

The War That Saved My Life Study Guide

**The War That Saved My Life by Kimberly Brubaker
Bradley**

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Plot Summary

"The War That Saved My Life" by Kimberly Brubaker Bradley is told in first person from the perspective of it's ten-year-old protagonist, Ada Smith, as she recalls her time during WWII.

Born with a clubfoot and told by her mother she was a worthless cripple, Ada didn't know what sort of life she was missing. When an order came to evacuate children from London into the English countryside Ada decided she would not let her brother go alone even though she'd lived her entire life locked in her family's one-room apartment. In this uplifting story Ada learns that even with her handicap she is able to do anything to which she sets her mind. With the help of her guardian, Ada even learns that she is worthy of love and happiness.

Because she wanted to be able to go to her little brother Jamie if he needed her, Ada began teaching herself to walk when she learned he would be going to school. This skill became lifesaving when she learned the children of London were being evacuated to the country. Although her abusive mother hadn't intended to send Ada away, Ada saw her chance to escape and left with Jamie early one morning before their mother woke. In the small village of Kent Ada and Jamie were passed over all of the residents who were supposed to take in evacuees because they were dirty. For this reason Lady Thorton, head of the village's Women's Volunteer Service, took the two to Susan Smith.

Before he and Ada went inside the house Jamie heard Miss Smith tell Lady Thorton that she didn't want any children. Because Ada had seen a pony on the property she got the feeling that that was where they were supposed to live. After Lady Thorton left the children with Miss Smith, a lady she described as not being very nice, Miss Smith helped them bathe, fed them, gave them clean clothes, and cleaned and bandaged Ada's bad foot. The next day she took them to a doctor who gave Ada crutches and told Miss Smith that with surgery Ada could walk more normally.

Ada and Jamie spent almost a year with Miss Smith. During this time Ada began to heal from the years of abuse she had suffered at her mother's hands. She not only began to make friends but also began to help her guardian through her own depression. Additionally, Ada also helped care for the soldiers who were brought to Kent and even caught a spy trying to infiltrate into England through Kent.

Ada's worst nightmare came true when her mother arrived to take Ada and Jamie home after the government sent her a letter telling her she needed to pay 19 shillings a week if they stayed in the country. At her mother's apartment Ada's mother told her she would stop walking and going out. The first night her mother stole Ada's crutches and shoes while Ada slept. In the morning Ada confronted her mother. She got her to admit she didn't want Ada and Jamie and would be happy if they left - she just didn't want to have to pay for them. Ada told her mother they would be gone in the morning.



Ada planned to take Jamie and go back to Susan's house but the city was bombed that night. When they came out of the bomb shelter that night they were surprised to see Susan walking through the rubble, looking for them. She took them back to Kent to discover that her house had been destroyed by a bomb. Villagers who were picking through the rubble told Susan and the children that the air raid sirens never went off. There were afraid Susan and the children were killed. Susan thanked Jamie and Ada for saving her life. Ada told her they were now even.



Chapters 1-3

Summary

In Chapter 1, Ada's mam screamed at her and slapped her because Ada was talking to Stephen White out the window. Mam would not allow Ada outside because she had a crippled foot. As her mother talked to her Ada slid over the smear of blood she left on the floor so her mother wouldn't see it. Her mother ordered Ada to make tea and fix dinner.

Ada tells the reader that her story started four years ago when World War II began. Although she knew a little bit about Hitler, Ada was most concerned with a war she started that summer with her brother. Because Jamie was not crippled like Ada he was allowed to go outside and play with other children. Ada hated being alone in the apartment. One day she was so afraid of him leaving her that she tied him up to make him stay with her. When he woke up and found that he was tied he began crying. Ada felt as if she was treating him like their Mam treated her. She decided the answer was to teach herself to walk so she'd be able to go out like Jamie did. Ada believed that if she could walk she mother wouldn't hate her so much. She explains at the end of the chapter that it was the beginning of the war with Hitler that set her free.

In Chapter 2 Ada began trying to walk the same day she decided that was what she needed to do. She explains to her reader that her biggest challenge in walking was being able to put her full weight on her bad foot. She struggled to try to walk, falling on each attempt. She didn't stop until the skin on her bad foot tore. She explained her second day was even worse than the first because her left leg was sore and her right foot hadn't healed, so she concentrated on trying to stand.

Ada hoped if she learned to walk her mother would accept her. She sometimes went even further in her dreams and hoped her mother would be proud of her. Because she couldn't go out, she depended on Jamie to tell her what life was like outside their apartment. Jamie began stealing things from the shops to show Ada what they were like. One day he was caught trying to steal a chop. Their Mam blamed Ada for his bad behavior. Mam moved to hit Ada, but Ada stood to dodge the blow. Mam was angry that Ada had learned to stand and made her crawl into the cabinet under the sink and stay there all night as a punishment.

Despite her mother's anger, Ada continued to teach herself how to walk. One day Jamie came home with the news that all the kids in London were leaving. Mam explained the children were being evacuated from London because it was feared Hitler would bomb the city. Mam said she hadn't decided if she was going to send Jamie but figured she would because it would be one less mouth to feed. Mam said Ada wouldn't be going because no one would want her. After Mam left Ada comforted Jamie who was upset they were going to be separated. She told him they would be leaving together.



In Chapter 3 Jamie and Ada set off early Friday morning before Mam was awake. Jamie was impressed that Ada was able to stand and walk. She struggled to make the walk to Jamie's school and collapsed when she reached it. They had to walk another half mile to the train station but Stephen White offered to carry Ada on his back. When he first saw her he told her he didn't think she'd be coming. He explained his mother had told him there were special places for people like Ada. Stephen had thought Ada was retarded. He didn't realize she only had a bad foot. At the train station Stephen asked why Ada's Mam kept her locked up if the only thing wrong with her was a bad foot. Ada tried to explain that her Mam believed Ada had done something bad to make her foot deformed but Stephen said the idea was crazy.

Analysis

The story is told from the first person point of view of Ada. This point of view makes the story more powerful as Ada appears to be telling it directly to her reader. In fact, there are places where Ada speaks to her reader directly. When she explains why walking was so difficult for her she says: "I want you to understand what the problem was" (8). The "you" to whom she refers to the reader indicating that it is important to her that the reader completely understands her issues. This makes the reader feel as if Ada were a new friend talking to him and telling her story.

The conflict in this story — Ada's abuse by her mother — is set up in this section of the novel. Because Ada was born with a bad foot her Mam believes she should be punished by keeping her locked up in the family's apartment. She tells Ada no one wants to see her crippled foot, she's ashamed of Ada and insists that no one would accept Ada either. Because she's never allowed out of the apartment Ada has no way of knowing if what her mother tells her is true or not.

Because this story is set in the time period of World War II and follows real events of the war it can be classified as historical fiction. The children of London were evacuated from that city to stay in the country because it was believed Hitler would bomb the larger cities, not the small villages. Ada, Jamie and their Mam, however, are fictional characters made up by the author. Through the course of Ada's story the reader will learn a good deal about life in England during World War II.

Because Ada's true handicap is her mother's act of keeping her away from society more than her clubfoot, one of the themes of the novel is the dangers of seclusion. Ada's mother has made her daughter's situation worse by keeping her inside, away from other people. She has not encouraged her to try to walk but has reinforced the idea that because she is a cripple Ada will never be any good to anyone. Ada's strength of character makes her decide to learn to walk on her own, even though it makes her mother angry.

The title of the novel is a paradox, a statement that appears to make no sense even though it turns out to be correct, and it appears the paradox will continue throughout the book. Ada says it is World War II that saved her, a contradiction since most people



associate war with death and destruction. It appears she is correct in saying that the war saved her because it gives her the opportunity to escape from her abusive mother.

A few significant symbols are introduced in this section of the novel. The first symbol is Ada's bad foot. Ada's Mam has led Ada to believe that the foot is a symbol of evil and shame. She tells Ada it is because she is bad that she has a bad foot. Another symbol is the smear of blood that Ada leaves on the floor while she is trying to learn how to walk. This blood smear is a symbol of Ada's determination and strong spirit. A final symbol in this section is the cabinet under the sink. This cabinet is used to punish Ada even if the punishment is unfair. Notice that Mam seems to enjoy making Ada stay in the cabinet.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author chooses to use the first person point of view for this story? How does it strengthen the story when Ada addresses her reader directly?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Mam won't arrange for Ada to go away to the country along with Jamie?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ada feel so bad after she ties Jamie up in an attempt to keep him in the apartment with her? Why does his reaction prompt her to decide to learn to walk?

Vocabulary

imp, stoops, venture, runt, clench, calloused, subsided



Chapters 4-7

Summary

In Chapter 4, even though the train ride was miserable Ada was amazed when they left the city and she saw grass for the first time. She was really awed when she saw a girl riding a pony, racing the train. When the girl and pony jumped a stone wall Ada told herself and Jamie that she would do that one day. When Jamie laughed Ada asked why she wouldn't be able to ride a pony. He admitted she had taught herself to walk pretty well. Ada didn't share with him how much that day's walking had hurt.

In Chapter 5, when they finally stopped at a train station an iron faced woman threatened to make all the children stay on the train but the teacher ordered them off so they could use the restroom and get something to eat and drink. Jamie had to explain to Ada how to use the bathroom as she'd never been allowed to use the common restrooms in their apartment. While she was in the bathroom Ada saw her reflection in the mirror. She was surprised that she didn't look like the other girls. She was dirty and her hair was matted and tangled.

Ada compared the process in which the families choose which children they would take to the way women would choose fish at the fishmonger's store across the street from her apartment. The people complained because the city children weren't shiny and clean like the children in the village. In fact, Jamie and Ada were still left when all the families were gone. One older lady had tried to take just Jamie but Ada had discouraged the woman from taking him because she didn't want them to be separated.

In Chapter 6, the iron faced lady took Ada and Jamie to Susan Smith's house. She noticed Ada's pain when she tried to walk. Ada lied and told her the foot had been run over by a brewer's cart. When Ada fell she expected the woman to beat her but instead she picked Ada up and carried her to an automobile.

Ada continues her story by saying that when they arrived at Miss Smith's house Jamie listened in on the iron faced woman's discussion with Miss Smith. He reported back to Ada that Miss Smith didn't want them. When a pony pushed its head between the bushes near the house Ada got a feeling that was where she and Jamie were supposed to be. She asked Jamie to help her to the house. The iron faced woman and Miss Smith were still arguing but the iron faced woman interrupted the argument to introduce the children to Miss Smith. Ada lied and said their last name was Hitler, then she said it was Smith. The iron faced woman said she'd find out for sure from the teacher and left the children there. Miss Smith told Ada and Jamie she didn't know anything about taking care of children.

In Chapter 7, Miss Smith insisted they both take baths right away when she found a louse in Ada's hair. After they were finished with their baths Miss Smith asked where their clean clothes were. Still wrapped in a towel Ada said they hadn't brought anything



else. She tucked her bad foot behind her good one and Miss Smith noticed that Ada had a clubfoot. Miss Smith made a motion with her hand toward Ada and Ada ducked as if she expected to be hit. Miss Smith recognized Ada's reaction and told her she wasn't going to hit her. She knelt and examined Ada's foot. Ada couldn't handle the closeness and made herself go away inside her head. After Miss Smith finished examining Ada's foot she promised to take Ada to the doctor the following day. Ada explains that when Jamie told Miss Smith nice people didn't like Ada because of her foot Miss Smith laughed and said it was lucky that she wasn't a nice person.

Miss Smith found the two clothes to wear, combed out Ada's hair and fixed dinner for them. She apologized because eggs were all she had but to Ada it was more than she was used to. Miss Smith questioned Ada and Jamie while they ate. When Jamie commented that Ada didn't go to school because of her foot Miss Smith replied, "That foot's a long way from her brain" (42). Ada describes the way that Miss Smith began to realize that they really didn't know their last names or how old they were as she continued to talk to them. Before she went to sleep that night Ada asked Miss Smith to whom the pony belonged. Miss Smith said the pony, who was named Butter, was her's, that Becky had given it to her.

Analysis

In this section Ada and Jamie are found a place to live even though the person who is forced to take them in doesn't seem too happy about being saddled with two children. One of the things of particular to notice in this section is the way the author plays with the idea of "nice people" and who it is who qualifies as a nice person. Mam has long told Ada and Jamie that "nice people" didn't want to look at Ada's foot and wouldn't stand for her to be around them. Jamie regurgitates this belief when the iron faced woman tells them not to worry because no one took them. The iron faced woman assures Jamie that Miss Smith "isn't that nice" (33) indicating that she isn't so stuck up or shallow minded that she would refuse Ada because she is handicapped. When Jamie tells Miss Smith that most nice people didn't want them because of Ada's foot Miss Smith replies "'You're in luck, then,' she said, 'because I am not a nice person at all'" (41).

Notice this idea of Miss Smith not being nice is repeated throughout parts of Chapter 7 to emphasize how nice Miss Smith is being to Ada and Jamie. The author uses the sentence structure "She was not a nice person, but..." in several places to describe how Miss Smith cleans up the floor where Ada's bad foot has bled onto it, how she bandages and cares for the foot, how she fixes dinner for the children, provides them with clean clothes, and tucks them into a clean bed with sheets and blankets.

Ada is unaccustomed to someone being as nice as Miss Smith actually is to her. It is in this section that the reader begins to see that way that the abuse Ada has received at the hands of her mother has affected her. Because she has bled on the bathroom floor Ada assumes that Miss Smith is going to hit her. Miss Smith recognizes right away that Ada's reaction indicates how often Ada has been hit for things that were often beyond her control. Notice also how Ada becomes so uncomfortable when Miss Smith touches



her bad foot that she has to go “away into her head” in order to bear Miss Smith touching her.

Another thing the reader should remember in this section of the novel is Miss Smith’s reaction to Jamie’s statement that Ada couldn’t go to school because of her bad foot. “That foot’s a long way from her brain” (42) Miss Smith replied indicating that she did not believe the bad foot was an adequate excuse for Ada’s mother to keep her out of school.

In this section it appears that not only Ada but also Miss Smith has lived her life in seclusion to some extent. Ada’s seclusion was forced on her by her mother. People believed that she was retarded and a threat to herself and others. They didn’t know that she was just suffering with a clubfoot. As a result, Ada doesn’t know what grass is; she doesn’t know how to use a toilet; she’s never been told her own last name or even how old she is. This results of this forced seclusion will become increasingly apparent as the novel progresses.

Miss Smith is also secluded from society but it appears that she chooses to alienate herself. Ada senses the woman is lying when she tells the iron faced woman that she didn’t know that the war had started or that she was supposed to go that day to take in children from the city. Even though she was forced to stay in her apartment, even Ada knew there was a war going on. Notice also the frustration the iron faced lady seems to exhibit when they arrive at Miss Smith’s house to find all of the shades drawn and the door shut. The iron faced lady seems frustrated with Miss Smith’s attempts to isolate herself.

Remember also Ada’s promise to herself and to Jamie when she sees the girl riding the pony that one day she will do that. When she sees the pony at Miss Smith’s house Ada believes that is where she and Jamie were meant to be. Though Ada may be physically crippled with her bad foot and emotionally fragile because of her mother’s abuse she still has enough strength in her to know what she wants and to put herself in a position to get it.

Notice in this section of the novel that Ada seems to be more comfortable with lies than with the truth. When people ask what happened to her foot she tells them it was run over by a brewer’s cart. When she’s asked what her last name is she obviously is lying when she says that it is Hitler. A short while later Ada says their last name is Smith but because she’s already lied so much Miss Smith doesn’t believe her.

Finally, in this section of the novel Stephen White admits to Ada he had prejudged her based on information he’d gotten from others. He had thought she was mentally handicapped because she never left the apartment. Even though he’d talked to her before through the window, he couldn’t really understand what she was saying and believed it was only gibberish. Once he sees Ada is handicapped only with a clubfoot he quickly corrects his opinion of her based on the truth. He tells her that her Mam was crazy for keeping her locked up.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the way the author presents how nice Miss Smith is actually being to Ada and Jamie. Why do you think that both the iron faced lady and Miss Smith tell Jamie that Miss Smith isn't nice when he makes the comment about nice people not wanting to take in a child with a bad foot?

Discussion Question 2

Consider what Ada goes through in order to get herself and Jamie away from their mother. Do you think you would have her mental or physical strength? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss how disturbed Ada is when Miss Smith tries to handle her bad foot. Why do you think Ada is so troubled by having someone touch her foot that she has to mentally and emotionally separate herself from the situation?

Vocabulary

vibrant, mesmerized, rector, surged, curdle, quay, appalled, indeterminate, fishmonger, wholesome, scuttled, billeting, rampant, rigid, impudent, posh, parcels



Chapters 8-10

Summary

In Chapter 8, Ada and Jamie woke up before Miss Smith. Ada fixed Jamie breakfast and then went outside even though Jamie argued with her and told her it wasn't allowed. Ada told him she believed it was her reward for being so brave. She went directly to the pony putting her arms around his neck and petting him. She wasn't sure how to get onto the pony so she just sat in the grass and watched him as he grazed. She fell asleep in the grass. Miss Smith woke her up telling her she was sunburned and asking why she hadn't woken her up. Miss Smith helped Ada inside. While Ada and Jamie ate Miss Smith noted how dirty Ada's bandage was. Jamie explained he'd tried to make Ada stay inside but Miss Smith told him Ada didn't have to stay in, they just needed to find a better way to keep her foot protected.

