews and their banishment from parks, playgrounds, and other areas. Annie started fourth grade later that year but soon school was stopped and Jews were no longer allowed to go to public schools. A special school just for Jew children was started with two male teachers. Soon there are signs on buildings and businesses that inform Jews they are forbidden from entering. On the way home from school one day Annie is teased and tormented by children yelling a poem in which "Jew will rot!" is the last line (page 14). The family moves into their home outside of town just before October 1941.

Chapter two begins by describing the new house. Things become more and more tense at home and there is more and more fighting. Because they are outside of town they are missed when trucks come through town with a list of all Jewish men and pick them up. They had come while people were sleeping and had cut the phone lines so no one could be warned. The Jewish men were taken to a jail camp called Mauthausen. Annie's next door neighbors, the Gans, have their oldest son taken. The boy writes and tells them how to write him back. Rachel helps them write him a letter but it comes back with the word "UNKNOWN" written on the front.

Annie's father tries to get across the border to Switzerland but is unable. A new announcement comes and the Jews all have to start wearing a star on their clothing so that Jews are easily identified. Annie doesn't mind since the star is so pretty. There are a lot of the Jews that volunteer to go to German work camps where they are promised that they will be treated well. Annie's father calls them all fools and refuses to go. Soon the notices stopped asking for Jews to volunteer and said that they had to go. Annie's father explains that he is looking for a place for them all to hide. Soon Annie's Jewish school is closed down after one of the teachers is taken to a work camp.

In spring of 1942 there are rumors that it will all be over soon but the notices now say that women can go to the work camps as well. Annie's mother becomes very ill and is taken to the hospital. The nurses come to tell the family that Jewish patients are no longer allowed to have visitors. Willy Bos' father was the mayor and so Annie went and asked for a permit to go in to see her mother alone and was given one. Annie's father continues to look for places to hide his family and Sini says she won't go but her father says she may not have a choice. Annie is told not to tell her mother about the fact that they are all going into hiding.

In chapter three it is summer and Annie and her father go to talk to a man who agrees to help them look for a place to hide. A place is found for Annie's father quickly and he says he will go after he has found a place for the three girls. Sophie will be safe in the hospital. In September Uncle Phil comes to see the family and says he had a hiding place for his family but his wife has refused to go since the woman won't do kosher cooking so Annie's father says he would be interested in the hiding spot.

The girls have a place to go in Usselo but Rachel refuses to leave since Sophie will need someone to do the kosher cooking for her because the hospital won't cook for Jews. In October there is a note sent in the mail saying that all Jewish families had to go to Dutch work camps. Annie's father leaves first for his hiding spot after giving the girls



each of their instructions. The girls receive word that afternoon that their father arrived safely. Annie went to see her mother one last time and Sini says that their mother won't live much longer. Sini dresses as a farm girl and heads to the town of Usselo and Annie cuts her hair off like a boy and gets on a bus to head there. Annie sees Rachel following her into town and when Annie stops to wait on Rachel, Rachel shakes her head no. Annie gets on the bus after buying a ticket and sees Rachel heading home.

Chapter 1-3 Analysis

There has been a lot of information come into play in the first few paragraphs. The story starts when Hitler is already making war. Annie is able to recall some of her past when the moods of everyone in her house were lighter but these times are never seen first hand in the book. Annie is under the impression that the work camps are where Jews are treated badly but she doesn't yet realize that people die there. Her father must suspect something at this point because he is so desperate to get away that he is willing to go into hiding without the girls. He has a place set up for them and knows that he can't travel with them. When the father leaves the house this is the last time he will be seen in the story although he will be talked about several times as the story continues.

The story is told from a young child's point of view and when Annie gets the star to wear on her chest she thinks that it is pretty. She never stops to look at the star as a symbol of something negative. The word in the front of the story that Annie hears on the radio, Kristallnacht, is never explained to Annie. This term is thought of by some to be the beginning event to Hitler's Final Solution. In the Kristallnacht there were nearly a hundred Jews killed and thousands were put into concentration camps. Annie doesn't realize any of this is going on but these events are vaguely explained through the eyes of a six year old.

Sophie didn't want her family to leave their home and seemed to be certain that nothing bad would happen to them. It is unclear why Sophie took this point of view but it is obvious that she was in fact very ill. In the next few chapters the children will receive word that Sophie has passed away. There is never any description explaining what it was that Sophie was ill with. Annie has left her home and this setting won't be seen again in the story. It will be mentioned a great deal in the story but the character's won't return here in the story.



Chapter 4-6

Chapter 4-6 Summary

In chapter four Annie is on a bus when German soldiers begin performing a search. Annie thinks quickly and is able to say that the girl clothes in her suit case are for her aunt. The soldiers don't arrest anyone off of the bus but do take a man's chicken, which angers the man. Once in the town of Usselo Annie is met by a girl named Dini Hannink. Dini carefully takes Annie home where Annie is put into a small room with her sister Sini. The Hannink family is well off but there is nothing much in this small room and only one little window and a bathroom to share. The girls argue with each other and soon they receive word that their mother has died. Despite the knowledge that it was going to happen the girls cry. The girls also receive word that Rachel isn't coming since it is too dangerous to travel. There is a family that has taken Rachel in that live in the same town.

