

Waiting for Anya Study Guide

Waiting for Anya by Michael Morpurgo

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Contents

Waiting for Anya Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-2.....	5
Chapter 3.....	7
Chapter 4.....	8
Chapter 5.....	9
Chapter 6.....	10
Chapter 7.....	11
Chapter 8.....	12
Chapter 9.....	13
Characters.....	14
Objects/Places.....	17
Themes.....	19
Style.....	21
Quotes.....	23
Topics for Discussion.....	25



Plot Summary

Waiting for Anya is a novel by children's author Michael Morpurgo. This novel is about a small village in France that is invaded by German forces during World War II. The so-called Black Widow of the village, Madame Horcada, lives alone outside the village on her small farm. Everyone ignores her and is afraid of her. However, Jo discovers that Madame Horcada, with the help of her son-in-law, is offering protection to Jewish children who are attempting to escape over the border into Spain. This novel is not only a story of the heroes and enemies of history, but is also an inspiring story of how one village came together to do the right thing.

Jo falls asleep while watching the family sheep, allowing a starving mother bear to get too close to the sheep. Jo runs into town for help and the men who remain, those who could not fight in the war, rush into the mountains to kill the bear. When they return, the men are triumphant, but Jo worries over the safety of his dog, Rouf. Jo goes into the mountain to find his dog and is shocked to discover Rouf has found a bear cub abandoned by the hunted mother bear. Not only this, but there is a man, a stranger to Jo, who has come to rescue the bear.

The man asks Jo to forget he ever saw him, but Jo cannot resist finding out who he is. Jo and Rouf follow the man to Madame Horcada's farm. Madame Horcada is a lone figure in this village of companions, an oddity that many of the children fear. Jo is aware of this fear as he peeks inside the kitchen window of her house, attempting to learn who the man is. Just before Jo falls and gives away his presence, Jo learns the man is Benjamin, Madame Horcada's son-in-law.

Jo returns to Madame Horcada's farm more than a month later, curious to learn the fate of the abandoned bear cub. Jo sneaks into the barn when he hears a noise, but instead of finding a bear cub, he finds a little girl. Benjamin catches Jo there and takes him into the house, where Benjamin and Madame Horcada tell him that the girl in the barn, Leah, is a Jew who is the sole survivor of her family. Benjamin explains about the atrocity being acted out against Jews in Germany and how he and his daughter, Anya, thought they were safe in Paris. When the Germans invaded Paris, Benjamin and Anya attempted to escape and were separated on the road. Benjamin has come to Madame Horcada's to wait for his daughter. While he waits, Benjamin plans to help as many Jewish children as he can escape into Spain.

Jo agrees to keep Madame Horcada and Benjamin's secret. However, when he returns to the village, Jo learns that a regiment of German soldiers plan to move into the village so that they can easily patrol the nearby border with Spain. Jo waits until the following day to tell Madame Horcada, but when he arrives he learns that Benjamin attempted to take Leah across the border the night before and has failed to return. Jo finds Benjamin and Leah in the shed behind his father's shepherd's cottage in the mountains. Benjamin broke his ankle while attempting to run from a German patrol.



Jo helps Benjamin and Leah return to Madame Horcada's farm. Over the next few months, Benjamin slowly heals and more children arrive. By the end of winter, Madame Horcada is attempting to care for a dozen children. Jo takes a job delivering food to Madame Horcada. One day, Madame Horcada asks Jo to ask his grandfather to buy her pigs from her. When his grandfather visits Madame Horcada, the man learns about the children and insists on helping. Grandfather creates a haven for the children in a cave in the mountains, successfully hiding them from the Germans.

Jo's father returns unexpectedly from the war, angry and sullen. One day Jo's grandfather tells him about the children on Madame Horcada's farm. Together they devise a plan to sneak the children to Spain in front of the Germans. They decide to drive all the sheep in the village into the mountains and to hide the children in plain sight, pretending they are members of the various village families. The plan works, but unfortunately, Benjamin and Leah are caught after sneaking the children into Spain that night. Leah and Benjamin are sent to a concentration camp where it is presumed they were killed.