The doctor told Miss Smith both Ada and Jamie were malnourished, had the skin disease impetigo and that Ada had the beginning of rickets, a bone disease caused by a lack of vitamin D. Although Ada didn't want him to look at her foot Miss Smith made Ada show the doctor. He hadn't seen many clubfeet and said most were corrected in infancy. As the doctor handled her foot, Ada went to the place inside her head until Miss Smith called her back. She told Ada that the doctor believed a specialist might be able to correct her foot with an operation. Ada didn't understand what they were saying but answered as if she did understand. Miss Smith said they would write to Mam and ask her permission for Ada to have the operation. The doctor also provided Ada with a set of crutches so it was easier for her to walk. Both the doctor and Miss Smith were surprised when Ada actually smiled because she could walk without hurting using the crutches.

Using her crutches, Ada was able to go shopping with Miss Smith. She was surprised no one made her leave the stores or even made a comment about her bad foot. Ada and Jamie decided Miss Smith was rich when she went to bank and was given money. She bought them new clothes and a pair of shoes for Ada even though Ada could wear only one of the shoes. On the way home Jamie talked about the possibility they could fix Ada's foot. Ada thought he was a fool but smiled anyway.

In Chapter 9, when they arrived home Ada asked Miss Smith if she wanted her to fix tea and dinner. Miss Smith said no and went to fixing dinner herself. Jamie was tired and didn't want to eat anything but ham. Ada got frustrated with him for acting so badly. She was surprised when Miss Smith corrected her for trying to force Jamie to eat. Miss Smith said it was time for Jamie's bath, then bed. Ada was so angry with Jamie she stayed downstairs and cleaned up the mess from dinner while she listened to him scream upstairs.

Ada woke up frightened that night. Miss Smith spoke to her from a chair where she'd been sleeping next to Jamie. She said something had woken her up as well. She told Ada she was surprised she'd slept in the chair for so long because she didn't sleep



good at night since Becky had died three years ago. She explained to Ada she hadn't wanted to take in any children because her depression was always so much worse in the fall. She explained it had nothing to do with Ada and Jamie personally. She told Ada that Becky had been her best friend. They had met at the university. Becky had left Miss Smith her house. Ada suggested to Miss Smith she move into the bed with them. The lady started to refuse but then slid under the covers.

In the morning Miss Smith discovered that Jamie had wet the bed. Ada started to be angry with Jamie but Miss Smith stopped her by telling them the sheets would wash. They'd get a set of rubber sheets in case it happened again. When Ada commented that Miss Smith was rich she told them she was living off the money she'd gotten from selling Becky's hunters, horses used for hunting. While they ate breakfast that morning they listened to the radio. It was announced that Germany and England were at war. Miss Smith said that meant the bombing would begin.

In Chapter 10 Miss Smith tried to comfort Ada and Jamie by telling them the war would be over soon and they'd be able to go home. Jamie cried and said he wanted to go home now but Ada wondered what he was thinking. The idea of going home panicked her. Later she went outside. While she was laying in the field Butter walked up to her and blew on her neck. Later that day when Ada and Jamie went in for supper Miss Smith commented on how dirty they were. She told them they'd have a bath each night so they didn't get mud on the sheets. Jamie and Ada looked at each other. Ada finally asked what sheets were. Jamie cried again that night and wanted to go home. Ada made up her mind she'd never go home. She'd run away again if she had to.

Analysis

Interesting in this section of the story is how different Jamie and Ada feel about going home. Because Jamie could run about with other children, home wasn't so bad for him. He had more than just his mother as a companion. Ada, however, was stuck in one room with no way of getting around. Since she's been away from home she has been able to enjoy a little bit of freedom. She can walk with her crutches and she can go outside. Her position has improved drastically. She knows if she is forced to go back home she'll lose everything she's worked for.

Notice in this section how Ada reacts when Jamie refuses to eat. Her reaction is comparable to the time that she tried to tie Jamie up to keep him from leaving the house. She acts like their Mam. She holds Jamie down and tries to force the food into him. Even though Ada is unsure of Miss Smith's intentions and doesn't trust her yet, she knows that they shouldn't refuse the chance to eat good food when it is offered. The thoughts that go through Ada's mind when she cleans up the kitchen while Miss Smith is upstairs with Jamie lighten the tense situation. "I could hear Jamie screaming upstairs. Miss Smith was either bathing him or slaughtering him; either was fine by me" (57-58).

In this section the reader learns a bit more about Miss Smith and why she didn't want to take in any children. She apparently suffers from a form of depression made worse by



the short cold days of the winter. She tells Ada she hasn't slept well for three years, since Becky died. The lack of sleep would make Miss Smith feel even more depressed. In Miss Smith's case she believes that she should stay away from people and alienates herself because of her depression. She thinks she's not good enough to take care of children properly because of her own emotional disability. In this way Miss Smith and Ada have something in common even though Ada doesn't fully understand the similarity. Both believe, or have been taught to believe, that people don't want them around. For Miss Smith, having children forces her to be out more. For Ada, not being around her mother allows her to go out and realize that people don't shun her the way her mother always told her they would.

One of the results of Ada's isolation is that she is not familiar with many of the words that Miss Smith uses. Inside the apartment the only people she heard talk were Jamie, who is much younger than she and does not know things simply because of his age, and her Mam, who doesn't appear to be a terribly intelligent conversationalist. As a result of her limited vocabulary, Ada doesn't understand what the doctor says to her about her foot. She doesn't understand what an operation is or that there is a possibility of her foot being fixed. Miss Smith cuts herself off from asking the question the reader probably wants answered as well; Why didn't Ada's parents have her foot fixed when she was an infant and could have lived a normal life? While Ada doesn't grasp the idea that her foot could be normal, she is happy with the crutches and ease she has walking with them.

Notice the way that Ada describes the things for which she doesn't know the proper words. For instance the doctor was wearing glasses but she didn't know what they were so she described them as "funny things like panes of round window glass stuck in front of his eyes" (48). Notice also how Miss Smith assumed they'd been to a bank before when they had asked her about the place they'd gone where the man had given Miss Smith money. She doesn't realize how deprived the children actually are and how little they know about the world.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Ada and Jamie's ideas about going home. Why does Jamie want to go home so badly when the idea of home evokes panic in Ada?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the clash between Miss Smith, and Ada and Jamie as Miss Smith tries to talk to the children about things that are unfamiliar to them. Consider the situation both from the side of Miss Smith and the side of Ada and Jamie.

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Ada's parents didn't have her foot fixed when she was an infant?

Vocabulary

resolved, evacuees, gullet, flailing, chilblains, subside, surly, sonorous



Chapters 11-14

Summary

In Chapter 11, Ada narrates that three things of interest happened in the following week. First, Ada reports how she and Jamie made tea and took it to Miss Smith after she didn't get out of bed at all on Tuesday. Miss Smith told Ada she was being thoughtful for sugaring her tea the way she liked it. Ada wasn't sure if being thoughtful was good or bad. Miss Smith also learns in this section that Ada and Jamie's last name was really Smith.

The second thing of interest was that the Royal Air Force built a base across the road from Butter's pasture. Jamie snuck over to watch until an officer brought him home and told Miss Smith to keep him away.

Third, Billy White and some other evacuated children went back to London. When Miss Smith, Ada and Jamie went to town on Thursday to buy more food they saw Billy White, his sisters and their mother at the train station. Their mother said there hadn't been any bombs and that she couldn't stand being away from her children so they were going home.

During the conversation Billy's mother expressed her surprise that Ada was out in public. She said she thought Ada had been put in an asylum. Ada was hurt because she had waved at Billy's mother through the window and had always thought she was nice. Jamie distracted her by beginning to cry. He demanded to be taken home with them. Ada wondered for a moment if perhaps she really did want to go home.

The iron faced woman showed up and shushed Jamie. She told Miss Smith how so many simple minded people were taking their children back to London. Ada noticed the iron faced woman's daughter looking at her foot and told her it got hurt when her pony stepped on it. The girl caught her lie and told her it didn't hurt that much when a pony stepped on your foot because her's had stepped on her plenty of times. During her conversation with the iron faced woman Miss Smith learned that she would get reimbursed 19 shillings a week for keeping Ada and Jamie.

In Chapter 12, Ada shares with her reader that she'd been teaching herself how to ride Butter. She'd begun by just sitting on him. She'd rummaged around in the storeroom of the stables and found a bridle to fit him and a book showing how the bridle should fit. Even though Butter threw her off the first few times she got on him, she kept trying.

Ada finally confronted Jamie about his desire to go home. The confrontation came when they were talking about the meaning of Miss Smith's sighs and had decided she made the noise because she didn't like them. When Jamie said he wanted to go home Ada was filled with rage and asked him why. She told him that when they were at home she was hungry, alone and trapped. He cried because he believed things at home would be



different since Ada could walk with crutches. He asked if they were safe there. Ada said they were but even Jamie recognized she was lying because she never felt safe anywhere.

In Chapter 13, during their next trip to town Jamie, Ada and Miss Smith noticed a war poster that had been hung near the train station. As they discussed the wording on the poster Jamie pointed out Stephen White and a very old man were across the street. Ada went to say hello to Stephen. He introduced her to his guardian, Colonel Robert McPherson, who insisted that Stephen introduce them properly. He told Ada she should come over for tea. Ada tried to ask Stephen why he hadn't gone home with his family but he told her he'd explain it later.

Meanwhile, Jamie and Miss Smith were looking at another war poster. They agreed the wording on that poster was better. Later, Miss Smith poked fun at Ada by telling her in the words of one of the war posters: "'Your courage, your cheerfulness, your resolution'— she was saying it wrong. I scowled — 'will bring you victory, my dear'" (87). Even though Ada didn't ask what sort of victory she might win Miss Smith told her the victory she would receive would be peace.

In Chapter 14, the teacher visited to announce school would be starting soon. It was arranged that Jamie would go but the teacher discouraged Miss Smith from sending Ada because she couldn't even read yet. The teacher assumed Ada couldn't learn but Miss argued she just hadn't had a chance to learn. Ada cried after the teacher left even though she didn't understand why she was crying.

That night before bed Miss Smith began reading a book to Jamie and Ada. The next morning she offered to begin teaching Ada how to read. Ada made up excuses why she didn't want to read. She stayed by herself when Miss Smith went that afternoon to take Jamie to school. That was how she happened to be home alone when a horse jumped the stone wall into Butter's pasture.

Analysis

Ada finally confronts Jamie about his demands to go home. She is angry because she knows what going home will mean to her. She would rather go anywhere than back to the place where she was abused, hungry and not allowed her freedom. She is still suffering from the aftermath of the abuse she suffered for so long. She expects Miss Smith to be angry with her and doesn't understand the words that the older woman uses to try to explain to Ada she isn't angry. For instance, Miss Smith tells Ada she is being thoughtful when she brings her tea and remembers to sugar it the way that she noticed Miss Smith liked it. Ada again ducked believing Miss Smith was going to hit her and expected her to be angry about the use of the sugar. She still expects Miss Smith to treat her like her Mam did even though Miss Smith tells her again in Chapter 11: "'I'm not going to hit you,' she said. 'I wish you'd understand that. I'm neglecting you, certainly, but I won't hit you,'" (68).



Just as Ada taught herself to walk in private, she's teaching herself to ride in private. Her act of working toward her goal of riding Butter helps her increase her self-confidence. The actual act of riding the horse helps to strengthen her leg muscles. Ada also feels safe with the pony. She can give the pony affection and receive affection from it without feeling uncomfortable or pressured. The fact that she is comfortable with the pony and feels safe with it is shown but the fact that when she tries to get away from negative or uncomfortable things going on around her she concentrates on Butter.

Significant also in this section is Mrs. White's negative reaction to Ada when she meets her on the street. The author returns to the use of the word "nice" to describe the type of people who wouldn't accept Ada. Ada had always thought Mrs. White was nice because she waved to Ada from the street. In this section Mrs. White pulls her daughter away from Ada as if Ada might have a disease that was contagious. She tells Ada she thought she should be in an asylum and does not accept, even when Ada talks to her, that the girl's only problem is a bad foot. Ada is hurt and embarrassed by the woman's reaction to her. She reacts in the way that Ada's Mam had always told her that people would react to her.

Notice in this section as well that Ada continues to not know words for some common items. She agrees with Jamie when he argues he wants to go home because "At home I know the words for things" (82). In this section Ada describes a needle because she doesn't know the name for it "a shiny metal thing like a toothpick" (80) and even a book "a sort of square thing on a shelf. It had pieces of paper covered in writing I couldn't read, and partway through had a drawing of a horse's head with the leather pieces fastened round" (78). Ada and Jamie are also confused by the sighs that Miss Smith makes. They don't understand what the sound means. They decide it is a sound that indicates frustration or anger not realizing that her sighs probably have nothing to do with them.

Even though she doesn't completely understand why, Ada is particularly hurt when the teacher indicates that she not be sent to school. The teacher falls prey to the same line of thinking as many other people. She assumes that because Ada has a physical handicap that she is also mentally handicapped. Miss Smith tries to cheer Ada up by telling her that she is able to learn, just hasn't been given the chance but Ada is overwhelmed by all the things that she doesn't know. "What I knew, I'd learned looking out a single window. I knew nothing" (93). At this point in her voyage Ada refuses to let Miss Smith help her learn to read. Perhaps it is because Ada is afraid she will fail. In her mind that failure would be proof that she really was the incapable cripple that her mother had always told her that she was.

If the story were not told in the first person point of view from Ada's point of view, the reader would not understand as completely how scared Ada is even as she tries to convince her brother that they are safe. Readers wouldn't know how difficult it is for Ada to trust people, or even understand what they are saying to her.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Jamie want to go home so badly even though he must remember how cruel his mother was to him and Ada? Is it true that a known evil is sometimes considered better than the unknown?

Discussion Question 2

Think about being a mother during World War II. How would you feel about sending your children away for their safety? Would you be like one of the mothers who brought their children back to London? Give reasoning to support your decision.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way that Billy White's mother reacted to Ada. How did she show prejudice in her comments? Was Ada right in coming to the conclusion that Mrs. White wasn't as nice as she'd once thought?

Vocabulary

rummage, civilians, asylum, forbid, astride, revision, underestimate, coot, gnarled, peril, solicitor, skeptical, plait, educable



Chapters 15-17

Summary

In Chapter 15, Ada watched as a spooked horse threw its rider and then jumped the wall into Butter's pasture. Ada discovered the rider, the iron faced lady's daughter, was hurt. Ada went for the horse. Since her foot hurt so badly she decided to ride him instead of leading him back to his mistress. Just out of curiosity she jumped the stone wall, laughing as she realized what it was like to go fast without hurting. The girl didn't think she could ride alone so she got into the saddle behind Ada.

As they made their way back to the girl's house the two talked. Ada learned the girl's name was Margaret and that her mother was the head of the women's volunteer service. She worked hard because she didn't want to think about Jonathan, her son who had gone to train to be in the Royal Air Force. Maggie confided to Ada that her mother liked Jonathan better than she did her. Ada said her Mam was the same way. She hated Ada because of her clubfoot. Maggie looked at Ada's foot and said that was a stupid reason for Ada's mother to hate her. Maggie commented they had a foal born with a clubfoot but said that Grimes and the farrier had fixed it.

At the stable an elderly man came running. He left Ada with the horse while he took Maggie inside. Ada unsaddled the horse and put him in a stall. When Grimes returned he noticed Ada was bleeding through her bandage and asked if she had gotten hurt as well. She explained to him that she had a clubfoot. He didn't offer to fix it, only gave her a ride home in the car. Grimes was kind to her on the way home so Ada was not prepared for how angry Miss Smith was with her.

In Chapter 16 Ada learned that Miss Smith was angry with her because she was worried about her. Ada tried to explain to her how she had to help Maggie after she fell off her horse. When Ada had told the whole story Miss Smith said she didn't believe her. She sent Ada to her room with orders to stay there the rest of the day.

Jamie came home saying he hated school and that he didn't want to go back again. Miss Smith told him he had to go back if he wanted to learn to read.

Later, while Ada was riding Butter, Lady Thorton came to thank her. The story Lady Thorton told matched the one Ada had told the day before. Miss Smith looked stiff as she listened to Lady Thorton thank Ada. Lady Thorton had also brought clothes for Ada and Jamie. Those for Ada included a pair of riding jodhpurs. She also told Ada that if she had any questions about horses or riding she was welcome to ask Grimes. After she left, Miss Smith apologized for calling Ada a liar. When Ada said it was okay because she was a liar Miss Smith told Ada there was a difference between telling lies and being a liar. She explained liars were people who told lies to make themselves seem important. When Ada asked, Miss Smith said that Margaret went to a boarding school because other rich people went to those types of schools. Miss Smith had also gone to



boarding school on a scholarship because she was the daughter of a clergyman. When Ada connected church to the place where the bells were rung Miss Smith told her they would not be able to ring the bells any longer - they were only to be used to warn of an invasion.