December comes and it snows. Annie wants out but Sini can't allow Annie outside for any reason. Christmas comes and Annie tips a chair over during the Hannink's Christmas party. The girls are forced to go out back to an underground shelter Mr. Hannink has built. Annie is very excited to be able to go into the hiding place and believes it will be a grand adventurous cave. Sini is in a foul mood and tells Annie that it is New Years Eve and she wants to be at parties not in a hole in the ground. When they go into the hole Mr. Hannink tells them that they will stay here for one day and the next night he will take them to a different home where they will be safe from a house search done by the Germans. Once there Annie realizes the shelter is not a grand adventure and quickly wants out. Annie and Sini wait in the hole until Mr. Hannink comes for them the next night and although the Germans haven't come Mr. Hannink says they could come at any moment if they decided to. The girls are taken into the darkness.

In chapter five the girls meet the Oosterveld family, Johan, his wife Dientje, and his mother whom the girls are told to call Opoe which means Granny in Dutch. The girls are allowed to stay in a little room upstairs but don't have the nice things that the Hannink family had and there is no inside toilet. The girls are to sleep in the same room with Dientje and Johan and Johan says if the soldiers come then the girls are to hide under the bed. The girls ask for a calendar of the current year, 1943, and a book. Neither of these two things, with the exception of a bible, are in the Oosterveld house. Dientje constantly tells the girls how much trouble she and her family would be in if the Germans found the girls there. Dientje asks Johan several times about the girls going back to the Hanninks since the girls were only supposed to stay for two weeks to begin with but Johan tells her to quit talking about it. Dientje then tells Johan that he needs to build the girls a decent hiding place in case there is search of the house. Annie hears this and can't help but hope that it isn't another cave like Mr. Hannink's.

When Johan was home he worked on a closet upstairs building a small entrance at the bottom of the closet that is concealed when the shelf and it's contents are in place.



Dientje doesn't like it because someone will have to put the shelf up after the girls are in but Johan points out that the girls can't be home alone anyway. Inside the hiding space there is barely enough room for both girls and Johan warns them not to get stuck. Johan says it isn't a bad contraption considering he is just a poor dumb farmer.

In chapter six Opoe brings in a calendar for the girls. They are excited and begin marking off the days that have gone by in January already. Opoe tells them that she will be seventy-one this coming Sunday. Dientje brings the girls in a book that she has borrowed from the minister. It is a large book titled 'War and Peace.' On Sunday the girls are able to eat downstairs during the daytime for Opoe's birthday and this excites Annie. When the party is over the Hannink family arrives and come up to see the girls before they go. Sini and Annie have to be quiet when other guests arrive but Opoe sneaks the girls a piece of cake in the middle of the company.

Chapter 4-6 Analysis

Annie is frightened at first at the thought of going to live with a different family. She is concerned that they may not be nice. After meeting the family many of her fears are put to rest, though it is clear that Dientje is very frightened of what will happen if the Germans find the girls there. Johan, for whatever reason, is not as concerned and until Dientje pushes the subject it seems that Johan would have been content to have the girls hide under the bed.

The little place where the girls have to hide is not somewhere they can stay long-term, but it is somewhere that will prove to be very useful and not easily found by German soldiers.

The Oosterveld family is not as wealthy as the Hanninks but they seem to genuinely care for the girls. This love that the Oostervelds develop for the girls will be beneficial in keeping them safe and sane. Things are not bad for the girls here but it is seen that Sini is still thinking of the fact that she is twenty years old and is forced to spend her life living in a hidden room. This is very hard for Sini to cope with and it will begin to eat at her in the coming chapters.

The Oosterveld family is a salvation for the girls but they are also a point of comic relief in the story. Opoe and Dientje will have little spats that, although could be taken seriously, are often humorous rather than frightening or saddening. Opoe will continue to tell the girls that she can't have too many years left alive. Later in the story it will be seen that Opoe actually lives many more years. Opoe's real name is never said.

The Hannink family will be seen again and spoken of many times in the story. There will also be another group of Jews that are being hidden that will be seen briefly in the story.



Chapter 7-9

Chapter 7-9 Summary

As chapter seven begins, Annie is trying to catch a glimpse of people passing by outside the window. Sini is very angry and asks Annie if she has forgotten what will happen if they are caught. Annie says that she hasn't forgotten, but she wonders just how often they could beat a person. Later Opoe begins to yell that someone has done something awful to her. Annie comes in to find that the War and Peace book has been put into a drawer on top of a lace cap that Opoe got from her mother. Opoe is so angry and tells Annie that she will never forget what Annie has done. Annie tries to say she is sorry but Opoe walks away from her. Later that day Dini Hannink comes to warn everyone that the Germans are planning a house to house search in order to find an underground worker. Johan gets home and puts the girls in their hiding place and says that they will be alright sitting up for one night.