The war ends shortly thereafter. Grandfather marries Madame Horcada. Jo takes on more responsibility around the home, taking the sheep into the mountains alone the following spring. One day, his family comes up to have a picnic. Jo learns that Anya has finally found her way home.



Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary

The novel is set in a small French village near the border with Spain. This location becomes a mode of escape for those French citizens who find themselves persecuted by the Germans.

In chapter one, Jo is a teenage boy living in Lescun, a small French village on the border with Spain. Most of the men of Lescun have gone to fight in the war and all of them, except for a cousin of Jo's who was killed in battle, have become prisoners of war. Jo is watching the sheep one quiet afternoon when he accidentally falls asleep. When Jo wakes, he finds his dog, Rouf, facing off against a bear. Jo runs into the village and alerts the remaining men. The men march into the mountains and kill the bear. Everyone is so excited by the kill that no one will answer Jo's concerned questions about his dog. Jo rushes into the mountains, afraid his dog has been killed. Instead, Jo discovers that his dog has found the bear cub the mother bear was protecting when she died. A man, a stranger to Jo, has also found the bear cub and has decided to take it home in order to keep it from sure starvation. When the man leaves, he asks Jo to forget he ever saw him.

In chapter two, unused to strangers in his small village, Jo uses his dog to follow the stranger. Jo discovers the man lives on Madame Horcada's farm. Madame Horcada is something of a recluse in the village, known as the Black Widow and feared by many of the children. For this reason, Jo is surprised she would have anyone living with her. Jo intends to leave after finding the man's destination, but Rouf goes up to the house. Jo follows and cannot resist peeking in the kitchen windows. Rouf overhears Madame Horcada call the man Benjamin and reproach him for leaving the house during daylight hours. It is then that Jo recalls meeting the man several years ago while tending the sheep at their summer grazing pastures in the mountains with his father. The man had been with his daughter, Anya, and they had walked to the border with Spain.

Over the next few weeks, Jo keeps the information of Benjamin's presence a secret. The rest of the village is still excited over the killing of the bear, an event that has lifted some of the depression of the war from the villagers. Jo keeps an eye on Madame Horcada's farm and one day decides to return to find out about the fate of the bear cub. Jo waits until Madame Horcada goes into the village for groceries and sneaks onto the property. Jo hears a noise in the barn and goes to investigate. Instead of finding a bear cub, Jo finds a frightened little girl. Jo turns to leave and discovers that Madame Horcada has returned. As Jo tries to sneak away, he sees another figure that looks like Madame Horcada. Jo is confused and easily caught. It turns out the figure in the yard was not Madame Horcada, but Benjamin wearing one of her shawls.



Chapters 1-2 Analysis

These first two chapters of the novel introduces the main character of the book and the conflict that will propel the plot. Jo is a twelve-year-old boy who lives in a tiny French village that has been devastated by the war. All the able bodied men of the village, including Jo's father, have gone to fight the war and have ended up in a prisoner of war camp. This has left the burden of caring for the family on Jo's young shoulders, as well as his mother's and grandfather's. For this reason, Jo is alone with the sheep when a bear comes to attack.

The bear attack symbolizes the suddenness and the danger of the war that is going on outside of Jo's frame of reference. The bear attack also shows the reader that there are other dangers in Jo's world besides the war. Life is a dangerous thing and Jo, as a child, is learning this lesson in a difficult and quick way.