In Chapter 17, Jamie cried and wet the bed after the first time he went to school. He told Miss Smith the next morning he wasn't going back to school but she warned him not to mess with her. While they were eating breakfast they were scared by a plane that crashed at the nearby airfield. They were surprised that Jamie recognized the plane by the sound of its engines and that he knew at least ten people could have been on board. Ada watched as Miss Smith comforted Jamie.

That week Ada and Miss Smith saw Lady Thornton in town and learned Maggie had gone back to school. Ada was sad because she wanted to know if Maggie would still like her if she hadn't just hit her head. Jamie continued to hate school. He skipped twice and Miss Smith started walking him to class. Ada couldn't understand why Jamie didn't like school but he wouldn't discuss it with her. He said he wanted to go home because he believed their mother wouldn't make him go to school. Meanwhile, Miss Smith was upset because their Mam had not responded to any of her letters. Ada asked if Miss Smith wanted their mother to come and take them home but Miss Smith indicated to Ada that she knew why she needed Mam to respond. Ada didn't but didn't say anything to Miss Smith.

Because the sun was setting earlier Miss Smith made blackout curtains for the windows in the house. The village was under blackout regulations so bombing planes wouldn't be able to see the lights of the village from the sky at night. Miss Smith was happy because she'd had her sewing machine out for the first time since Becky had died. She said she planned to make Ada and Jamie dressing gowns for the winter time. She also mentioned she might make Ada a velvet dress. Ada lied and told Miss Smith she didn't like velvet. When Miss Smith asked why Ada lied she said she didn't want Miss Smith making things for her but couldn't elaborate why.

Jamie changed the subject by asking Miss Smith if she'd make him something. He was happy when she told him she'd make him something stout and manly. Ada brought up the point they probably wouldn't still be there come winter time. She also mentioned to Miss Smith she would be happy to get rid of them. Even though Miss Smith tried to argue her point that she didn't want to get rid of them, Ada wouldn't listen and instead told Miss Smith that she also hated cocoa. That night Miss Smith noticed a welt on Jamie's wrist.

Analysis

As Ada lashes out at and pushes Miss Smith away, the reader can see how the abuse Ada received at the hands of her mother is keeping her from bonding. Whenever Miss Smith tries to do something nice for Ada, Ada pushes back against Miss Smith's attempts to help. For instance, Ada reacts badly when Miss Smith mentions that she'd



like to make Ada a velvet dress. The offer bothers Ada so much that she tells Miss Smith she doesn't like velvet even though she doesn't know what it is.

Notice that in her mind Ada believes that she "knows her limits" (120) and considers herself unworthy of anything that Miss Smith might make for her. Even though she has made her escape physically from her mother Ada still sees herself as the simple-minded girl who deserved no kindness. She thinks she is worthy of hand-me-downs but nothing else.

Meanwhile, Ada is perplexed by Jamie's ability to be affectionate toward Miss Smith. She hates the way he allows himself to be held and comforted after the plane crashed at the air base. Notice also that Jamie enjoys the book that Miss Smith is reading to them. She uses the book as a way to encourage him to continue going to school, so he can learn to read it by himself. In Ada's opinion the book is unrealistic because the characters are always having good luck by finding things just when they need them.

Also in this section the reader learns about blackout requirements, an aspect of life for those who lived during the time of World War II. It was required for families to cover their windows with heavy dark fabric to keep light inside their houses from showing outside their houses. Military officials believed that if bomber planes flying at night could not see the lights from a village or town they were less likely to bomb that area. One of the downfalls of these blackout curtains was that the residents had to learn to live in an unusually dark indoor environment. This darkness would be particularly difficult for people like Miss Smith who suffered with depression anyway.

Miss Smith learns a lesson about Ada in this section of the novel. Ada tells Miss Smith about helping Margaret Thorton home after the girl had fallen from her horse but Miss Smith chooses not to believe her. It is not until Lady Thorton, the iron faced lady, visits the following day that Miss Smith realizes her mistake and apologizes to Ada. It is at this point that Miss Smith tries to explain to Ada the difference between a liar and a person who lies. The differences in definitions don't seem to make much difference to Ada, she just knows that Miss Smith didn't believe her when she tried to tell her the truth about helping a fellow villager.

Even though Miss Smith is aware that Ada drifts off in her mind during sessions like the one in the doctor's office where she had to tap on Ada's cheek in order to get her attention after the doctor finished examining her foot. She doesn't realize that Ada doesn't connect her letters to Mam to Miss Smith's desire that Ada get the needed surgery on her foot. Ada believes that Miss Smith is writing to Mam because she wants to get Mam to come and get the children. She can't seem to wrap her mind around the idea that Miss Smith wants to keep her.

Pay attention also to a building thread in the plot as Jamie begins balking at going to school. Ada cannot figure why he does not want to go to school and he won't talk to either Ada or Miss Smith. They know something is wrong because he cries when he comes home and sometimes it is apparent he has been crying at school. He also has begun wetting the bed again.



The writer uses a technique, called a cliffhanger, in the last paragraph of Chapter 17 to keep the reader interested and give him a reason to turn the page and read the next chapter. At the end of Chapter 17 the author notes that Miss Smith finds a welt on Jamie's wrist. It is almost like a cliffhanger at the end of a television show that makes the watcher want to see the next episode. The reader uses a variation of this technique to leave the characters in a predicament to which the reader will want to know the resolution. How did Jamie get the welt? What will Miss Smith do about it?

Finally, notice in this section of the novel that although Ada still doesn't fully understand the new world she has found herself immersed in she is able to empathize with other characters, like her brother and Miss Smith, when they are in situations similar to those in which she has been. For instance, Ada doesn't full understand Miss Smith's anger when she left the house to help Maggie. When Miss Smith tells Ada she was worried about her, Ada wonders at this because she never thought that someone would worry about her the same way she worried about Jamie. Similarly, when Miss Smith begins taking Jamie to school because he has skipped so often Ada understands that Jamie probably feels trapped at school because he cannot leave once he has gone inside for lessons. She knows what it is like to be trapped in an unpleasant situation.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Miss Smith's description of the differences between a liar and one who lies. Do you agree with her differences in definition? Does it make a difference in the fact that she told Ada the story she told was a lie?

Discussion Question 2

Consider the way the author ends Chapter 17. Do you think this is an adequate technique to keep the reader engaged in the story? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Even though Miss Smith has done many nice things for Ada, Ada is still unable to trust her. Why do you think this is? Do you think there will ever be a point that Ada believes she is worthy of affection?

Vocabulary

perplexed, persistence, invasion, ruptured, welt



Chapters 18-21

Summary

In Chapter 18, when Miss Smith saw the welt on Jamie's wrist, he wouldn't tell what happened to him. The next day Ada went with Miss Smith to take Jamie to school. After taking Jamie to his room Miss Smith and Ada went for a cup of tea. When they finished their tea they went back to the school. Miss Smith went into Jamie's classroom and discovered that the teacher had tied his left hand to his chair to keep him from writing with it. Miss Smith untied Jamie and comforted him. The teacher was angry with Miss Smith for interfering. She said if Jamie would obey her and not use his left hand she wouldn't have to tie it down. The teacher insisted that left handedness was the mark of the devil. Ada goes on to narrate how Miss Smith told the teacher her Divinity teacher at Oxford was left-handed. Miss Smith told her that Jamie's hand was not to be tied up again. Afterward, Miss Smith explained to Ada why the teacher had tied Jamie's hand. Ada later asked Miss Smith if a clubfoot, like being left-handed, was a mark of the devil. Ada said she wondered if that was why her Mam hated her. Miss Smith was shocked by Ada's admission but wasn't sure what to say to Ada and told her so. Ada indicated Miss Smith's response was the most honest one she'd ever heard.

In Chapter 19, Miss Smith took Ada and Jamie to get their identity cards. When Miss Smith told the man at the registry office that Ada and Jamie didn't know their dates of birth he assumed they were retarded. Miss Smith told the man he was ignorant and made up birthdates for both the children. After they left the office Ada asked Miss Smith about birthdays. She learned from Jamie that at school the teacher made a fuss over a student when it was his birthday. Ada asked Miss Smith if it was not lying to put down birthdates that were not right. To make Ada feel better Miss Smith told her that as soon as she found out their real ones she would have their cards changed.

Ada went on to explain that the date of birth Miss Smith gave to Jamie was the same as her father's and that she had lost touch with her father. She didn't know if he was still alive or not. Miss Smith told Ada she gave her Becky's birthday. Ada told Miss Smith she was lying when Miss Smith indicated it would be good to have a reason to celebrate the day again.

In Chapter 20, Stephen and Colonel Robert McPherson invited Ada to tea but she chose to refuse the invitation. Ada realized the invitation scared her but she didn't tell Miss Smith so. As an excuse Ada told Miss Smith she didn't want the Colonel staring at her foot. Miss Smith said that wasn't possible because the Colonel had gone blind. On the day of tea it rained so Ada was not able to ride. She stayed inside with Jamie who was cutting out pictures of planes and flying them. When she asked Miss Smith if she could go to the Colonel's for tea she said no, it wasn't polite. Ada was angry and damaged one of Jamie's planes with her crutch. Ada refused to apologize to Jamie so Miss Smith did it for her. Ada watched as Jamie curled up in Miss Smith's lap. She was jealous because no one had ever treated her like that. As if she heard Ada's thoughts



Miss Smith motioned for Ada to sit beside her. She pulled Ada over so that she was leaning against her. Even though Ada was uncomfortable she stayed like that with Miss Smith's arm around her until it was time for them to make tea.

In Chapter 21, because she could not make Butter do anything but walk, Ada decided to go and visit Grimes for advice. Ada asked Miss Smith, who insisted that Ada call her Susan, permission to go. Miss Smith allowed the visit and suggested Ada put Butter's saddle on him for the longer ride. She offered to show Ada which saddle was Butter's but Ada said she knew which one it was and didn't need help. Before Ada left the house Miss Smith asked Ada to at least let her know if she ever had trouble but Ada assured her she wouldn't have any trouble.

As they got closer and closer to Maggie's house Ada noticed that Butter went slower and slower. She wished she had the horse that belonged to Maggie's brother. When she arrived at Maggie's house Grimes asked what she was doing there. She explained she needed help with Butter because she couldn't get him to move past a walk. Grimes said it was because the pony's feet hadn't been trimmed in years. Ada screamed when Grimes made the first cut on Butter's hooves. Grimes explained he wasn't hurting the horse but that his feet needed to be trimmed, just like a human's fingernails.

Grimes explained to Ada that Butter's long hooves made his feet hurt so he really couldn't go any faster. He complained about Miss Smith leaving the pony in the field after Becky had died without properly caring for it. Ada thanked Grimes for working on the pony's feet. He asked her to call him Fred since they were going to be friends. On her way back to Miss Smith's house Ada got lost.

Analysis

Miss Smith seems to make a sort of emotional breakthrough with Ada in this section of the novel as she tries to comfort the girl just as she has begun doing with Jamie. Ada is angry and frustrated because it rained the day she was supposed to have tea with Stephen and the Colonel and she wasn't able to ride like she had wanted to. When Ada sees Jamie curled up with Miss Smith she realizes that she is jealous of Jamie's ability to seek comfort from Miss Smith when she had no one to comfort her in that way.

The reader learns in this section that Miss Smith believes there are times when telling a lie is not inappropriate if it helps one to make a point. In this particular instance Miss Smith is trying to make the point that a person is not marked by the devil if he uses his left hand. To make her point seem stronger she indicates that her professor of Divinity was left-handed. Ada questions Miss Smith about what she told Jamie's teacher and learns Miss Smith made some of her story up. Remember what Miss Smith told Ada in the past about the difference between a liar and someone who lies. She had told Ada that someone who lies may lie just to protect themselves. In this case Susan was lying to protect Jamie. A liar, she said, was a person who told lies to make themselves look important. In this case Miss Smith wasn't trying to make herself look important, she



really had gone to Oxford, she just wanted it made clear that just because a person wrote with his left hand didn't make him marked by the devil.

Ada changes the focus of the conversation in this section back to the teacher's belief that his left-handedness was a mark of the devil. She asks Miss Smith if having a clubfoot is also a mark of the devil, like her mother always suggested it was. Ada's question gives Miss Smith an opportunity to tell Ada that the deformity in her foot is in no way her fault. It is at this point that Miss Smith doesn't answer a question that Ada puts to her but Ada realizes the answer Miss Smith has given her, though not even really an answer, is the most honest one she's ever heard. In this response Miss Smith fights back the knee jerk reaction to tell Ada that her mother did love her when Ada expressed her opinion that her mother hated her because of her foot. She instead tells Ada she doesn't know how to respond the Ada's statement that her Mam hated her. Miss Smith is well aware of the fact that Ada was accustomed to being hit regularly. She also knew that Ada's Mam made her remain a cripple and stay inside. Although Miss Smith could easily have lied and said Ada's mother loved her she had proof that that probably wasn't completely true. Ada appreciates Miss Smith's honesty in the matter.

The interaction between Grimes and Ada is significant in this section of the novel because it plants seeds of doubt in Ada's mind as to whether or not Miss Smith can be trusted. Grimes openly criticizes Miss Smith's neglect of Butter. He explains to Ada Butter wouldn't trot because his feet hurt since they'd been allowed to grow too long. Ada, who knows all about foot pain, believes Miss Smith's neglect of the pony was intentional, like her mother's neglect of her.

Significant in this section is Ada's indifferent response to a question about how she might feel if she didn't receive love. He is using Butter as an example when he poses the question: "If someone gave you enough to eat, but didn't keep you clean or healthy or ever show you any kind of love, how would you feel?" (148). Grimes doesn't realize that Ada has been in this type of life except she didn't even have enough to eat. Her response that she wouldn't be hungry tells Grimes either she's been in a place before where she's been all of those things and hungry as well or she is being a smart aleck.

Notice that the author again ends Chapter 21 with a cliffhanger as she indicates that Ada gets lost on her way back to Miss Smith's house from Maggie's.

Discussion Question 1

What similarities are there between Miss Smith's mistreatment of the pony and the treatment Ada received from her Mam? What differences do you see in the two situations?

Discussion Question 2

What impression do you think that Miss Smith makes on Ada when she lies about her Divinity professor being left-handed?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss Miss Smith's reaction to the man who assumed that Ada and Jamie were retarded because they didn't know their birth dates. Was she right in calling him out? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

unwarranted, reprimand, surname, decline, negligent, affront, keen, aboard



Chapters 22-25

Summary

In Chapter 22, Ada and Butter wandered a while before she saw a tall hill and climbed it. She saw the sea but didn't know what it was. From the hill she could also see the spire of the church. At dinner she asked Miss Smith what it was she had seen from the hill. Miss Smith told her it was the English Channel. When Miss Smith asked about Butter Ada told her the pony wouldn't trot because Miss Smith had crippled him. Although Miss Smith told Ada the abuse wasn't deliberate Ada pulled away when Miss Smith tried to pat her arm. Ada goes on to tell how Miss Smith made her go with her to the pasture and show her the differences in Butter's hooves. She explained to Ada it was difficult for her to face the things she had failed to do properly. Miss Smith apologized to Ada when she learned Ada had gotten lost. She suggested Ada must have felt scared and angry. Ada denied she was scared and angry but in reality she was very angry.

In Chapter 23, a Royal Navy battleship was sunk by a German torpedo with 833 of the men on board dying. A few days later Susan took Ada and Jamie to the movies. Ada was so traumatized by the newsreel showing pictures of the burning ship that she had nightmares about being back home and being unable to walk.

Because Jamie's teacher still insisted he had the devil in him Susan decided Ada and Jamie should go to church. She didn't attend with them. She explained to them that her father didn't like her and had said that he didn't think she could be redeemed. Jamie said their Mam didn't like them either. He went on to say that Mam especially hated Ada because of her foot. Susan told Jamie to apologize to Ada and explained Ada had done nothing wrong to cause her foot to be the way it was.

In Chapter 24, Ada was finally successful in getting Butter to gallop. She tried to get him to jump the stone wall but he refused and sent her flying over his head. Miss Smith came running out telling Ada she was an idiot for trying to make the pony jump such a high wall. Ada thought she was one to talk since she hadn't cared for the pony properly. Miss Smith read her thoughts and told Ada since she knew what Butter needed now she didn't plan to hurt him again. She went on to tell Ada to go to Fred Grimes and get some riding lessons so she would know what to do. Fred agreed to help Ada in exchange for her helping him with chores. Miss Smith provided her with a map so she wouldn't get lost.

Meanwhile, Colonel Robert McPherson invited Ada to tea again. Ada once again declined the invitation.

English residents were bombarded with mail telling them how to go about their daily business in the time of war. There were still no bombs but German submarines were waiting to blow up any ships that tried to enter or leave the British harbors. This was a problem for the British because it affected their ability to import food. Ada noticed there



was less food in the shops and that food was more expensive. More and more of the evacuated children returned to London even though it frustrated Lady Thorton because she was certain that London would be bombed. Ada and Jamie's Mam still hadn't written, a silence that concerned Susan.

Even though Jamie's teacher had left and his new teacher didn't think he had the devil in him he still wet the bed.