The girls quickly become bored in the closet and Sini works hard to keep Annie awake. Opoe brings the girls something to drink at about two in the morning and says she isn't mad anymore. To keep Annie awake Sini begins to teach her English. Annie asks Sini how to say 'doodmoe' in English and Sini says it means 'dead tired' (page 102). The soldiers don't come that night.

Sini is looking at Annie and says that something is wrong with Annie's legs. Annie is forced to start counting out paces across the room for exercise although Annie hates it. That night Annie was permitted to go with Dientje to a neighboring farm where ten Jews were being held. They had a little girl Annie's age. When they arrive Annie is too shy to talk to the girl who is just as shy as Annie is.

Annie's birthday comes and she gets a book and a monopoly game. After her birthday Annie is permitted to read a newspaper that is printed by underground workers. After reading the paper Annie suddenly knows that the people in the concentration camps are murdered and they are put into showers where gas is turned on them. Now Annie understands why she can't stand in front of the window and what is at stake if she is caught.

In chapter eight the girls are moved to a back room since it is warm enough that the room won't be cold. Sini is complaining about not being pretty and refusing to play monopoly with Annie. Sini and Johan listen to the radio and learn that the Americans and the English are in Sicily and Johan says this is the beginning of the end. Just thinking of being free makes Sini look better.

One of Sini's old high school teachers comes to visit and brings Annie some work books since she can't go to school. Annie becomes upset after being scolded for not doing her exercises that her sister has asked her to do. Annie becomes tickled watching the teacher eat because it reminds Annie of a rabbit. Annie is scolded again by Sini and



Annie goes to sit in a corner and tries not to sob. When the teacher gets ready to leave she kisses Annie and Annie is saddened that she won't ever have this woman for her own teacher. The teacher also tells the girls it was a good thing that their mother died when she did because the next day all the remaining Jews in the hospital were shipped off to camps.

In December snow begins to fall. Johan reminds the girls that they have been there almost a year although Annie knows that they couldn't forget how long they have been there. Johan says that maybe 1944 will be a better year.

In chapter nine Reverend Slomp comes to see the girls. Rachel is staying with the Reverend. The girls beg Johan to let Rachel come see them. Shortly Johan makes arrangements for Rachel to come visit. Annie is very anxious to see her sister but soon Rachel begins to tell Annie that Annie needs to take cod liver oil and that she looks sloppy and that they need to iron their clothes. Annie sullenly walks away from Rachel. Sini asks Rachel to take Annie so that they wouldn't have to fight anymore. Annie decides she hates both of them.

Rachel shows Sini and Annie that she has a post card from their Uncle Phil who is on a train to one of the camps. He threw the post card out in the hopes that someone would mail it. The card says not to worry about them. Annie knew what happened at the camps and when she sees Rachel's face Annie knows that Rachel knows too. Rachel leaves the next night at dark.

Over the next few months they receive word of where the Allied troops are fighting. Johan begins learning little bits of English so that he can ask for cigarettes. Annie knows that she should practice too. The girls grow tired of being indoors and ask Johan to let them go outside. He refuses but the next day he takes them out, covered in a wheel barrow, where they can't be seen to sit in the sun and says he will be back when the day is close to being over. It is nice to be in the sun but soon it becomes obvious that something has gone wrong. Johan comes back and says that Dientje's sister is there and the girls can't come back until she leaves. By the time they are taken back Annie is badly burned and has to have a doctor called. Despite her burn Annie feels that it has been a nice day.

Chapter 7-9 Analysis

Annie continues to want things that she doesn't actually want. She wants badly to go outside but soon it becomes too much for her. The burn that she gets is very bad and calling a doctor is very dangerous for the Oostervelds as well as for the girls. Johan had told the girls no but he doesn't seem to be able to refuse them. Later in the story it will be seen that he continues to say yes when it would be smarter to say no.

The little girl that Annie went to go see at the other farm will be mentioned one more time in the story. There will be a man who betrays this family and the ten Jews and the



family that is hiding them are all taken to a camp. There is no indication as to what happens to this family.

Rachel will be talked of again in the story but not until the last of the chapters. Annie was anxious to have Rachel there but Rachel began to treat Annie like a child when she got there. Annie feels that she has grown a great deal and doesn't want to be mothered. Annie again doesn't want Rachel to leave when it is time to go.

The fear that grasps most of the people in this story pushes them one way on the other. It will be seen in the next few chapters that it is Johan that steadies Dientje's fears. Without Johan the girls most likely would not be allowed to stay with Dientje and Opoe because of Dientje's fear of what will happen if she is caught. Other people that have the same fear use it differently and fight back, such as Mr. Hannink and Johan. Annie's father was also frightened but it didn't cause him to get on one of the trains. He chose rather to go into hiding and try to find his family safe places as well.