Lady Thorton asked Susan to join the Women's Volunteer Service but she refused. Because Ada knew that Susan spent a good deal of day just laying around she spoke up and said that Susan could help because she didn't have a real job. When Lady Thorton told Susan she could help by sewing, Susan made the excuse that no one liked her. Lady Thorton argued it wasn't true but Susan accused her of being patronizing. Lady Thorton went on to tell Susan it wasn't the time to be an isolationist. When she explained to Ada an isolationist was a person who didn't care about the war Ada agreed the term described Susan. Ada was surprised how wound up Susan got when Ada said Susan didn't care about things. Susan listed off the things that she did to show Ada and Jamie she cared about them. She finished by telling Lady Thorton she would join.

After Lady Thorton left Susan told Ada she'd tried to get a job when she'd first moved to the town but any she was qualified for were men's jobs. When Susan put on her uniform to go to her first meeting she asked Ada not to stare at her. When Susan suggested Ada could go with her as a junior member Ada sensed Susan was scared and asked her why. Susan explained it was because she had never felt she had fit in with all of the proper housewives who were part of the group. Ada refused to go to the meeting with her. She goes on to narrate that she stayed home instead and broke Susan's sewing machine.

In Chapter 25, Ada tried to sew together two scraps of fabric but wound up breaking the needle of the machine. Because Susan loved the machine so much Ada was afraid she'd get into trouble. She ran upstairs and hid in the spare bedroom. When Susan and Jamie came home she heard them looking for her. Susan finally found Ada and pulled her out from under the bed. She held onto Ada's wrists and asked her what happened to scare her so badly. Ada was in a panic but finally admitted to Susan that she had broken her sewing machine. Susan told her she wasn't going to send her back but she should have asked before trying to use it. They went downstairs where Susan discovered just the needle was broken. She replaced the needle and showed Ada what she had done wrong. She asked Ada to explain why she'd gotten under the bed. Jamie realized it was because their Mam had made her go in the cabinet when she was bad. Ada finally told Susan she knew she had to leave but Susan assured her that she did not have to leave. In fact, she explained how she had looked forward that day to not coming home to an empty house.

One day Jamie came home from school with a cat. It was dirty and flea ridden. Jamie had named it Bovril and insisted he was keeping it. He gave it a bath and killed its fleas. That night Bovril slept with Jamie. Jamie stopped wetting the bed. As a result, Susan



began offering the cat watered milk. She told Ada it was worth the sacrifice because she didn't have to wash the sheets so much any more.

Analysis

The reader can see a real affection being formed between Susan and Ada during this section of the novel. One of the signs of this affection is that Ada finally stops referring to her guarding as Miss Smith and starts calling her Susan as she had requested all along. This change in reference begins after Susan makes Ada show her the way in which she had neglected Butter. In order to help Ada realize that she is a human and can make mistakes, Susan makes Ada show her the way that she caused Butter to be crippled even though her negligence was not intentional. She admits to Ada that it is hard for her to admit her shortcomings but does so because she needs Ada to realize she does care.

Even with this admission Ada continues to question Susan's true nature through the course of these four chapters. Ada still believes that Susan is looking for an opportunity to send Ada and Jamie back to their Mam. This explains Ada's terror when she believes she has broken the sewing machine. She believes that this mistake, which turned out to not be as horrible as Ada had first believed, would be the one that would end her time with Susan. The panic into which Ada puts herself is her own form of self punishment. Even Jamie recognizes that Ada's act of putting herself under the bed is comparable to their Mam putting Ada in the cabinet. Although Ada holds herself so high above Susan by declaring that she doesn't need Susan's help, she desperately doesn't want Susan to send her back to her Mam.

It is in this section that Ada first begins to get the idea that Susan has issues just like Ada's. When Ada talks about going to church and mentions that Susan doesn't go with them she says it is because Susan and church don't get along. Susan's father, Ada learns, doesn't like Susan and believes she has lost her redemption. In this way Ada's relationship with her mother is somewhat like Susan's relationship with her father. Both have parents who believe they are not worthy of love or affection. Notice that when Jamie points out that their Mam had always believed Ada's bad foot was a mark of her worthlessness, Susan argues the point and tells Ada she did nothing wrong to deserve her bad foot. Regardless, Ada notes that she still has to deal with the limits the foot puts on her ability to live her life as a normal person.

Ada continues to have first time experiences in this section of the novel. When she gets lost she is scared but also uses her common sense to find her way back home. Ada does get a bonus when she gets lost because she sees the ocean for the first time. She describes her experience: "Seeing the ocean was like seeing grass for the first time" (151). Ada has no idea what she is looking at but is awed but the experience nonetheless. When she finally makes it home and learns from Susan what she has been looking at she is angry. This is an interesting response because it was Ada's Mam, not Susan, who kept her so alienated from the world. Regardless, Ada blames Susan for not telling her about the ocean. Because Susan tells Ada she did tell her how close



they were to the English Channel, it could be that Susan was using language that Ada didn't understand. This may account for Ada's belief that Susan didn't tell her about the ocean.

Even though they've been receiving war propaganda regularly in the mail, Ada indicates it isn't until she sees the newsreel about the war that it really seems real to her.

When Ada sees the newsreel at the beginning of the movie Susan takes them to see, the war becomes a reality to her. Even though they have heard about the sinking of the ship the Royal Oak on the radio, the words of the newscaster don't have the drastic affect on her as seeing the moving pictures of the ship sinking. "Other than the silly posters and the sandbags that lay piled near some of the road intersections, you'd hardly know there was a war" (156). As Ada watches the movie of the ship sinking while the narrator tells about the men who died it is almost too much for her to handle. In fact, the trauma causes nightmares in which she imagines herself back in the Mam's apartment unable to do anything but sit in a chair.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Susan didn't consider how traumatic it might be for Ada to watch the newsreels about the war? Why do you think it bothers Ada more than Jamie?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance in Ada's act of beginning to call Miss Smith "Susan." Why is the change important?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Ada gets so angry with Miss Smith because Ada didn't know what the ocean was? What does it mean that Ada lashes out at Miss Smith about Butter's hooves? What does Miss Smith hope to prove when she makes Ada show her what she had been failing to do?

Vocabulary

torpedoed, nudged, cantering, relented, patronizing, onager



Chapters 26-28

Summary

In Chapter 26, Ada believed Susan tricked her into writing when she asked Jamie to show them why he was left-handed. She had Ada try writing first with her left hand, then her right. She told Ada she'd just written her name. Ada kept the paper to practice later.

In November Fred gave Ada a side saddle he'd found. He saddled Butter with it and then put Ada on top. She was able to fold her right leg over the saddle so that it didn't matter that she couldn't use the stirrup on the right side. He let her practice using the new saddle. She felt much more secure in saddle. On her way home Ada rode again to the top of the big hill. She noticed the shore was fenced in barbed wire and knew mines had been buried there in case there were invasions.

Once Ada reached home, Susan thought the gift of the side saddle was too generous. When she talked to Lady Thornton about, however, Lady Thornton said Ada could have it because no one else wanted it.

When Ada got a letter from Maggie at school Susan asked if Ada wanted her to read it for her. Ada declined her offer. When Jamie couldn't read it Susan took it to Grimes. He said that Maggie wanted them to go riding together during her Christmas break. Ada expressed concern that she wouldn't still be there at Christmas but Grimes assured her the war was far from finished. Ada tried to remember that all of the good things that she had with Susan were temporary. She had begun to wonder if her mother really loved her. She tells about a time when Butter got spooked and returned home without Ada. Susan had gone looking for Ada and had seemed angry, as she said she didn't need the extra worry. As Susan had cared for her and Butter that night Ada realized she wished her mother were more like Susan. She also admitted to herself that she didn't trust Susan not to begin acting like her mother.

In Chapter 27, Dr. Graham was impressed when he saw Ada and Jamie at their next appointment. He suggested to Susan that she could manipulate Ada's ankle in order to help increase flexibility. One night while Susan was massaging Ada's foot she realized how cold it was. She was surprised when Ada said the cold numbed it so Ada couldn't feel the constant pain. Susan fashioned her a wool sock and leather soled house shoe that at least kept the foot dry.

Susan began teaching Ada how to sew by hand and also how to knit. She called Ada a sourpuss when she made special riding gloves for Ada to wear in winter and all Ada would tell her was that they were okay.

Meanwhile, the village vicar and some boys erected an Anderson shelter for Susan. One of the boys who helped was Stephen White. Stephen tells Ada he didn't go home with the rest of the family because the Colonel really needed his help. He'd learned to



cook and clean for the man who had gone nearly blind. He encouraged her to come and visit them. After they left Ada looked at the Anderson shelter. The smell reminded her of Mam's cabinet.

In Chapter 28, when Butter became thin Susan bought hay and oats for him. Ada remembered how alarmed she'd been when the leaves started changing colors. Susan was no longer surprised at the things Jamie and Ada didn't know and explained things completely often without being asked. Susan explained to them that the winter used to make her feel even sadder than usual but because she had so much to do she didn't have time to be sad. Ada noticed even so that Miss Smith did seem sadder and seemed to have to make an effort to do the things she did.

One day when Susan seemed particularly down Ada asked her to teach her how to read. Susan began by teaching Ada her letters. From that point on Ada began leaving notes for Susan to make her smile. She also learned to leave notes to let Susan know where she or Jamie were going. Jamie still went to the airfield, they learned. He explained to them he was allowed to talk to the pilots but had to leave if they said so.

After Susan talked to Ada and Jamie about Christmas she realized they'd never celebrated the holiday before and told them about it. She said she'd invited their Mam for Christmas but hadn't gotten a reply. Because they couldn't go home for Christmas Jamie invited some of the pilots for Christmas dinner. Ada had invited Maggie but she said she had to stay with her family. They had ridden together but Maggie had seemed distant. Maggie finally asked why Ada hadn't written back to her. Ada lied at first and said she was busy but then admitted to Maggie she was just learning how to write. Maggie suggested Susan could have helped Ada write a letter but Ada said she didn't want to get used to Susan helping her with things. Maggie points out how much Ada had changed since she'd been living with Susan and said she thought Susan was real.

Analysis

Ada admits to herself in this section that she is both afraid that she will have to leave Susan and go back to her Mam, and that Susan will begin treating her like Mam did. At several different points in the past Susan offers to help Ada but Ada refuses to take help from Susan. Ada tells her guardian almost rudely that she doesn't need help or that she doesn't want help from Susan. One example of this is Susan's offer to read the letter from Maggie to Ada. Ada refuses her help even though she wants to know what the letter says badly enough that she takes it to Grimes to read it for her. It is when Maggie asks Ada why she didn't get Susan to help her write a letter that Ada admits that she doesn't want to get used to Susan helping her with things. Ada is not rejecting Susan as much as she is trying to protect herself. She's not only afraid that any day she might have to go back to her Mam, but is also afraid that Susan might begin acting like her mother and abusing her. Despite all they have been through, Ada still doesn't completely trust Susan.



The reader also learns that Ada has been playing with question of whether or not her mother really loves her. Now that she sees what she has missed out on during her time with her Mam she has reason to question her mother's love.

In this section it is important to notice how many people see the positive changes both physical and emotional that have taken place in Ada since she has been living with Susan. The first person to comment on the differences both in Jamie and Ada is the doctor. He says that both of them look like different children. They have gained weight and have also grown. Maggie additionally comments on how much better Maggie looks since she has spent time with Susan. Maggie had noticed when Ada got off the train how scared she looked. Even Stephen makes a comment that Ada is a different person now that she is at Susan's. He comments that her foot doesn't disgust people the way she believes it does because although her foot is still the same she isn't forced to stay inside at Susan's.

Notice also in this section that although Ada tries to guard herself from depending too much on Susan and getting used to the benefits of living with her Ada is sensitive enough to notice that Susan is sinking into depression as the winter gets darker and colder. She notices the effort that Susan has to put into getting up and doing things. When Susan just sits without even cleaning the lunch she spilled on her blouse Ada challenges Susan to get up and get busy by telling her she wants to learn how to read. Once Ada begins learning to write she tries to cheer Susan by leaving her notes around the house.

The Anderson shelter is an important object in this section because it reminds Ada of the abuse she received at the hands of her mother. After the boys finished digging the shelter Ada examined the shelter. She compared the smell coming from the shelter to the smell of the cabinet beneath her Mam's sink, the one she'd always been put into as a punishment. The reader can anticipate that when it comes time for Susan, Ada and Jamie to use the shelter, Ada may have emotional problems because the smell reminds her so strongly of her abuse and resulting fear.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Ada declines Susan's offer to read the letter that Maggie sent? Why does she feel more comfortable having Grimes read it?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way that Susan's depression affects her. How does Ada recognize the depression and try to help Susan through her low spots?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss Stephen's decision to stay with the colonel even though he wanted to go back to his family.

Vocabulary

intervention, inflexible, leached, curmudgeon, mollified



Chapters 29-31

Summary

In Chapter 29, Maggie won when the two raced back to town. She couldn't go to Susan's for Christmas but said she was afraid Christmas at their house would be terrible between her brother being on leave from training, her father wanting to talk about the war and her mother trying to put on a big Christmas dinner like they did when they had a full staff of servants. Maggie feels as if her family is at war even if some people are saying that World War II wasn't real.

Susan made Jamie and Ada go with her to cut a Christmas tree. She explained the symbolism to them. She was surprised when she learned they weren't aware that Christmas had anything to do with God. When they got home Susan got out the ornaments that she and Becky had always put on their tree. She suggested to Ada that they make their own decorations and explained that she wasn't quite ready to use the ones that she and Becky used. Ada was uncomfortable with the idea of Christmas because she wasn't sure if she was really worthy of being part of such a celebration. She was also uncomfortable because she sensed that Susan wanted her to be happy.

When Ada visited Maggie and Fred to help with the horses Maggie told Ada she was supposed to get Susan a present for Christmas. Since Ada had no money Maggie suggested that she make Susan something. As she rode home Ada came up with the idea of knitting something for Susan. She went back to the Thorton's stables and told Grimes she needed some wool.

In Chapter 30 Grimes gave her his late wife's knitting bag. Ada was so excited she forgot to thank Grimes until he reminded her. At home she and Susan made a deal that Ada could have "nothing" time in her room to work on her presents as long as she gave Susan the same amount of time downstairs.

The Sunday before Christmas Susan said they would all be going to church at night instead of in the morning. As they got ready for services Susan told Ada she had a gift for her. In a wrapped box was a green velvet dress so beautiful that Ada could only stare at it. Susan helped her try it on. It fit perfectly and Susan said she looked beautiful but Ada knew she was lying because she could hear her mother's voice in her head telling her she was dirty and filthy. Ada began trying to take the dress off, declaring that she couldn't wear it. She began to panic even as Susan tried to calm her. Ada's screams brought Jamie running. He found Susan trying to restrain Ada as she screamed.

In Chapter 31, Ada remembered that they had never made it to church. She had kicked and screamed and scratched at Susan as she tried to calm her. Jamie had finally brought blankets downstairs and they wrapped Ada up in one of these. It was not until that point that Ada began to feel better. Ada woke before anyone else. At first she was



afraid Susan would be mad at her. When Jamie woke up he smiled at her before putting Bovril outside and adding coal to the fire. The scuttle woke Susan and she too smiled at Ada. she suggested they go upstairs and change clothes. Once they were downstairs again there were presents around the tree. Ada started to comment but saw Jamie's pleasure that Santa had come and didn't say what was on her mind. After they handed out presents and Susan fussed over the scarf Ada had made Susan sent Ada out to see Butter seeming to understand she needed some time away.

Three of Jamie's pilot friends came for Christmas dinner. Ada had put on the green dress because she knew it would make Susan happy but was still uncomfortable in it. She felt like an imposter, like she was pretending to be a happy girl with a loving family. When one of the pilots complimented Ada on her dress she was polite and tried to concentrate on the fact he'd noticed her dress and not her foot. When they left Susan complimented Ada on making it through dinner even though it was hard for her. Ada goes on to say that when Susan began working on Ada's foot Ada asked if they could begin reading "Alice in Wonderland" the book she'd gotten for Christmas. Susan began reading and Ada soon identified herself in the book. She believed she and Jamie were like Alice but instead of falling down a rabbit hole they'd wound up in Susan's house where nothing made sense.

Analysis

Wars seem to be happening everywhere in this section of the novel except in the battlefield. Maggie describes to Ada that her family seems to be at war with itself, a situation that is making Christmas miserable. Maggie challenges Ada when she tells Ada she's sure that Ada is happy about the war. Ada is clear she's not happy that Maggie's family is divided concerning the war. Meanwhile, Ada is fighting a war with her own emotions. The build up to Christmas and the expectations of happiness are almost more than Ada can handle. She still thinks she isn't worth of being happy. When Susan gives her the new dress and tells Ada how beautiful she looks Ada can't accept the compliment because she can hear her mother's voice telling her that she is filthy, dirty and no one will love her with her ugly foot. Ada stresses to the point that she goes into panic mode screaming and physically attacking Susan. Jamie and Susan wrap her in a blanket to help calm her.

Notice in this section that Ada begins learning for herself how to separate the truth she sees around her from the lies that her mother had told her. When she first wakes on Christmas morning Ada is afraid that Susan will be angry with her and punish her for the way she acted the night before. She begins to panic but then stops herself and thinks about how Susan didn't hit her the whole time Ada was fighting her. She inferred that if Susan wasn't cruel to her then, she wouldn't wait to punish her the following morning. Ada also manages to keep herself under control during Christmas dinner even though she feels the beginning of panic when one of the pilots compliments her on her dress. Again, Ada concentrates on the fact the pilot complimented her on her dress instead of commenting about her foot.



When Ada puts on the green dress with the ribbon in her hair she feels like an imposter. This feeling of being false adds to the theme of appearances as it is presented in the novel. She remembers thinking the girls, like Maggie, who worked at the train station when the evacuees first came to Kent were shiny and happy with ribbons in their hair. When she looks in the mirror Ada sees a girl who looks like those girls at the station, but she doesn't feel like she is one of those girls. Again, Ada reminds herself of the truth when Jamie tells her how nice she looks. She thinks to herself that she does have a family even if it is just Jamie.

While it is not a major theme in the novel the reader has to wonder about the relationship between Susan and Becky. It is already known that Susan met Becky in college. It was at this same time that Susan made choices that her father believed made her unredeemable. At one point Susan had told Ada that she wasn't interested in getting married or having children the way her father expected her to. Susan has mourned Becky's death more than one would expect a woman to mourn the death of a friend. It makes the reader wonder if there was not some sort of homosexual relationship between the two that caused Susan's clergy father to reject her.

Discussion Question 1

What changes do you see in the way Ada handles herself and her feelings in this section of the novel? How has Susan modified her behavior to help Ada handle herself?

Discussion Question 2

Although it is most often described as being a holiday of peace and joy many people feel an unusual amount of stress during Christmas just like Ada does for her first Christmas. Why is Christmas such a stressful holiday? Why is it stressful for Ada specifically?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think the relationship between Becky and Susan is significant to the novel? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

aviation, hideous, oddments, perplexed, scuttle, imposter, fetch



Chapters 32-35

Summary

In Chapter 32, Ada describes how food rationing worked in their town. She tells how she and Jamie tried to eat less but Susan scolded them and said that she would make sure they always had plenty to eat even if she had to get a job as a cleaning lady. Ada questioned why Susan would make such a sacrifice for them when she didn't even like them. She continued to argue until Susan asked Ada what point she was trying to make. Ada shrugged but thought to herself how angry she was because she still thought her life with Susan was temporary. As Ada continues to narrate she realizes she was also angry with the war because she believed it was the military conflict that separated her and her mother before her mother realized that she loved her. Ada admits she was also angry with herself because she was so happy to leave her mother.

Susan spoke to Ada calming her and telling her that she did not intend to send Ada anywhere. She was writing to her mother for permission to fix her foot and that all would be well. Ada listened to Susan for the first time. She wondered what Susan meant by her comment about fixing her foot. A few days later she rode Butter up the hill to look at the ocean and then down through town. People nodded to her and smiled. None seemed to think she should be locked away. After she'd rubbed Butter down after their ride and cleaned the tack she went inside and asked Susan what an operation was.

In Chapter 33, Susan took Ada to Dr. Graham to let him explain the surgical process to Ada. Although the doctor doubted Ada's foot would ever look normal they could fix it to the point that she would be able to walk on the bottom of her foot. On the way home Ada asked Susan what the doctor had meant when he'd said she could have had a normal foot if she had started treatment early enough. Susan explained to her that most babies born with a clubfoot were treated right away and their feet could be completely fixed.

Later, when they had their tea Ada pulled off her shoe and sock to look at her foot. Susan told her that she'd done nothing wrong to be born the way she was even though Ada had always been told her deformity was her fault. Susan advised her to go outside and throw something if she felt angry. Ada didn't feel angry, she felt sad. She wrote a letter to her mother asking her to let the doctors fix her.

In Chapter 34, 12 days after Ada had written to her Mam she received her letter back with a note saying she no longer lived at that address. In her anger and frustration Ada began crying. She told Susan she didn't want to just survive. Susan told her they would find a way for her to do so even if she didn't get the operation to fix her foot.

As the winter became colder and more fierce Ada went to help Grimes in the stables every day. Susan insisted Ada would go to school the next year and made her read books and do math and history lessons to catch up with other students. When Ada got



chilblains on her bad foot she was surprised because Susan was so distressed about them. She and Fred worked together to fashion a boot for Ada out of a piece of leather to keep her foot dry. The chilblains didn't get worse but didn't heal either. To Ada they weren't bad because she usually got them on her hands and other foot as well.

Ada finally accepted the Colonel's invitation for tea. The Colonel told her they'd saved up their butter ration for her visit and encouraged her to take plenty. They talked about the war. The Colonel was determined spies were real even though Ada had her doubts. He advised Ada to be on the lookout for them. Even though the war still hadn't really affected them, they knew that the Germans had sunk 56 ships by the end of January. In February another 51 were sunk. It was not until the end of February that the days finally began to brighten.

In Chapter 35 when Maggie came home for Easter she was surprised at the state of her mother's house and the stables. She decided to try to make her mother close off some of the rooms and get the gardener to help Grimes in the stables. She said she'd suggest the park be turned into cropland, as the government was asking them to grow Victory Gardens. Ada narrates that even Susan had her backyard tilled up and the bushes in the front cut so they could grow a garden.

Maggie told Ada she looked forward to coming to her birthday party since being at home had become so miserable. Because most of the evacuees had returned to London Lady Thorton felt she had not done her job well. While she seemed busy and full of energy in public Maggie said she was dull and lifeless at home. Her mother was afraid Jonathan would be killed in action just like his uncles were. Maggie believed that if her brother died her mother would die as well because she'd already suffered through the loss of two infant sons to typhoid. Ada promised to keep an eye on Maggie's mother and let her know if she began acting any differently.

For her birthday celebration Susan had saved up their sugar rations to make a cake. She gave Ada one of her old books and also made her a new dress. Maggie gave her a carved wooden pony that looked like Butter. At the end of the day Ada felt she had too much to feel as sad as she did.

The war continued with Germany taking over Norway, Denmark, Holland and Belgium. The English government circulated a list of seven rules it believed would keep the people safe. There continued to be rumors that there had been German spies in Holland and that these same spies might be in England. Posters with the phrase "Loose lips sink ships" began to appear. Jamie began wetting the bed again because he was afraid there were spies in the area. Susan took him to talk to the pilots but they confirmed there were spies about and told him to act like a soldier and keep his eyes open for anything unusual.

Meanwhile, meat rations were getting more scarce and onions were like gold. Ada indicates all the onions in England had been imported and they took a long time to grow from seed. When the Germans invaded France some called what happened at Dunkirk a miracle, but to the people of Kent it seemed like a disaster.



Analysis

It is in this section of the novel that Ada finally comes face-to-face with the idea that her mother hadn't wanted to get her foot fixed when she was a baby even though it was possible to completely fix her foot at that time. At the same time, Ada struggles with her feelings about her mother. No child wants to be disliked by her mother and Ada is no exception. She tries to find some way to reconcile the evidence that her mother didn't care enough about her to even see to her basic needs with the idea that her mother loved her. At one point she clutches at straws and decides she was separated from her Mam before her mother came to realize that she loved Ada. Even so, she remembers how happy she was to get away from her mother.

It is when Ada's letter to her mother is returned to Susan's house that Ada has the most understandable, but also the calmest, outburst she has had since she came to Susan's house. Ada doesn't fully understand why she is so upset by the returned letter. She is able to verbalize that she is tired of just surviving. She wants to live as a whole person without the deformity that has held her back for so long. Notice that Susan comforts Ada by telling her they'll find some way for her to live a full life even if they aren't able to fix her foot.

The reader learns more about how the war changed the lives of those living in England in this section of the novel. One of the main changes is the beginning of rationing. Because boats importing food are not able to get to England, an island, there is a food shortage. Each person is allowed only so much of certain items that are hard to get, like sugar, butter and meat. Notice twice in this section that Ada describes how people save up their butter or sugar rations for a special occasion as a honor for someone. For instance, when Ada finally accepts the invitation to have tea with the colonel, she learns that he and Stephen have saved up their butter rations so she can have all she wants. On the date that Susan had chosen as Ada's birthday Susan is able to make a small cake because she has saved up their sugar rations.

In order to help feed themselves the people of England are challenged to plant Victory Gardens. Note that Susan has parts of her yard tilled and bushes removed so they can plant a garden. Additionally, Maggie wants to encourage her mother to allow some of their yard to be turned into gardens not only because they have plenty of room for these gardens but also because it would take some of the work off the gardener trying to keep an ornamental lawn neat.

Although Ada is learning more and more about the world around her she still describes things in terms of situations with which she is most familiar. Sometimes these descriptions still include references to life in her mother's flat. She describes the war in this way: "The war, which had begun to feel like memories of our flat in London, hazy and unreal, suddenly came into sharper focus" (245). In this description Ada both shares with her reader that her bad memories associated with her mother and her years spent trapped in the apartment are beginning to fade away. She also indicates that the fear of war is a new terror that is coming more sharply into focus.



As has been pointed out before, Ada often points out humor or humorous inconsistencies in her story. In Chapter 35, Jamie is scared so badly by the talk that there may be spies in the area that he begins wetting the bed again even though he still sleeps with Bovril. Remembering how much Jamie looks up to the pilots at the airfield Susan takes him there to have the pilots tell him there are no spies in the area. Instead, the pilots tell Jamie the opposite. But they encourage him to act like a soldier and keep his eyes and ears open for any sign that there might be a spy in the village.

Notice also in this section that Ada notes that one of the things that has become scarce in England is onions. Not only are these vegetables scarce, Ada notes it takes a long time to grow them from seed. The scarcity of onions will be important later on in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

In Chapter 32 Ada lists a variety of things that make her angry. Read through this list again and try to determine why these things make Ada angry. What is it from her past that makes her feel so strongly that she's not worth the praise of other people?

Discussion Question 2

Can you think of a reason why a mother would not allow her child's deformity to be fixed at birth if the option was possible? Why do you think Ada's mother chose to let her daughter live with a disability?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way the war has had an effect even on Maggie's life. What does this tell you about the value of riches?

Vocabulary

queue, char, plantar, requisitioned, elective, consulted, agitating, keen, forbade, blockade



Chapters 36-38

Summary

In Chapter 36, Susan, Jamie and Ada woke up to Lady Thorton pounding on the door telling Susan they needed her help. Lady Thorton said a ship had docked in the village bringing soldiers who were being evacuated from Dunkirk. After breakfast Ada and Jamie could hear planes taking off from the airfield and not coming back. Ada wanted to help. She told Jamie she would take him to the Thorton's to help Grimes in her place and she would go help the WVS.

Ada narrates that she'd later seen the newsreels about the soldiers who came from Dunkirk. She knew those reels were a lie because the soldiers in them looked tired but otherwise happy. She explained the men who were sent to Kent were wounded and sometimes dying.

She went into the town hall when she saw one of the WVS ladies go inside that hall. Inside she was overcome with the smell of blood and human excrement. Ada explained that when men were badly injured they lost control of their bowels. The women inside were cleaning the men up. Susan saw Ada and told her to go away. In the street a man asked Ada for water. She went into a pub where she got a pitcher of water and mug for the man. She limped back and forth filling the pitcher so other men could drink. Daisy, the daughter of the man who owned the pub came out with a bucket of water to save Ada her trips with the pitcher. Ada filled and passed around water to the soldiers. When there were no more soldiers who could walk asking for water Ada helped inside the pub and passed out drinks to the wounded soldiers who had been taken inside.

Daisy's mother finally made the girls sit and eat. Daisy cried because she believed the men were dying but her mother assured her they weren't all dying. After they'd rested a man asked Ada if she could write a letter for him. She went for Daisy to do the writing but when they returned the man was dead. Ada was so shocked and grieved by the man's death that she almost went away inside her head but Daisy called her back by telling her they were really at war. Ships docked at Kent bringing in soldiers throughout the week. Susan found Ada at the pub the first night and allowed her to stay even though she thought it might be too much for her. Ada told her she wanted to stay and help. She felt as if it were her opportunity to help fight the war.

Much later Ada had trouble believing that the situation she helped with was England's finest hour as Winton Churchill called it. Ada did feel proud of herself because she had kept working with the soldiers even when she felt like quitting. She believed she was stronger and less afraid because of the work she had done.

In Chapter 37, Ada learned that the village of Kent was evacuating its children in fear that Hitler would land in Kent if he decided to invade. Lady Thorton tried to get Susan to send Ada and Jamie to a safer place but Susan refused. One night when Ada couldn't



sleep she went downstairs and was surprised to find Susan there. Susan began talking about how some people thought she should send Ada and Jamie away but she thought they were better off as a family. She had at first believed she wouldn't be as good a mother as her own mother but realized she hadn't done badly. Susan goes on to suggest to Ada that she wouldn't have liked to have been raised the way Susan had. Ada wasn't sure. She tried to explain that things seemed clear until she really thought about them and then they got muddled. Ada ends this chapter by telling her reader that the first air raid was worse than Christmas Eve.

In Chapter 38, the first night of air raids, Ada couldn't make herself go into the Anderson shelter. Susan picked her up and carried her. Ada screamed. She could hear her mother laughing. As bombs exploded and she heard screams, Ada felt as if she were really back inside the cabinet. Susan wrapped her up in blanket and then smushed Ada between herself and the wall. Susan soothed Jamie. As Ada was comforted by the pressure and smell of the blanket that helped to block out the smell that was like that of the cabinet, she began to calm.

The next morning Susan told Ada she'd have to go back into the shelter again because there would be more bombs. When she found out it was the smell of the shelter, similar to that of the cabinet Ada was put into for punishment she put aromatic herbs in the shelter that helped to block the smell. She still had to be wrapped in a blanket to keep her calm but she didn't frighten Jamie as much.

They had to go to the bomb shelter nearly every night from that point on because Hitler was trying to reduce the number of planes in England's force so he could invade with ships successfully. They were especially interested in bombing the airfields. When Susan thought of how close they lived to an airfield she thought even more she should listen to Lady Thorton and send Ada and Jamie away. Ada wondered if she could live without Butter and the freedom to which she had grown accustomed. Before, when she'd lived in one room, she hadn't know all of the things she had been missing. When Ada explained this to Susan, Susan told her it was why she was keeping Ada with her.

Analysis

Ada learns in this section that even government officials tell lies to the people in order to manipulate their way of thinking about things happening around them. Ada realizes this after she has been involved in helping the soldiers evacuated into her village from Dunkirk. The soldiers she sees are sick and weak from lack of food and water. Some have been injured by gunfire and bombs. Later when she watches newsreels about the same events she notices the soldiers in those news broadcasts look tired and dirty but for the most part healthy and happy.

Although it is hard and painful for Ada notice that she helps with the soldiers despite her own pain. Although her own dreadful background could have caused her to be self centered and dependent she instead creates a job for herself and dedicates herself to helping until the last of the soldiers have left their village. Even Ada notices after she



has persisted through the trauma of seeing all of the sick and wounded soldiers that she is much stronger than she was before her experience.

Also of significance in this section is Susan's determination to keep Ada and Jamie with her. Many children in Kent are being sent away because it is feared the German army will invade England in the area of Kent. Ironically, the countryside that people had thought was so safe is no longer deemed safe. Even though Susan had fought against being given Ada and Jamie in the first place, she now fights to keep them. "Look at Ada. If she gets put with the wrong person she'll go right back to where she was" (261) is one of the reasons Susan gives Lady Thorton to leave Jamie and Ada with her. Ironic also is how fervently Lady Thorton fought to keep the evacuee children in Kent. When the threat of the invasion becomes real she fights just as hard to get them out of Kent.

Notice how much Ada has grown emotionally in being able to handle herself and the things that bring back the bad memories of her mother. Just as it seems she might be stable, however, the air raids start. Because of the way the Anderson shelter smells Ada has flashbacks to being in her mother's cabinet. When Susan carries her into the shelter Ada feels as though she is actually being crammed back into the tiny damp space. She notes that she can even hear the sounds of her mother laughing.

Susan, however, has become more adept at handling Ada. She has learned that there are certain things that elicit panic in Ada because of the abuse she suffered as a child. Susan has also learned how to help Ada through her panic by wrapping her tightly. Once Susan learns that it is the smell of the shelter that brings on Ada's flashbacks she finds herbs she can hang in the shelter to help disguise the smell. She also begins reading books to Ada and Jamie during their time underground as a way to distract them from their circumstances.

Notice also that even in her panic Ada has become more observant of the way her fits of panic disturb Jamie. She wants to avoid these panics because she knows her behavior scares Jamie. Because she knows what it is like to be scared, she doesn't want Jamie scared any more than he has to be.

Susan had always believed she would be a bad parent based on the way her mother raised her but when she compares herself with Ada and Jamie's mother she realizes she hasn't done badly. In fact, Susan even poses the question to Ada if she would have liked to have been raised by a mother who ironed her shoelaces like Susan's did. There is definitely a wide berth between the mother Susan describes and the mother that Ada has. Ada is unable to answer her question, but based on the progress that Ada has made it seems that Susan has taken the right path in parenting her.