Chapter 10-12; Postscript

Chapter 10-12; Postscript Summary

In chapter ten Annie and Sini are discussing what they will do when they get home and Johan promises to come and visit them. While Johan is out German soldiers start a house to house search. The girls are put into their hiding place and when the soldiers come Annie is afraid to breath out of her nose for fear of making too much noise. The soldiers take some cloth from Opoe and a pig. When Johan gets home he is angry and almost wishes that the soldiers would come back so that he could get his pig back. Dientje begins to cry when Johan says he has to go to work. Johan has been late several times but Dientje wants him to stay and protect them and Johan eventually agrees. Later that afternoon Dientje comes in and says that the farmer with the ten Jews has been caught and all of them have been taken on a train to a camp. That night Mr. Hannink comes to the house and says that the farmer had been betrayed and Mr. Hannink knows who told. Mr. Hannink wants Johan to kill the man and they discuss it and a revolver trades hands and Johan sends it on with a note to a boy. Several days later the Germans take several hostages and say that they need the person who killed their friend or they will kill the hostages. No one comes forward and the hostages are all found in a ditch. Their fingers were all broken before they were killed.

The fighting is getting much closer to Usselo and people from the cities begin showing up at the Oosterveld house begging for food. They offer to pay large sums of money but Dientje and Johan refuse the money saying that it is a crime to take advantage of hungry starving people. Soon the Germans show up and announce that the Oosterveld house is going to be their new headquarters. Johan tries to refuse but is unable. Johan says that the girls must be very quiet and stay in bed but that the German's aren't allowed in the house. Since the Germans will be living in the same house there will be no need for a search of this house and thus the girls will be much safer. Dientje decides to dye the girls' hair red just to be extra safe.

October 17, 1944 the Germans moved into the Oosterveld house and Annie and Sini began their long stay in bed. Annie gets tired of staying in bed and heads downstairs where she walks into the kitchen and comes face to face with a German soldier. Annie goes back to tell Sini and they quickly dress before they are taken away. Johan comes upstairs and says he sent Dientje to get her niece and has told the soldier that his shy niece is staying with them. Annie hears the girl when she comes but Annie finds her to be stupid outside playing when Hitler is killing people like a maniac.

A week after Annie barged in on the German officer the soldiers pack up their equipment and leave suddenly and the girls can get out of bed for the first time.

In chapter eleven the Germans are pulling men out of public places and offering extra food rations to go to work for the German forces. Johan goes into hiding for a short time since he is in danger of being taken. Dientje can't handle the pressure without Johan



and takes the girls back to the Hannink family where they are hid in the underground tunnel. Sini spends a great deal of time crying. Sini decides if she gets out of the hole in the ground that she won't stay hidden any longer and that she doesn't care what happens. Annie worries about what will happen to her if Sini doesn't stay hidden.

After ten days in the dark hole they are rescued by Johan who is very angry with Dientje for sending the girls away. Johan takes them home. Sini tells Johan that she won't live in hiding any longer. Johan refuses for a time but finally decides to help Sini get fake papers so that she can work as a maid for a different family. Annie doesn't want to be left alone but she knows that Sini isn't handling being locked up very well.

After Sini has been gone several days Annie is downstairs when a visitor comes Annie tries to rush upstairs but her legs quit. Annie has to be carried by Johan. Sini comes and visits Annie and after several days Sini says she has heard that Canadian troops will be there in a few days.

On March 31 the German troops took all the horses and carts in Usselo so that they could make a faster retreat. Shortly thereafter there is a bombing on Usselo. Everyone gets into the air-raid shelter. The bakery and other places are destroyed and a few people are killed. Mr. Hanninks arrives and says that the Canadians will be there tomorrow and that they will soon be free. Annie is worried knowing that it would take only one German in order to kill her and her sister.

In chapter twelve, early that next morning, they all get ready and go into town to see the troops. Annie has to be carried part of the way. She worries about people looking at her funny legs and wonders about them. Sini kisses several of the soldiers. Many of the neighbors ask Johan about who Annie and Sini are and he says he will explain it later. Johan is able to get packs of cigarettes from the soldiers. When they go home several families come with them. Johan has to stop Annie from going back upstairs to her little room.

Now that the war is over they all know that Annie and Sini can go home soon. Johan says he will wait a few days to make sure roads are clear and safe. That night Annie is standing in front of the window pressing up to it and out of reflex she hides when someone goes past on a bicycle. Sini reminds her that they don't have to hide anymore.

In the Postscript Rachel arrives after more than a week Rachel arrives to take her sisters home. Sini refuses since she has a boyfriend in town. Annie says he can't go either because she still isn't used to get outside. Rachel went home by herself to get the house ready for the family. A month later Annie and Sini went home with Opoe, Johan, and Dientje crying. Annie's father comes home as well. Before long the family moves to America. Opoe gives Annie her mother's lace cap and tells Annie to take good care of it.

When Annie was grown she took her children to visit Usselo. Johan still had the hiding place that Annie and Sini had hid in. Annie's children ask her to get into the hole again. Annie tries but stops because she is crying.



Chapter 10-12; Postscript Analysis

There are many plots in the story that are concluded but there are many little plots that are left unanswered. There is no indication of what became of all of the family that went to the concentration camps although it is believable that they were murdered as many of the people in the camps were. There is also the question of what became of Sini and Rachel. Sini had a boyfriend when she left Usselo but there is no mention of how serious this relationship became.

It is unclear how their father reacted when he learned of his wife's death or if he felt any guilt for leaving Rachel this job. There was also no explanation as to why Annie's legs were beginning to quit but Sini's legs seemed to be fine. When Annie goes back to visit Johan and Opoe there is nothing to indicate that her legs were hurting her there or bothering her. It is plausible that her legs simply hurt because she wasn't moving them but this isn't fully explained.

Annie and Sini reacted the same to being locked away in many ways but very different in others. Annie began to lose the function of her legs and she was noticed for the fact that she began to talking to herself as if she had an audience. This was bothering Sini. Sini had become almost desperate to escape her prison regardless of the danger that was waiting. Annie's legs began to break down but it seems that something emotional or psychological began to break down in Sini. It was obvious that she was losing her youthful look and when she had moments of sincere hope Annie would comment on the fact that Sini suddenly looked better.

When Annie goes back to visit there is no mention of Dientje. It is possible that she died of old age. Opoe had talked of not living many more years in the story but when Annie went back to visit her Opoe was ninety-two years old.

Characters

Annie

Annie is the main character in the story and the perspective will come entirely from her. Annie is only six years old when the story begins. Her family refuses to go to a work camp or concentration camp and they live in their house until it becomes clear that they are going to be taken away if they remain there. By the time that Annie goes into hiding she has already turned nine. When Annie first hears about Hitler and the things that are going on in the war Annie has a very childlike reaction to the horrible events that are beginning to take place. Annie says that Hitler is bad and that things Hitler does isn't nice. These comments show her frame of mind and to what level she has mentally developed. Annie has a very kind heart but she is a child. When Annie has to leave her mother behind in the hospital Annie is very hurt at the thought of lying to her mother.

When Annie and her sister are in hiding there are times when Annie will look at something and wish for it feeling that it might be a grand adventure. There is a hole in the back yard that the Hannink family has built in order to hide Jews. Annie will think that this a grand adventure and call it a cave. Annie dreams of a time that she can go into this cave and be outside the horrid room that she is forced to stay in. When Annie has no choice but to be put into this hole for fear of a house-to-house search Annie quickly changes her mind and after a short period of time wishes to be back in her room.

Annie has several birthdays while in hiding. During one of the birthdays Annie gets a monopoly game and a book about wildlife. At the time Annie says that it is the best birthday that she has ever had. When they are finally liberated and Annie is able to come out of hiding she finds that being outside is too much for her. Annie has dreamed of being able to go outside for years now. While outside she desperately wants to go back inside the house and for a moment she almost begins to go back to the same room that has seemingly been her prison for so many years.

Sini

Sini is one of Annie's older sisters. Sini is only sixteen when the story begins but when they are forced to go into hiding Sini is already nineteen years old. Sini is quite a bit older than Annie but is still a child herself in some respects. Sini tries to take care of Annie and take over duties that one of the parents should be doing for Annie. This seems to strain the relationship between the two even more. Sini is trying to get Annie to do math work, exercise, and at the same time Sini is completely focused on herself and her beauty. She feels certain that she should be out and about meeting young men and going to parties. Sini comments several times during the story that she will be kept locked away until she is old and gray. Sini seems to grasp onto every hope that she can find during the story whenever news of Hitler's forces being defeated comes through the



radio. Despite these moments of hope that Sini is given she will still eventually decide that she cannot stay locked up.

Sini loves Annie and there are times when she tells Annie how much she needs to be there with her. Other times Sini is so concentrated on her own desperation that Annie will feel that she is the one that keeps Sini from losing herself. Toward the end of the book Sini tells Johan that she won't stay locked up anymore. Despite the immense dangers, Sini is allowed out to go and work for a family as a maid with fake papers.

When the war is over Sini doesn't want to go home immediately because she has a boyfriend that she started dating while working as a maid. Annie comments on how truly beautiful her sister is.

Johan Oosterveld

Johan is the man who Sini and Annie are sent to live with. Johan builds a hiding spot for Annie and Sini behind the closet in his house. The girls are only supposed to stay with Johan for a week or two but end up staying there for more than two years. Johan leaves for a short period of time and returns to find that his wife has sent the children away in fear. Johan is very upset and immediately comes to get the girls.