Discussion Question 1

What ironic actions do you see happening in the village in which Ada lives now that there is a threat of an invasion by Hitler's army?



Discussion Question 2

In what ways does Ada appear to have improved in this section of the novel from the time she first came to live with Susan? What areas of life still challenge her?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think the English government intended to mislead its citizens with the newsreels about the soldiers rescued from Dunkirk? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

strafed, comrades, sentiment, thrived, nestled



Chapters 39-41

Summary

In Chapter 39, Susan read books to Ada and Jamie during their time in the bomb shelter. Ada goes on to explain that in preparation for an invasion the men had removed the street signs from the signposts so Hitler's troops wouldn't know where they were. If there was an invasion the church bells would ring and Ada was to return home as quickly as possible. They were to do nothing to help Hitler or the troops. After several weeks went by with no invasion Ada grew accustomed to going into the bomb shelter. She and Jamie rode Butter and looked for shrapnel. One day they found a crashed plane.

One day when Ada was riding she saw a man rowing a boat to the shore from the top of the hill. As the man rowed closer and closer to shore she wondered if the man were a spy. She rode closer and watched as the man came ashore and buried what looked like a suitcase in the sand. He left the beach and walked toward town. Ada galloped Butter straight to the police station. The man she first met and told about the person on the beach looked her up and down as if he didn't believe her. When she noticed him looking at her bad foot she repeated to him the words she thought Susan would say: "My bad foot's a long way from my brain" (277-278). She asked to talk to the man's commanding officer. The second police officer took her more seriously. They went out in his patrol car to see if they could find the man. They did see a man walking and Ada was almost unsure if he was the man she had seen until she noticed the hem of his pants was wet and sandy. The officer handcuffed the man and put him into the back of his car.

At dinner that night Ada still hadn't decided how she should tell Susan about what had happened when the police came asking to talk to her. They wanted her to show them where the man had come on shore and where he had buried the parcel. The officers agreed to let Ada know if the man turned out to be a spy if she could keep quiet about it. She promised. When Susan heard the story about how Ada had spotted and turned in the spy she told Ada she was so proud of her. The next afternoon the officer who hadn't believed Ada knocked on the door. He apologized and presented her with an onion.

In Chapter 40, Ada reports that a radio transmitter was found when they dug up the beach. It was determined the man who was caught was a spy. Ada became a village hero. For the first time Ada felt as if she were someone loved, as if she had been born with two good feet. Jamie begged her to repeat her story over and over. Maggie wished she'd been with Ada when the spy came. In reality Ada realized it was scary that there had really been a spy trying to enter their village. One day when the air raids started before they'd even finished dinner, Susan told Ada and Jamie no one would tell her for sure what had happened to the spy but she suspected they were probably making him send false messages back to Germany.



As the fighting continued Jamie learned two of the pilots that had Christmas dinner with them had died. Ada had been so upset about the dress she couldn't even remember their names. She wished she'd at least taken the time to learn their names. Although the English lost planes every day, the Germans were also losing planes. In September, British plane finally attacked Berlin. Before leaving for work one day, Fred gave Ada a piece of a German aircraft that had fallen in the pasture. Ada was so happy that she galloped Butter back home even though they were so close. She decided to take her chances and turned Butter toward the stone wall. He jumped it. At the house Jamie and Susan were standing with a person Ada didn't recognize. As she rode closer Ada realized it was Mam.

In Chapter 41, Mam looked at her with anger and disinterest. Ada realized her mother didn't recognize her. When Ada introduced herself her mother was outraged and belittled Ada for riding the pony. She'd gotten a letter from the government telling her she'd have to pay for her children to continue living as evacuees. She was also angry because she'd gotten the letter from Susan asking permission to fix Ada's foot. When Ada moved to take Butter to the stable her mother hit her, knocking her down and told her they were going home on the next train.

Susan told Ada that she could fix it where she could stay. Ada knew that might be true for her because her Mam had locked her up but that it wouldn't work for Jamie because he hadn't been abused like she had. Ada didn't want to be separated from Jamie. Their Mam pushed Jamie and Ada down the road. When Ada looked back she saw that Susan was busy with Butter. She hadn't even said goodbye.

Analysis

The author pulls the reader in two different emotional directions as first Ada is hailed as a town hero when she helps to catch a spy and then when Ada's worst nightmare comes true as her mother comes back to take her and Jamie home. After she helps catch the spy Ada feels people responded to her differently. Even though they had smiled, waved and not been hateful to her before, now she feels as if she actually belongs in this village. "It was as if I'd been born in the village. As if I'd been born with two strong feet. As if I really was someone important, someone loved" (282). At several points in the novel Ada has indicated that she feels like she was an imposter, as if she is living someone else's life. Now that she has done the service of catching the spy, she feels as if the people of the village really do accept her as a worthwhile person.

When the portly police officer tries to reject Ada as not knowing what she is talking about when she first tries to report she'd seen a spy, he falls into the trap of judging Ada by her appearance. He appears to not believe her because she is a child and because she is crippled, so she can't possibly know what she is talking about. Ada borrows a phrase she heard Susan say when someone else had questioned Ada's intelligence because she is crippled. Ada tells the officer that her bad foot is a long way from her brain. As evidence of her maturity Ada doesn't let the man's reaction to her deter her from doing what she feels is her duty. She asks for another officer.



In Chapter 35, Ada had described how scarce some foods - particularly onions - were, saying onions “might as well have been solid gold” (248). Considering the analogy, the portly police officer pays Ada a high compliment when he comes to apologize and brings her an onion as a gift.

Notice also the description of Ada’s act of recognizing the man as a spy. Even though she has received little education and has known little of the world she is very intelligent and very observant. She knows no one is supposed to be on the beach much less rowing up to it in a row boat. As she watches the man bury something in the sand and then push his boat off, she concludes he is up to no good. Later, when the policeman is about to let the man go because he can find no evidence the man is a spy Ada notices the sand on his pants. This sand is unusual because the people of the village know they are forbidden from going on the beach.

The author continues to incorporate bits of World War II history in with the story as the residents often find parts of warcraft and shrapnel in the fields and woods around their village. Fred sends Ada home with a part of a German plane for Jamie. Fred tells Ada he’d watched the pilot try to fly what was left of his plane out of enemy territory with parts dropping off as it went. Once, while they were riding Butter, Ada and Jamie even came across a crashed plane.

Becoming a traitor to one’s country is an issue discussed by Jamie and Ada in this section of the novel. This act of becoming a traitor ties into the theme of lies and the truth. Miss Smith tells the children that the spy whom Ada caught would be turned into a double agent. He would be used to send incorrect information back to his people in Germany. Jamie said he could never lie in this way. Ada, however, reasons that if he didn’t do what the English told him to do he’d be killed. She says that if she were in his position she’d do as she was told.

Ada finally achieves her goal of jumping Butter over the stone wall just before she is thrust back into her old life when she realizes that her Mam has come for her and Jamie. It is clear that Susan wants to do something to help Jamie and Ada but isn’t sure what she can do. It is clear Mam has come back for the children only because she doesn’t want to have to pay the government for her children to remain evacuees. She immediately begins attacking Ada accusing her of believing she’s better than she is and degrading her for being out in public. She knocks Ada down when Ada doesn’t move fast enough for her. Although Ada knows she can stay with Susan because of the abuse her mother has dealt her, she also knows she can’t leave Jamie to face their mother alone. Susan seems to understand and accept Ada’s reasoning when she nods in response after Ada tells her she can’t leave Jamie.

Discussion Question 1

When Susan tells the children that the German spy whom Ada helped catch will be forced to tell lies to the German government Jamie says he wouldn’t lie under those



circumstances but Ada says she would. How does this situation put a new spin on the lessons this novel teaches about lying?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Susan doesn't say goodbye to Ada and Jamie when their mother comes to take them away?

Discussion Question 3

How does Ada's opinion of herself change after she helps catch the German spy?

Vocabulary

huns, shrapnel, copse, portly, vehemently, plummeted, petrified



Chapters 42-46

Summary

In Chapter 42, Mam told Ada at the end of the driveway that Ada wouldn't be walking much longer. On the train when a serviceman offered a seat SO Ada could sit down, Mam took it instead. When Jamie tried to tell their mother that Ada had caught a spy Mam thought it was a lie. Mam continued to abuse Ada emotionally as they got closer to her new apartment. She said she had a better job now. When Ada argued there was nothing wrong with her being in public her Mam hit her again. Once they reached the apartment Ada tried to be polite but her Mam was angry at her politeness as well.

When Ada told Mam she didn't need to use a bucket, she could go to the toilet, her Mam told her she would not be leaving that apartment. She warned Ada that if she were to disobey her she would punish Jamie. After she left Jamie asked why she was so angry with them. Ada told Jamie it was because they looked different but for a moment she went back to her old way of thinking and believed it was because she was a cripple. As she thought she realized the truth, that her mother could have had her foot fixed but instead wanted her to remain crippled. Ada didn't understand why. She reminded herself and Jamie of all the good things they'd done while they were at Susan's. Just before she went to sleep, Ada realized she was at war with her mother.

In Chapter 43, when they woke the next morning Jamie had wet the bed. Their Mam hit him. As Ada told her she'd wash the bedclothes she noticed her shoes and crutches were gone. Her mother laughed. Ada questioned why she hadn't at least gotten her crutches or fixed her foot when she was a baby. Her mother had said it was because no one was going to take her money and tell her what to do with her baby. Jamie interrupted asking where they went if there were bombs. She simply told them there were no bombs in London. When she realized she didn't have their ration cards she was angry with Susan and blamed her for not sending them.

When Mam and Jamie left to get groceries Ada began exploring the flat. Inside her Mam's dressing table she found birth certificates for herself and Jamie as well as her parents' marriage certificate. Jamie alerted her that they were coming home by singing as he walked up the stairs. When she fixed dinner Mam wouldn't let Ada or Jamie have any of the beef she'd cooked. Before their mother left for work Ada commented that her mother would be better off without she and Jamie. She said she could arrange for them to go away and it wouldn't cost her mother anything. Ada went on to explain that she could even have her foot fixed. She made a guess that her father would have fixed her foot and suggested so to her mother. She was not wrong. Mam explained her father had wanted the babies and had wanted to get Ada's foot fixed. Ada challenged her mother telling her that she had never wanted them. Mam agreed it was the truth; she'd never wanted either of them but her husband had told her she was unnatural. When Ada told her they'd be gone for good in the morning and Mam wouldn't have to pay anything Mam asked if it was a promise. Ada said it was.



In Chapter 44, after Mam left Ada and Jamie cried. She showed Jamie the article she'd found detailing their father's death. She had just gathered their birth certificates when they heard air raid sirens. They followed other people to a shelter. Just as a building near them blew up Ada found the door to a shelter. She hung onto Jamie as they waited in the shelter and promised herself she'd never let go of him.

In Chapter 45, an air raid warden woke them in the morning telling them they had to clear out of the shelter because of fires. As they made their way to the street Ada was surprised to see Susan walking toward them. Jamie screamed her name and she began running toward them.

In Chapter 46, Susan said she'd found them by the address on the letter's their mother had left at her house. When she had arrived the building had been hit by a bomb but some people told her they'd seen Ada and Jamie going down the stairs. Susan explained to Ada and Jamie while it was true that their mother had a right to them, they also belonged to Susan. Ada told her they were planning to begin the journey back to her that day.

On the way back to the train station Susan told Ada she needed new crutches anyway as her old ones were getting too short. Ada knew she'd tell Susan what really happened between her and her Mam someday but the truth still hurt too badly. When the train finally arrived in Kent they took a taxi to Susan's house. When they arrived Susan gasped because her house had been leveled by a bomb. People from the village were sifting through the rubble. The villagers were at first astonished and then happy to see Susan, Ada and Jamie alive and well.

Lady Thornton hugged Susan but criticized her for not telling anyone that she was leaving town. Meanwhile Bovril, Jamie's cat, ran for him. Ada moved toward the pasture to look for Butter but Fred assured her the pony was all right. He explained there had been no air raid sirens that night, that was why they thought Susan, Ada and Jamie had been in the house. Susan hugged Ada and Jamie, telling them they had saved her life. Ada finally identified what she was feeling as joy. She told Susan that made them even.

Analysis

As Ada decides to wage war against her mother in this section of the novel, the theme of war is completed. Just as the English were fighting for freedom Ada was fighting for her own freedom. With the violent refresher of how much her mother really hated her and how cruel she was Ada realizes she had only come for her and Jamie because she doesn't want to have to spend money on them. Ada is intelligent in her fight and first finds her birth certificate and Jamie's birth certificates. She also finds a newspaper article about her father's death during a dock accident.

"I was going to have the truth said plainly. I was done with lies" (305) Ada says to herself as she deals with her mother. She gets her mother to admit she never wanted children. Mam goes on to tell Ada that she didn't want to spend the money on getting Ada's foot



fixed, that she would never pay for the surgery. Notice Ada tries several times to get her mother to stop when she begins going down a path of berating Ada and Jamie or telling what Ada realizes are downright lies. Ada stands up to her mother and gets her to admit that she wants them to go away. Even though it hurts her, Ada says she can make that happen.

Significant in this section is Mam's admission that she never wanted children. Remember when Ada and Jamie were left with Susan one of the things they knew she had said about them was that she had never wanted children. Even though at this point Ada's Mam had not told her in words that she wasn't wanted, her actions made Ada feel as if she weren't wanted. This could be why Ada had so much trouble trusting Susan at first. She was afraid that Susan would realize how much she didn't want children and begin treating them like Mam did. Notice that although Susan told Ada and Jamie that she didn't want children and that she wasn't a nice person, her actions told the children a different story, that she was nice and planned to do her best to care for them.

Just as the author has explored different kinds of lies through the course of the novel she fills out this theme when Susan makes up her mind to go after Ada and Jamie. She tells Ada she decided to come for them because she had realized that just like there were different kinds of lies, there were also different kinds of truth. Even though Mam had a right to take Jamie and Ada back to the city because she is their biological mother, Susan has a right to fight for them because she is the one who truly cares for them, like a mother should.

Remember back in Chapter 11 when Jamie first asked Susan to take him home. She had not taken his request seriously but did tell him that she'd never been to London. She passes off the idea of her going to London as if it would be an impossibility as she wouldn't know where to go to find where Jamie belonged. Despite her lack of familiarity with the area Susan sets off to find Jamie and Ada in a city that is not only foreign to her but has also been bombed. These actions define Susan's determination to locate and save Ada and Jamie.

In this conclusion of the novel Susan discovers how many people really care for her as the villagers gather to sift through the rubble of her house after it took a direct hit from a bomb. After her friend Becky had died Susan had chosen to isolate herself from other people. She believed the people of the village didn't really like her and that she was happier on her own. It appears the people of the village do care for her when she returns from London with Ada and Jamie to find them looking for bodies in the rubble of Susan's home. Remember that no one knew Mam had returned to get Ada and Jamie. Susan had not yet told anyone the children were gone nor had she told anyone she was going to bring them home.

Susan does realize the lucky timing of her trip to London. She knows that if she had been at home she would have quite possibly been dead. She thanks Ada and Jamie for saving her life. Really the children have saved Susan's life in more ways than one. They have not only kept her from getting killed by the bomb but have also brought happier things into her life for her to think about than her loss of Becky. They help her to start



living again. Similarly it is Susan who helped Ada begin living at all. Ada credits Susan for saving her from a life of misery and entrapment just as Susan believes the children kept her from dying.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the irony that the Germans began dropping bombs on London the second night after Mam brought Jamie and Ada back there.

Discussion Question 2

In what ways did Susan save Ada's life? In what ways did Ada and Jamie save Susan's?

Discussion Question 3

If you were Ada do you think you would have had the courage to confront your mother and hear her tell you she never loved you? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

flaunting, congenial, placidly, roused, coursing



Characters

Ada Smith

Ada Smith is the main character and narrator of this story. She is born with a clubfoot. Because she is embarrassed by her daughter, and wants to punish her, Ada's mother makes her stay in their one-room apartment. She abuses Ada and calls her a cripple.

Although she doesn't have any formal education and no knowledge of the world outside her house, Ada has a good deal of common sense. After she makes Jamie cry by tying him up so he can't leave the apartment, Ada realizes that she can't act like her Mam. She decides instead to learn to walk so she can get to Jamie if he ever needs her.

When Ada learns her Mam is considering sending Jamie to the country, she sneaks out so she can go with him. Ada sees a girl riding a pony from the train as they travel to Kent and decides she wants to do that as well. She feels she and Jamie are supposed to be living with Susan when she sees a pony there.

Because Ada had been abused for years by her mother she is suspicious of Miss Smith and worried that she will soon lose the good things that she enjoys while living with Miss Smith. She has panic attacks when Miss Smith first makes a dress for her because she believes she isn't worthy of the gift. The Anderson shelter built for them to use during air raids resurrects Ada's memories of her mother putting her in the cabinet under the sink as a punishment. Susan helps Ada deal with her fear of the shelter.