Opoe Oosterveld

Opoe, a word meaning grandmother in Dutch, is what Annie and Sini are told to call Johan's mother. Opoe is in her seventies and continually says that she won't live many more years although she has said that for many years already. Annie unknowingly lays a large copy of War and Peace in a drawer on top of Opoe's lace hat that her mother gave her. Opoe is furious over this but at the end of the story gives the hat to Annie.

les de Leeuw

This is Annie's father. Les is afraid of what will happen to him and his family because of Hitler and the hate for all Jews. Les wants to go to America but doesn't because his wife refuses to go.

Sophie

Sophie is Annie's mother. Sophie doesn't appear to understand that Hitler wishes to kill all Jews. She doesn't want to go to America because she will have to start a new life there. Sophie eventually dies in a hospital. It is said that it was good that Sophie died when she did because the other patients were taken on trains the next day.



Rachel

Rachel is Annie's oldest sister. Rachel was a teacher before Hitler outlawed Jews working. Rachel stays behind to take care of her mother when the others go into hiding. Rachel comes to visit the girls while they live at the Oosterveld household but Rachel makes Annie angry by fussing over Annie's appearance.

Dientje Oosterveld

Dientje is Johan's wife. She is very frightened by the Germans and the thought of being caught. It seems that she loves the girls very much but takes them to the underground hiding place when Johan leaves the house because Dientje is worried about being found out.

Dini Hannink

Dini Hannink is the one that meets Annie when she first gets off the bus in Usselo. Dini is also the character that comes to warn the Oosterveld house when the Germans are planning a house to house search. Dini makes Annie a snowman outside in the snow when Annie is unable to go out.

Mimi

Mimi is a little girl about the same age as Annie. Mimi is being hidden by a farmer not far from the Oostervelds. Annie and Mimi don't play with each other when they meet because they are too shy. Mimi is found by the Germans and taken to a camp.



Objects/Places

Closet

This is where Johan makes a small hiding place for Sini and Annie. It is not very big and someone has to be there to put things back on the shelves after the girls are inside. This close space, while being almost torture because of the size, is very likely what helps to keep the girls alive and free of the Germans.

America

This is where Annie's father wants to go in the beginning of the story but Annie's mother refuses. The allied troops come to fight the German forces from America, among other places. When Annie is grown her and her family go to America.

War and Peace

This is the book that Mrs. Oosterveld borrows from the parsonage for the girls to read after they have begged for something to read. War and Peace is a rather big book and Annie puts it in a drawer on top of Opoe's lace cap that belonged to Opoe's mother.

Lace Cap

This is the only possession that Opoe has left from her mother. Opoe becomes very upset when Annie lays a large copy of War and Peace on the hat. Opoe later gives the cap to Annie and tells her to be careful with it and remember what happened with the big book.

Radio

No one is allowed to have radios although Johan hid his. Johan and Sini enjoy listening to the radio in secret so that they know what is going on in the war. When the Germans move into the Oosterveld house Johan has to hide the radio until the men leave.

Star

The Jews are required to register and wear a star on their chest. Only children under the age of six don't have to wear a star. Annie says she doesn't mind wearing the star when it is first introduced.



Concentration Camps

It is to the concentration camps that many of the Jews are sent to work. Annie believes at the front of the story that the Jews go here and Hitler's soldiers are able to hit and beat the Jews anytime they want. It isn't until Annie reads an underground newspaper that she learns that many of the people in the concentration camps are told to shower and when in the big showers they are gassed and then burned alive. The main concentration camp talked about in the story is Mauthausen.

Winterswijk

Winterswijk is the town that Annie and her family lived in before they had to go into hiding. It is here that Annie had went to school and where she lived when the story begins.

Usselo

Usselo is the town where Sini and Annie go to hide with Gentile families. The first family that they go to live with here is the Hannink family and the second is the Oostervelds. It is here in Usselo that several bombs drop and the bakery, along with other buildings are destroyed.

Monopoly

Annie has a birthday and is given a Monopoly game. She plays this game with Sini. At the time Annie says that this is a wonderful birthday.



Themes

The Desire to Live

The desire to live comes into play in the story early on. There are some Jews who don't seem to fully realize the severity of the situation they are in until it is too late for them to try and leave to try and find some place safer, such as America. Annie's father seemed to know early on that Hitler would be a torment to every Jew if possible and that they should leave, but Annie's mother didn't want to go anywhere new to start over and said that everything would be fine. There are many people in the story who are seen leaving for America and other places in order to try and stay alive. In truth some of the Jews who volunteered to go to the work camps where they were told they would be treated well were only trying to stay alive.

The desire to live is seen greatly in Annie and her sister Sini since the point of view in the story comes from Annie. Sini hates being locked up and from Annie's perception of Sini it appears that staying locked away is taking a physical and emotional toll on Sini. The question soon becomes is it worth more to live in hiding or to die out in the open for Sini. Fortunately at about the time that Sini appears to be near breaking the war is very close to being over and Sini is able to take a job outside the home posing as a Gentile maid.

The desire to live is also seen from those hiding the Jews. They have great amounts of fear stemming from the secret that they are carrying because they know they too will die if Jews are discovered in their homes. The German soldiers also have a desire to live and when it becomes clear that they are no longer safe in this town they take every horse and cart they can find so that they can run faster.

Living Versus Surviving

There is a theme of living versus surviving that is quickly put into play in the story. The Jews in the story know that they are no longer safe out in the open and will be taken to the camps if they are found and so many of them go into hiding. If a person has to hide for a short period of time there may not be lasting effects but these Jews had to hide for years. Sini says at the beginning of the story, in regards to hiding, "Sitting somewhere in a room is no life" (page 28). This shows early on that many of them think that going into hiding was not an alternative that they were going to choose if they felt they had any other choice.

After Annie and Sini go into hiding Annie walks by windows once in a while and notices the changes in the trees outside. This gives an indication of the amount of time that has passed while she has been shut up in the house. Sini soon says that Annie's legs are beginning to look funny and after many more months of being forced to hide Annie's legs soon begin to stop working until she has to be carried a great deal by Johan. Annie



and Sini are surviving while at the Hannink's and the Oostervelds but it becomes clear that survival doesn't equal living. When Annie thinks that she has given herself away by coming down stairs where the German soldier is sitting Annie goes upstairs and waits, not even being quiet.

The Importance of Family

Annie is a small girl. Her point of view in the story is that of a child and so the importance of family is seen in many different ways. Annie's family tries very hard to stay together but when it becomes apparent that they must go separate ways in order to survive it seems to be the connection between Sini and Annie that help them a great deal. They are sisters and so while the bond between them seems to be strong it is obvious that they are still sisters and are prone to fighting at times. Annie will admit that she picks fights with Sini at times in order to get Sini to say something.

The Oosterveld family takes Annie and Sini in and in more than one way this family will become their own. They will be allowed to call the grandmother in the home Opoe, which is Dutch for Grandmother. When Annie is much older and the war is over Opoe will give Annie the only thing Opoe has left from her mother, a lace cap. This cap had been placed in a drawer and was very precious to Opoe. It is significant that this item is given to Annie, as if she Opoe's heir. Johan and his wife won't want the girls to leave after the war since they became so used to each other. Without the family bond that had been developed here it is possible that things could have turned out very different for Annie and Sini.

At various points in the story the girls become very despondent and depressed from being cooped away from the world and knowing that they are being looked for to be killed. One of the things in the story that Annie mentions being very happy to receive is any word from her oldest sister or their father. There is one time in the story when Annie's oldest sister is able to visit. This is very dangerous but seems to lift both of the girl's spirits to a great extent.

Style

Point of View

The point of view in the story is written in first person from the point of view of Annie. The point of view is past tense and while much of the story is told from the point of view of a little girl, Annie, there is a lot of historical facts that are included in the story and dates. The point of view in the story will almost seem to change because Annie is so young when Hitler begins to amass his armies. Annie is just a little girl at the beginning of the story that is certain that they are safe because they are so far from Hitler and the Jews that are being put into prisons. For a portion of the story Annie appears to think that the "work camps" that the Jews are being sent to are actual camps and it makes an impression on her when she realizes that they aren't camps but rather prisons. The war seen from the point of view of a child is very different. When Annie is talking to her sister, Sini, about the hiding Annie says she doesn't think that they could beat her so badly to make hiding all the time worth it. It isn't until they have been hid for an extended period of time that Annie, now around the age of 11 reads an underground newspaper and realizes that the Jews in the camps are killed.

This point of view shows the innocence of a child and the way that the war influences her. This personal point of view will also show how a child is still a child regardless of the dangers that they are going through. Annie thinks that it would be marvelous fun to be in the underground cave outback that is being built for the Jews that the families are hiding, but soon Annie is forced into the hole for a day and it is clear that Annie quickly changes her mind.

Setting

The story takes place starting in the year 1933 and goes until the area that Annie and her sister were hiding in Holand is overtaken by Canadian forces thus freeing the Jews. There is a little description given of the outside of the house because Annie is able to look out of a window once in a while. These times are so rare that the scenery changes vastly between times she sees the trees and these vast changes are relayed to the reader. Most of the setting that is described in the book is that of what the main character, Annie, gets to see. There is the small hiding place that Annie and her sister, Sini, are kept in while at one house. Then there is the cave outback of the Hannick house where Sini and Annie are forced to stay at two different times in the story. The Oosterveld family home is where Sini and Annie stay for three years and so this is where the majority of the book takes place.