As Ada lives with Susan she realizes many of the things that her mother had told her about herself are lies. When her Mam finally comes for Ada and Jamie they do not want to go but Ada feels they don't have a choice. She decides, however, she is tired of her mother's lies and confronts her mother. Ada gets her mother to admit she doesn't want the children and never had. She doesn't love them and would be happy if they went away. Ada tells her mother she can make that happen.

Susan Smith

Susan Smith is the lady who takes in Ada and Jamie even though she doesn't really want children. Lady Thornton takes the children to Susan and basically forces her to take them. Although Susan helps Ada through her panic and her adjustment to living in society it is apparent that Susan has problems of her own.

Through the course of the novel Susan slowly tells Ada her story. Because she was the intelligent daughter of a clergyman she got a scholarship to go to college. In college she met Becky, whom she called her best friend. The two lived together until Becky died. Susan's father told her he believed she was no longer able to be redeemed after she went to college. She always believed he hated her.



Susan believes she is not worthy to be a parent because she doesn't keep as close a watch over Ada and Jamie as her mother had kept on her. She came to realize, however, that Ada and Jamie would not have liked that sort of parenting. Susan also suffers depression from the death of Becky. She prefers to be alone and believes the people of the village don't like her, but Lady Thorton and Ada convince her to join the Women's Volunteer Service.

Despite her challenges, Susan cares for Ada and Jamie the best she can. She sees to it that Ada's foot is protected and kept covered. She gets Ada crutches so she can walk without pain. She feeds the children well, teaches Ada how to sew and knit, reads to them both and keeps Jamie from being abused at school.

When Jamie and Ada's mother comes for them Susan realizes they are more her children than their own mother's. She goes after Ada and Jamie the following day and finds them in the bombed out ruins of London even though she had never been to London before. When she returns home with the children and finds her house has been bombed, she thanks the children for saving her life.

Lady Thorton

Lady Thorton is the billeting officer and the head of the Women's Volunteer Service in Kent. Ada first meets her when she and Jamie come into town on the train from London. At this point Ada knows her only as "the iron faced woman." It is Lady Thorton who takes Ada and Jamie to live with Susan Smith even though Miss Smith said she doesn't want children.

Lady Thorton visits Miss Smith to ask her to join the WVS. She tries to convince Miss Smith that she is not as disliked in the community as she believes she is. Between Lady Thorton and Ada they convince Miss Smith to join the group.

It is Lady Thorton who visits Ada and Miss Smith after Ada helps her daughter Margaret following a riding accident. Miss Smith had not believed Ada's story about helping Margaret until Lady Thorton paid them a visit. Lady Thorton suggests during the visit that Ada should go to Grimes, their stable hand, for help in riding Butter.

Lady Thorton is a strong-willed woman who believes in supporting the war effort. She is very orderly and has trouble adjusting to changes as is shown by the way she reacts when the train brings children refugees instead of infants. She is passionate in trying to keep the children where they will be safe first when she tries to persuade the families of the evacuated children to leave them in the country and then again when she tries to persuade Susan to send Ada and Jamie away because Kent is a likely place the German army will invade.



Mam

Mam is Ada and Jamie's mother. She is cruel to both of her children. In the end of the novel the reader learns that Mam never wanted children. It was her husband who pressured her into having them.

Mam arranges for Jamie to go to the county so he can be safe from the bombs. She says she does this so she will have one less mouth to feed. She tells Ada no one will take her, but Ada sneaks away and goes anyway.

Mam is not among the mothers who come to get their children because they miss them after they were evacuated to the country. In fact Mam never responds to Miss Smith's letters asking for the children's dates of birth or permission to do surgery on Ada's foot. Mam does not come for the children until she learns she will have to begin paying the government if her children stay in the country any longer.

As soon as she brings Ada and Jamie back home, she takes away Ada's shoes and crutches. Ada faces her mother and tells her that if she doesn't want them Ada and Jamie can leave and she won't have to worry about paying money to the government. Ada's mother asks if she will promise that they will leave. It is at that moment that Ada realizes her mother doesn't love her or Jamie and that nothing they can do would make her love them.

Jamie

Jamie is Ada's younger brother. Because he is not crippled their Mam lets him leave the apartment as often as he wishes. During their time at Susan's house Jamie often tells Susan and Ada that he wants to go home. He does not remember the way that his mother treated him and Ada.

Jamie often cries, wets the bed and refuses to go to school. It is Susan who realizes that Jamie is being abused at school when she notices a welt on his wrist. She goes to his school and sees that the teacher has tied his left hand to the chair because she thinks being left-handed is a mark of the devil. Susan tells the teacher not to tie the boy's hand again.

Through their time with Susan Jamie enjoys visiting the airbase built next to their house and getting to know the pilots. He can recognize the planes by the way they sound in the sky and can tell if a plane is a German plane or a British plane.

One day Jamie brings a cat home from school with him. Jamie cleans it up and kills his fleas. Regardless, Susan does not want to keep the cat but when it begins sleeping with Jamie he stops wetting the bed. She decides dealing with the cat is worth not having to wash sheets as often.



Stephen White

Stephen White is the boy who helps Ada out by carrying her to the train station on the day that they are evacuated from London. He is the only one of the children in the White family who refuses to go back to London when his mother comes for her children. He stays because he wants to continue taking care of Colonel Robert McPherson, the man who took him in when he was evacuated from London.

Stephen is also one of the few people from London who was fair with Ada when he learned she was only crippled, not mentally handicapped. Stephen tells Ada on several occasions that her crippled foot is no reason for her mother to have kept her locked in the apartment.

Fred Grimes

Fred Grimes is the man who takes care of the Thorton's horses. Grimes helps Ada improve her riding skills. In exchange, Ada helps Grimes with the stable work. He is the one who tells her that Butter won't run because his hooves have grown so long. After he trims the pony's hooves he is able to both trot and gallop.

Grimes seems to understand that Ada was once abused. He treats her kindly, almost like a daughter. When Ada comes to him looking for wool to make Susan a Christmas present he gives her his late wife's bag of knitting supplies. Grimes also finds a side saddle for her to use that allows her to ride Butter more easily despite her bad foot.

Margaret Thorton

Margaret Thorton is the daughter of Lady Thorton. She attends a boarding school. While she is at home during a break Margaret has a riding accident when riding her brother's hunter. Ada cares for Margaret and takes her home.

Even though Margaret is away at boarding school through most of the course of the novel she and Ada form a close friendship. Margaret worries about mother because her older brother is away at the war. Her mother is afraid her son will be killed. Margaret is grateful to Ada when Ada says she will keep an eye on Lady Thorton.

Colonel Robert McPherson

Colonel Robert McPherson is the retired military man who takes Stephen White in after he is evacuated from London. Before Stephen came to live with the Colonel, the older man had gotten in bad shape because he was not taking care of himself properly. Stephen helps him by cleaning up his house and learning to cook for them both. Even though he is old and blind, the colonel is upset because he can not help in the war effort.



The English Gentleman

Ada watches as this man, who later pretends to be an English gentleman, rows a small boat up to the English shore and then buries a suitcase on the beach. Ada tells the police about the man and helps them locate the man. After Ada points out to the police the man has sand on his pant cuffs even though people from Kent are not allowed to be on the beach, it is determined that the man is a German spy.

Jonathan Thorton

Jonathan Thorton is Margaret's older brother. He joins the Royal Air Force and is away at training during the time of the novel. When he is sent away to fight in the war his mother is stressed and depressed believing her son will be killed. The reader never learns if Jonathan survives the war or not.

Butter

Butter is the pony with whom Ada makes friends and learns to ride while she is living with Susan. The pony offers Ada both physical and emotional therapy. The pony was something she could love and care for without the pony ridiculing her. Riding the horse was also a form of physical therapy for Ada.

Becky

Becky was Susan's best friend. The two lived together before Becky died. Becky gave Butter the pony to Susan hoping she could foster a love of horses in Susan. It is suggested in the novel that it was Susan's relationship with Becky that made Susan's father believe she was unable to be redeemed.

Jamie's Teacher

Because Jamie is left-handed his teacher ties his left hand to his chair to make him write with his right hand. She believes left-handed people were evil and are of the devil. Susan confronts this woman and warns her not to tie Jamie up again. The teacher eventually leaves the school after most of the evacuees go back to London.

Daisy

Daisy is the daughter of the couple who own the pub in Kent. When the soldiers are brought to Kent after they are rescued from Dunkirk, Daisy helps Ada serve water and tea to the soldiers.

Bovril

Bovril is the cat that Jamie adopts. Neither Ada nor Susan like the cat much but allow Jamie to have it in the house and even sleep with it.

Dr. Graham

Dr. Graham is the doctor who examines Ada and Jamie when they first come to live with Susan. Dr. Graham believes that Ada's foot can be fixed with surgery.



Symbols and Symbolism

Blood on the Floor

The blood on the floor is a symbol of Ada's attempts to teach herself how to walk. When she sees the spot on the floor that she missed Ada slides over to cover it so that her mother won't guess that she has been trying to learn to walk.

Ada's Clubfoot

Ada's clubfoot is a symbol of her mother's hatred for her. All of her life Ada has been told by her mother that she should not be seen in public because of her deformed foot. Ada's Mam forces her to stay inside the apartment because of the foot. It is only when Ada evacuates to the country with the other children that she learns that her mother could have chosen to have Ada's foot fixed when Ada was a baby. She also learns that her clubfoot is not a reason for her not to have been allowed to go to school or even out of the apartment.

Mam's Cabinet

Mam's cabinet, the one located under the kitchen sink, is a symbol of torture. Ada is sent to stay overnight in this cabinet when her mother deems she has been bad and deserves to be punished. Ada hates the way that cabinet smells, the closeness and darkness of the space, and especially the roaches that crawl over her while she is in the cabinet.

"The Swiss Family Robinson"

In Ada's opinion, the book "The Swiss Family Robinson" is a symbol of an unrealistic life. This is the first book that Miss Smith reads to Jamie and Ada. Although Jamie loves the book, Ada believes it is unrealistic with the things the family needs magically turning up just when they need them.

Blackout Curtains

The blackout curtains are symbols of rules that the people had to follow during the time of World War II. These curtains had to be put up so that Nazi fighter planes could not see the lights from homes at night and would not know where to drop bombs.



A Welt

The welt that Miss Smith finds on Jamie's wrist is a symbol of an unjust punishment. When she visits Jamie's school she learns that he got the welt because the teacher has been tying his left hand to his chair in order to keep him from writing with it. Miss Smith demands the tying be stopped and that Jamie be allowed to write with whichever hand is most comfortable.

Anderson Shelter

This Anderson Shelter is a symbol of Ada's continued terror resulting from the abuse she received at her mother's hands. Even though these shelters are intended to save families from bombs, Ada panics when she has to go into the shelter because it reminds her of the cabinet her mother would put her in as a punishment.

Green Velvet Dress

This green velvet dress is a symbol of Miss Smith's affection for Ada. Because Ada does not believe she is worthy of anything beautiful she has a panic attack. Ada also cannot understand or accept affection because she still sees herself as the ugly, unloved girl that her mother always said that she was.

“Alice In Wonderland”

The book “Alice in Wonderland” symbolizes the way that Ada believes that her life has been turned upside down, just like Alice's life is turned upside down when she goes through the rabbit's hole.

An Onion

This onion, strangely enough, is a symbol of honor. After the man that Ada sees rowing to the ocean shore is determined to be a spy, the policeman who didn't believe Ada's story comes to apologize to her. He brings her the gift of an onion. This onion is significant because imported onions were very scarce and the residents of Kent had not yet had time to grow onions in their victory gardens.



Settings

One-Room Flat in London

This one-room flat in London is the opening setting for the novel. Ada has spent most of her life trapped by her Mum in this one room because she has a clubfoot. Ada leaves the apartment with her brother when she makes the decision to disobey her Mam and go with her brother to evacuate to the country.

Kent Town Hall

Kent town hall is the place the evacuees were taken after they got off the train. It is at the town hall where the people come to choose which children they wish to keep. Ada and Jamie are left standing in town hall after everyone leaves because no one wants them. Ada later returns to this town hall after the soldiers from Dunkirk are brought to Kent and the hall is set up like a makeshift hospital.

Susan Smith's House

Lady Thorton takes Ada and Jamie to Susan Smith's house because none of the other families would take the brother and sister. The two children stay at her house for several months until their Mam receives notification she'll have to pay the government if her children stay in the country any longer. Susan realizes she can't let the children go back to their mother the day they left with her. She goes to London to get them. When she, Ada and Jamie return to Susan's house they discover it has been flattened by a bomb. They arrive to find villagers and friends picking through the rubble looking for the bodies of the three.

Hill Overlooking the Village

It is from this hill overlooking the village that Ada sees the man who turns out to be a German spy rowing up to the shore and burying a suitcase.

Two-Room Flat in London

This two-room flat in London is where Mam is living when she takes Jamie and Ada back home with her. Ada and Jamie stay in the flat only one night before Ada confronts her mother about her lack of love for them.



Thorton's Stables

Because Grimes has so little help doing his work in the stables Ada agrees to help him out in exchange for riding lessons. Ada first goes to these stables when she takes Margaret home after her riding accident.

Dunkirk

Dunkirk is the name of a French port near which members of the British army were trapped against the ocean. This location is significant because the soldiers rescued from this port are brought to Kent. Ada is among the women who provide assistance to the soldiers.

Kent

Kent is the name of the area in which Susan Smith lives. It is to this area that Ada and Jamie are sent when they are evacuated from London.



Themes and Motifs

Different Types of Truth and Lies

Although everyone tells lies at one point or another, this novel teaches that there are different types of lies — some necessary and some for show — just like there are different forms of the truth. When Ada first comes to live with Susan she lies because she seems uncomfortable with the truth. Soon she realizes that adults, even governments, lie. During their time together Susan shares with Ada the differences between a liar and one who tells lies. Finally, Susan comes to realize that there are different types of truth, just like there are different kinds of lies.

When Ada first ventures from the apartment in which she has been trapped for so long she seems to tell lies because she believes no one will like who she really is. Instead of telling people she has a crippled foot she tells them her foot got run over by a brewer's cart or that she got stepped on by a horse. Ada's mother has told her so often that people won't like her because she has a crippled foot that Ada believes it is better for her to lie than to tell the truth. When Susan asks Ada what her and Jamie's last names are Ada lies again. When she does tell Susan the truth, Susan doesn't believe her.

As the novel progresses the reader will learn that children aren't the only ones who lie. Ada spent the first ten years of her life being told by her mother that she would always be a cripple and would never be any good to anyone. In Mam's case her lies were outright, false, hurtful lies.

Although Susan had always criticized Ada for lying Ada is surprised when she catches her guardian telling a lie. When Susan confronts Jamie's teacher about the injury he has received because the teacher has been tying his left hand to his chair to keep him from writing with it Susan fabricates proof that left-handedness is not a mark of the devil. She tells Jamie's teacher that her Divinity professor was left-handed. Susan lies with the intention of getting Jamie's teacher to stop hurting him over something he can't control.

In a much broader sense, Ada realizes that even government officials lie when she sees the newsreels made about the rescue of soldiers from Dunkirk. She notices the clips included on these news briefs show soldiers who look tired and dirty but seem healthy for the most part. They smile and wave at the camera. From her own experience with the soldiers brought to her village in Kent, Ada knows that these soldiers are weak, sick and often injured. She knows none of the soldiers brought to their area look like the ones in the newsreels. The government, however, uses the newsreels as a way to encourage the people of England. For this reason, they put a positive spin on the news and chose to show only healthy looking soldiers.

After Susan learns she has been wrong in accusing Ada of making up the story about helping Margaret Thornton, Susan tells Ada there is a difference in a liar and a person who tells lies. Ada dismisses Susan's apology for not believing her by telling Susan that



she is a liar. Susan corrects Ada. She explains to Ada she tells lies but that doesn't make her a liar. Susan shares with Ada that sometimes a person needs to tell lies to protect themselves. In that case, that person is not a liar. She describes a liar as a person who tells lies just to make themselves look important.

Later in the novel Ada and Jamie learn the spy that Ada helped catch would be turned into a double agent and discuss their opinions of the man being a traitor to his country. While Jamie says he wouldn't lie to the people of his country to save his own life Ada disagrees. She says that in his position she believes it would be okay for him to do whatever it takes to stay alive.

Just as it has been demonstrated that there are a variety of different cases and situations in which people can and do lie, there are also situations that can bring out different forms of the truth. One of these is seen in Susan's decision to find Ada and Jamie. Although she knows it is a legal truth that Ada and Jamie belong to their biological mother, she also sees the way their mother treats them. She comes to the realization that the children also belong with her, the one who has taken care of them and helped them to heal from their mother's abuse.

The Path to Recovering from Abuse

Although Ada's path to recovering from the abuse she received at the hands of her mother is not easy she becomes a stronger person through the course of her story by escaping from her abusive situation, moving to a safe environment, building her self confidence and having a support system. Life hasn't given Ada many opportunities but those she has been given she chooses to take full advantage. She works hard to teach herself to walk so she is ready when her chance to escape comes.

Because Ada has been trapped in a one-room apartment by her mother for years she takes the opportunity when the chance comes for her to escape. Even though she is in pain because she is trying to walk on her clubfoot and she doesn't know what the future might hold for her and her brother, Ada sneaks out of her mother's apartment to evacuate to the country with the rest of the children.

Even though she doesn't realize it at first, Ada has arrived at a safe place when Lady Thorton leaves her and Jamie in Susan Smith's care. Susan teaches them how to properly clean and care for their bodies. She also provides them with fresh warm clothes and worries about the chilblains that Ada gets on her bad foot. Even though Ada still ducks when Susan makes particular hand gestures Susan tries to comfort her by assuring her that she will never hit her. Most importantly, Susan sees to the children's medical care. Under her watch they blossom into healthy active children.

Another stepping stone in Ada's path to recovery from the years of her mother's abuse comes when Ada begins building her own self confidence. Her first literal step in building this self confidence comes when she begins teaching herself to walk. She decides she will no longer be helpless. Ada also gains self confidence as she learns to



ride Butter. She sets a goal for herself that others might think couldn't be accomplished because of her handicap but Ada achieves her goal. A major boost to Ada's self confidence comes when she assists with the soldiers brought into Kent. Although the work is hard, painful and tiring Ada persists through days of hard work and knows she is stronger when she is finished. A final boost to Ada's self confidence comes when she assists the police in catching the German spy.

A final benefit that helps Ada recover from her abuse is her support system. Even though Ada does not believe she needs help, and especially pushes Susan away, Ada is helped immensely by the people who surround her. Susan quickly picks up on the clues that Ada has been abused and finds ways to help her cope with her panic and lack of self worth. Jamie especially is a source of support for Ada. As she matures and heals, Ada learns she has to hold herself together to keep from scaring Jamie. This is the case when she has to go in the bomb shelter even though it reminds her of the times her mother put her in the cabinet under the sink as a punishment. Others in Ada's support system included Grimes and Margaret.

The Downfalls of Seclusion

Before they meet one another both Ada and Susan lead secluded lives even though they are isolated for different reasons. Both suffer different disadvantages because they do not associate with other people. Despite their different reasons for being isolated, Ada and Susan are a benefit to each other and help the other out of her isolation.

Ada's seclusion is forced and complete. Her mother forces her to stay in the family's one-room apartment. The only people she really has contact with are her Mam and Jamie. As a result of her seclusion, Ada knows very little about the world. When she first escapes she doesn't know what grass is. She doesn't know how far a block is. Communication is difficult because Ada often doesn't understand the words people use when they talk to her.

For the first several months after Ada escapes from her isolation she is frustrated and angry. Her frustration comes from not understanding what is going on around her, while she is angry because she has been forced by her Mam to miss so much. When Ada comes to live with Susan, Susan gives Ada the freedom she needs to explore the world around her. She learns how little Ada knows about life and begins explaining things to her so that Ada can understand them better. At the conclusion of the novel, Susan decides that Ada and Jamie belong to her as much as they do to their mother. She goes to London to get them and bring them to live with her permanently.

While Ada's isolation is forced, Susan chooses to seclude herself from society because she feels she doesn't fit in with the other women. It appears Susan's isolation became more severe after her friend Becky died, although it started before that point. When Lady Thorton requests that Susan join the Women's Volunteer Service Susan makes the excuse that none of the women like her. Susan is different from the other women. She had the opportunity to go to college and is well-educated. Instead of focusing on a



course of study intended for women Susan studied math. When she finished her college she couldn't get a job because all the jobs for which she was qualified could be filled only by men.

Because Susan has completely isolated herself since Becky's death she has allowed herself to get very depressed. When Ada first meets Susan she notices that there are days that she does nothing but spend her time staring into space. Susan often has trouble motivating herself to get things done and must often put forth a great effort just to do the minimum to take care of Ada and Jamie.

A good deal of the way that Ada helps Susan to escape from her isolation is just by challenging her to get involved in life. When Ada and Jamie are left at Susan's house, the woman has no choice but to begin to take care of them. This requires her getting out more for doctor visits, taking Jamie to school and getting groceries. When Lady Thornton asks Susan to volunteer with the WVS Susan tries to refuse but Ada challenges the woman to get involved by hurting her pride a little bit. When Ada does learn to write she begins leaving notes for Susan around the house in hopes of cheering up her guardian.

Life During World War II

A good deal about the way of life during World War II can be gleaned from this book which qualifies as historical fiction. Ada's story is built around many events that really took place in England during World War II. The reader finishes the book with a better understanding of the effects of the war on England and its residents.

The first aspect of World War II recorded in the novel is the evacuation of the children from London. Just as it is recorded in the book it was believed Hitler was more likely to bomb the larger cities, so children were moved to the countryside where it was believed they would be safe. In this story Ada is saved not only from the fear of bombs being dropped but also from her abusive mother.

The rationing of food and supplies is another situation faced by the people of England during World War II. Ada describes how some foods, like sugar, butter, meat and onions were in very short supply because ships used to import this food were being bombed by the Germans. People were given ration books allowing each person in each family only a certain amount of some of the most scarce foods.

During the time of the rationing people often saved up their rations in order to honor someone. For instance on the date of birth she had chosen for Ada, Susan saves up her sugar rations so she can make Ada a cake. Similarly, the colonel and Stephen honor Ada by saving up their butter rations for her when she comes for tea. Because onions are so scarce, the portly policeman does Ada a great honor by giving her an onion as an apology gift for not taking her seriously.

Victory gardens, gardens in which average citizens grew food for themselves and their communities became common during World War II. The government encouraged these vegetable gardens so the people could provide their own food. It was not uncommon for



people to till up what had once been manicured lawns, in the case of the Thortons, to plant vegetable gardens.

German spies living among the English were another very real fear during World War II. These spies were tasked with gathering information about the English weaponry and attack plans and sending it back to Germany. People were warned to be very careful what they said in public and to keep their eyes open for strange people. In this particular novel Ada helps the police catch a German spy who tries to infiltrate Kent.

War propaganda was also popular during the time of World War II. Citizens were forced to watch newsreels about the war before movie showings. It is one of these newsreels that gives Ada nightmares because it makes her realize how real the war really is. Propaganda also came in the form of posters displayed around town. These posters seen during World War II times and also featured in the novel bore messages like: "Loose lips sink ships" (246), "Your courage, your cheerfulness, your resolution, will bring us victory" (83) and "Freedom is in peril, defend it with all your might" (86).

A final real life occurrence in World War II that is also featured in this novel is the situation at Dunkirk and the evacuation of soldiers into Kent. It is these soldiers whom Ada helps for days as they are rescued from the port at Dunkirk and brought into Kent.

The Dangers of Judging a Person Based on Appearance

Because she is born with a clubfoot, Ada has spent all of her life being told that others will judge her based on that one characteristic. Through the course of the novel the reader learns how harmful this type of judgement is to the person who is judged simply by the way they look. From Ada's point of view she learns that sometimes the people whom she thought were nice turn out to be not so nice, while the ones who characterize themselves as not being nice turn out to be the kindest.

Even though they don't know her the people who live near Ada's apartment in London assume that because she doesn't ever go out she is mentally handicapped. Even after Stephen White's mother sees Ada out in public and speaks to her, she cannot get over her preconceived notion that Ada should be in an asylum. Ada is very hurt by the way Mrs. White judges her because Ada has always thought that Mrs. White is a nice person.

On the other hand of this judgement, however, is Stephen White's claim that Ada's mother is crazy for keeping her locked in her house. Stephen, like his mother, had assumed Ada was mentally handicapped. When he sees her in public he realizes that he was wrong and changes his opinion of the girl. He can see that all that is wrong with her is a bad foot.

Ada is judged by her appearance in different aspects of the novel. For instance when the teacher comes to Susan's house to tell her that school will be starting for Jamie, she



is critical of Susan's desire to put Ada in school as well. The teacher offends both Susan and Ada by assuming that Ada is unable to be educated. Susan makes a common sense statement to Jamie when Jamie comments that Ada can't go to school because of her foot. "That foot's a long way from her brain" (42) Susan says indicating she believes Ada's physical handicap has no bearing on her intelligence. In fact, Ada borrows this saying when the portly police officer refuses to listen to her when she tries to tell him about the man she's seen who she believes is a spy.

Jamie is also judged on appearance. These judgements are first made when the two children arrive in the village on the train. Because they are so much dirtier than the other children no one will open their homes to them. This not only hurts Ada and Jamie but also strengthens Ada's belief that no one really wants her.

A judgement made on Jamie alone is that of his teacher who believed he had the devil in him because he wrote with his left hand. The teacher's act of punishing him, criticizing him and belittling him for being left-handed causes him to hate school. Susan manages to convince Jamie that just because he writes with a different hand than the other children, he is not marked by the devil.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told by Ada from the first person point of view. She knows and reports all of her emotions and her thoughts but is able to report only the actions and words of other characters. She tells her story directly to her reader as if she were talking to a close friend. There are even places in the novel where she directly refers to her reader. This first person point of view makes Ada's story seem very personal. The reader comes to think of Ada as a real person and care about what happens to her. This story would not work as well if it were told from any other point of view. A third person point of view would not have given the reader the in-depth look in Ada's life and emotions as the first person point of view does.

Language and Meaning

The significance about the language in this novel is the way that Ada struggles with understanding people once she begins living with Susan. There are many words she and Jamie both don't understand. This lack of understanding certain words leaves Ada confused about many of the things Susan has told her. It is only after Susan begins to realize just how isolated Ada has been and how little she understands about how the world works that she begins explaining everything to Ada. There are several places in the novel where Ada will describe the object she has seen but doesn't know the word for, like the doctor's eyeglasses or the book she found in Butter's stable.

Structure

This novel is told in a linear fashion in the past tense. Ada tells the story from a point after the action has already taken place, she had already gone to live with Susan full time after her Mam took her back to London. Through the course of the novel Ada speaks to her reader as if she is telling the story directly to them. One notable example of this is found in Chapter 2 when Ada says "I want you to understand what the problem was" (8). Ada expresses her desire to communicate with her reader and make him understand her situation, as if they were acquaintances.

The 316-page book consists of 46 chapters. Each chapter is indicated only with a chapter number. Average chapter length is seven pages. The shortest chapter is Chapter 45 at a mere two pages. The longest chapter is Chapter 8 at eleven pages.



Quotes

I see that look in your eyes, my girl,' she said. 'Don't start thinking you can cross me. You're lucky I put up with you as it is. You've no idea how much worse things can be.'"

-- Mam (Chapter 1 paragraph 11)

Importance: Ada's mother threatens Ada that she shouldn't fight back too much against her mother because her mother can make life even more miserable.

You'd think from what I've already told you that I was at war with my mother, but my first war, the one I waged that June, was between my brother and me."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 14)

Importance: In this quote Ada speaks to her reader directly as she explains how she tried to convince her brother to stay in the apartment with her so that she didn't have to be alone.

Then I did what I should have done to start with. I taught myself to walk."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 33)

Importance: When Ada realized she couldn't make Jamie stay in the apartment with her she decided to teach herself how to walk so she could go to him.

In the end it was the combination of the two, the end of my little war against Jamie, and the start of the big war, Hitler's war, that set me free."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 35)

Importance: Paradoxically Ada says that it was World War II, a war in which so many were imprisoned and killed, that gave her the freedom she needed.

We'd escaped. Mam, Hitler's bombs, my one-room prison. Everything. Crazy or not, I was free."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 63)

Importance: After Ada speaks to Stephen White at the train station she gets the idea that he believes she is crazy. Even so, Ada is happy to be leaving London unlike some of the other children.

That's what we children were: fish on a slab."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph 24)

Importance: In this metaphor Ada explains that the children are picked over and chosen based on somewhat the same criteria as fresh fish.

She was not a nice person, but she cleaned up the floor. She was not a nice person, but she bandaged my foot in a white piece of cloth, and gave us two of her own clean shirts



to wear. They hung past our knees. She combed or cut the tangles out of our hair, which took ages, and then she made a big pan of scrambled eggs.”

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 16)

Importance: Although the author indicates repeatedly that Miss Smith is not a nice person, she also contradicts the statement that Miss Smith is not nice by describing the nice things she does for Ada and Jamie.

When I thought of going home, I couldn't breathe. Home was more frightening than bombs. What was Jamie thinking?”

-- Ada Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 9)

Importance: Ada cannot understand why Jamie wants to go home so badly. Whenever she thinks about going home she goes into a panic.

I was,’ I said. ‘I was hungry, and I was alone, and I was trapped, and right now, no matter what, you have to do what I say. You have to stay here with me. I’m the person who keeps you safe.”

-- Ada (Chapter 12 paragraph 32)

Importance: Ada finally gets so angry with Jamie that she feels that she has to tell him why she doesn't want to go home. She is not only hungry but is also lonely and not allowed to walk or explore.

Stupid. Simple. Educable. Thoughtful. All just words. I was so tired of meaningless words.”

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 14 paragraph 21)

Importance: Because Ada has so little experience in the world there are many words with which she isn't familiar. These words that people use make Ada feel frustrated because she doesn't understand what they are telling her.

If you have to tell lies, or you think you have to, to keep yourself safe — I don't think that makes you a liar. Liars tell lies when they don't need to, to make themselves look special or important. That's what I thought you were doing yesterday. I was wrong.”

-- Susan Smith (Chapter 16 paragraph 57)

Importance: Miss Smith describes the difference between liars and those who tell lies to keep themselves safe. She explains to Ada that she believes there is a difference in these two types of lies.

Everyone knows that's the mark of the devil. He wants to write with his left hand, not his right. I'm training him up the way he's supposed to be.”

-- Jamie's Teacher (Chapter 18 paragraph 29)

Importance: Jamie's teacher explains to Miss Smith that she tied Jamie's left hand to



the desk so he would stop trying to write with that hand. She believes using one's left hand is a sign of the devil.

She should talk about hurting the pony. Ignoring him until he was practically crippled. He'd been better as soon as his hooves were trimmed. Better the very next day."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 24 paragraph 8)

Importance: Ada is angry when Miss Smith tells her there is a danger in trying to jump Butter because she might hurt her, especially when Miss Smith didn't keep the pony's hooves trimmed properly and caused it to have trouble walking.

I was imagining how you'd have the lights on inside, and the blackout up, and I was thinking how lovely it was to have someone to come home to again. I used to dread going back to an empty house."

-- Susan Smith (Chapter 25 paragraph 33)

Importance: Miss Smith explains to Ada how she is happy to have Ada and Jamie there and no longer have to come home to an empty house.

And Christmas trees are a nice tradition. Green in the midst of winter, light in the midst of darkness — it's all metaphors for God."

-- Susan Smith (Chapter 29 paragraph 11)

Importance: Susan explains to Ada and Jamie the Christian meaning of Christmas.

Sad, angry, frightened were bad. It was not okay to be any of those. I couldn't say so, though, not on that gentle morning."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 31 paragraph 23)

Importance: Ada believes it is bad to be sad, angry or frightened. Because Jamie and Miss Smith are so happy Christmas morning she doesn't tell either of them how badly she feels.

It was us, I thought. Jamie and me. We had fallen down a rabbit hole, fallen into Susan's house, and nothing made sense, not at all, not anymore."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 31 paragraph 54)

Importance: Ada can see the similarities between Alice's story as she falls down a rabbit hole into a world she doesn't understand and the life that she and Jamie are living.

Posters or newsreels or spies notwithstanding, it was hard to sit in a warm parlor with snow falling outside, and really believe in the war."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 34 paragraph 46)

Importance: Because the actual fighting have not come to Kent yet Ada and Stephen have trouble believing that there really is a war going on in the world around them.



There was a Before Dunkirk version of me and an After Dunkirk version. The After Dunkirk version was stronger, less afraid. It had been awful, but I hadn't quit. I had persisted. In battle I had won."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 36 paragraph 62)

Importance: Ada describes a change in herself after she helps with the soldiers who come to Kent after they are rescued from Dunkirk. Ada is proud of herself for persisting through the ordeal without giving up even though she was afraid.

It was as if I'd been born in the village. As if I'd been born with two strong feet. As if I really was someone important, someone loved."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 40 paragraph 3)

Importance: After Ada helps capture the spy, she feels for the first time as if she is loved and accepted by the people of the village of Kent.

But now, thinking back, it seemed a little silly to be unhappy about a dress when the pilots were dead. If I had it to do over, I would at least have learned their names."

-- Ada as Narrator (Chapter 40 paragraph 30)

Importance: Ada has matured and healed to the point that she realizes how immaturely she had acted when she was so upset about her new dress at Christmas. She realizes that people who visited in her house had died for her freedom and she hadn't even bothered to learn their names.

You're a cripple. That's all you are. A cripple, and nothing but a cripple. You've never been anything else. Got that?"

-- Mam (Chapter 42 paragraph 43)

Importance: When Ada's mother gets Jamie and Ada back she begins right away abusing Ada and reminding her that she is a worthless cripple.

Then she put her arms around Jamie and looked directly at me. "It's lucky I went after you," she said. "The two of you saved my life, you did."

-- Susan Smith (Chapter 46 paragraph 30)

Importance: Just as Susan had saved the lives of Jamie and Ada when she took them in during the early part of the war, Susan believes the children saved her life because she had gone to London to look for Ada and Jamie that day that her house was hit with a bomb.