There are brief explanations of other places in the book that are explained and the way that the people are treated when they go into town is also looked at in some detail. The fact that the Jews cannot go to town and have to wear a star on their clothing is explained from the point of view of Annie. Her home before the war is explained and



there is a lot of detail given to the small little room that Johan built for the girls to hide in. This is not important for any other reason than because this room was both torture and life saving. The room was extremely small so that the soldiers would not notice it, but it was also what kept the girls alive.

Language and Meaning

The story was written on a level that very young readers can grasp and understand what is going on despite the fact that it is about the Holocaust. This is due largely to the fact that the point of view in the story is that of a little girl. There are times in the story when the main characters are talking to each other about words in the English language that they want to learn for when they are saved or when they go to America. The language in the story will change slightly from when Annie is first introduced until later in the story when she is saved. This can be attributed to the fact that Annie is six when the story begins but is twelve when the Canadian soldiers arrive. This change is shown partially in what Annie knows and how she puts information together. Annie is aware at the beginning of the story that the German soldiers are bad to an extent and that Hitler isn't nice. Annie also knows that the German soldiers are allowed to beat Jews whenever they want. It shows much of her growth when Annie is able to understand the fact that the Jews aren't just beat, that they are taken and killed.

While the language is fairly straightforward and from the point of view of a young child, there may be words and phrases that aren't immediately recognizable for young readers. Part of this may be due to the difference in culture and time but part of it can also stem from the fact that the Oosterveld family spoke differently than Annie's family and so their speech differences are spelled out so that the reader will be able to understand better the differences in the two cultures.

Structure

The Upstairs Room consists of one hundred and ninety-six pages. There are twelve chapters in the book. The chapters will be close to being the same length with some of the chapters taking up to twenty pages and some taking as few as twelve pages. These chapters are numbered but there is no index in the front of the book and there is no title given to the chapters. In addition to the individual chapters in the book there is a Postscript in the back of the book that takes up only three pages. The first paragraphs of the postscript tells about the immediate weeks following the war and Annie's family being brought back together. After this information the story tells about the family leaving for America and then ends with Annie coming back to see Johan and Opoe. Annie is able to bring her children and show them the small hole that she had climbed into as a child.

In the front of the book there is an introduction that is numbered with Roman Numerals. This introduction gives historical information about the way that Hitler began the war and how the Nazi party came to power. It also explains about the critical errors that

Hitler made that would lead to the Nazi party downfall. The last sentence of the introduction explains that *The Upstairs Room* is a story about the Jews that suffered because of the events that Hitler helped to set into motion.



Quotes

"And it must be far away, for Uncle Bram said that Hitler would never be able to reach them in America." Chapter 1: Page 4

"Lots of them, all yelling: 'Jew, Jew, ugly mole, Stick your face in a dirty hole. Stick your face in a mustard pot, By tomorrow Jew will rot!'" Chapter 1: Page 14

"A concentration camp, people called it, where Hitler told his soldiers to beat Jews any time they felt like it." Chapter 2: Page 18

"Mother never understood that Hitler is after the Jews. If she had, we would've gone to America when Father wanted to." Chapter 4: Page 47

"If they found us, they'd punish the Hanninks and take us away to Mauthausen or to a camp in Poland." Chapter 4: Page 54

"Every day we'd have to practice getting in and out, Johan said, until it took us no time." Chapter 5: Page 78

"Something was wrong with my legs, Sini said." Chapter 7: Page 105

"But I hadn't know that they were like this, that Hitler had told his soldiers to murder Jews, any time they felt like it." Chapter 7: Page 112

"The Germans found 'em. They took everybody in the house away on the truck." Chapter 10: Page 151

"I'll bet they don't even know that Hitler is a maniac." Chapter 10: Page 164

"I couldn't move. My legs hurt so." Chapter 11: Page 176

"I haven't been outside for so long that I don't even want to go." Chapter 12: Page 185

"Johan had left the hiding place intact. 'That's the place Mommy used to crawl into.' I said." Postscript: Page 196



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the differences and similarities between Sini and Annie. What major differences would there have been in the story had it been told from Sini's point of view rather than Annie's?

Explain why Dientje was so quick to take the girls back to the underground hiding cave at the Hanninks when Johan was gone from the house? What does this say about Dientje's character? Explain.

Why did Annie become so upset when Rachel started talking about ironing Annie's dress and offering to wash Annie's face?

Was it understandable that Annie's father left his family to go into hiding before the children were gone? Why did he chose not to stay with his wife?

Why was Sophie so against coming to America? Why did she believe they would be safe?

Describe the star that the Jews had to wear on their chest. Speculate on the different things that this symbol meant to different people. What other symbol could the Jews have been made to wear?

Why did Annie begin to cry at the end of the story when she started to climb back into the hiding hole in the closet? What does this convey?

Would Annie's stay in the room have been easier or harder without Sini? Would Sini's time have been harder or easier without Annie? Explain your answers.