Later, concerned for his dog, Jo finds a man who has not only helped out Jo's dog, but has also rescued the cub of the dead mother bear. This man is a stranger to Jo, who has always known all the people of his tiny village. For this reason, Jo follows him and learns that he is in hiding in the home of Madame Horcada, who is an isolated woman who has developed something of a fearful reputation among the children of the village.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The man and the woman catch Jo and take him into the house. Ben and Madame Horcada tell Jo about the little girl. Leah is a Jewish girl who is attempting to escape the Germans. Leah's family is all gone. Benjamin also tells Jo that he and his daughter, Anya, were separated when they were attempting to flee Paris. Benjamin told Anya before their escape that if they were separated they should find one another again at Madame Horcada's, Anya's maternal grandmother. Now Benjamin waits for Anya in secret and helps young children like Leah escape into Spain over the nearby border. Madame Horcada asks Jo to keep their secret. Jo agrees.

When Jo returns to the village, he discovers a German soldier has come to speak with the mayor. Hubert, a young, mentally impaired man pretends to shoot the soldier with a wooden stick. When the soldier is gone, the mayor announces that the German's will be sending a regiment of men to live in the town in order to patrol the border with Spain. These soldiers have warned the mayor that if they learn of anyone harboring or helping the Jews, or any other people considered war criminals, they will be shot on sight. The following day, Jo leaves Hubert with the sheep and runs to the Horcada farm to warn Benjamin. When he arrives, Jo learns that Benjamin has taken Leah to the Spain border the night before and failed to return.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, Jo learns that Benjamin is a Jew. Jo does not know for sure what it means to be a Jew, especially during this time period. The savvy reader, however, understands that the Jews were persecuted by the Germans, many placed in camps where they were either put to death or neglected and worked to death. For this reason, Benjamin is hiding from the Germans and helping children like his missing Anya make it to Spain. The reader now knows that the position of the village where Jo lives is one that makes it a strategic location for both the Jews like Benjamin looking for escape, and the Germans looking to stop escaping Jews. It is this latter reason that brings a group of German soldiers hoping to settle in the village for the remaining months of the war.

Jo knows that the Germans coming to the village pose a threat to Benjamin. Proving himself brave and intelligent, Jo goes to Madame Horcada's farm to warn them of the threat, only to discover he is too late. Benjamin has left to take Leah across the border and failed to return. The following chapter will reveal what happened to Benjamin during his badly timed escape to Spain.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Jo hikes into the mountains over the village toward the border with Spain. When Jo reaches the mountain cabin where his father stays while tending the sheep in the summer pastures, he finds Benjamin and Leah in the shed. While running from an unexpected patrol, Benjamin broke his ankle. Jo carefully helps Benjamin and Leah back down the mountain to Madame Horcada's farm. Jo returns home late to find his mother and grandfather distracted by a postcard from his father. Jo overhears his mother tell his grandfather that she does not believe his father will ever come home again.

A few days later the teacher has Hubert get his drum to call everyone to the town square. When they arrive, they discover that the soldiers have arrived. Lieutenant Weissmann tells the villagers that his men will be living in the parish house behind the church. The lieutenant wants all the villagers to hand over their weapons by that afternoon and to observe a curfew beginning immediately. Jo's grandfather is unhappy with these requests, but feels forced to comply. Grandfather takes an old weapon, a rifle that his own father shot in the First World War, and hands it to the German's while hiding his modern rifle in the family crypt in the graveyard. A short time later, Jo runs into Madame Horcada while with his grandfather. Madame Horcada asks if Jo could begin running errands for her to save her from having to walk up and down the hill each day.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Jo rescues Benjamin, again proving his bravery. However, Benjamin has broken his ankle and will be unable to lead any more children across the border. Even Leah remains with Benjamin, meaning she will stay with him an extended period of time, creating the danger of Leah becoming too close to Benjamin.

The Germans come to town and many of the adults resent their intrusion. In particular, Jo's grandfather is resentful of their decision to confiscate all the weapons in town. Grandpere hides his rifle in the family crypt in the cemetery. Hubert is there when grandpere does this. This is significant and will be recalled by the reader later in the novel.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Jo avoids the German soldiers as the weeks and months pass. Jo takes food to Madame Horcada once or twice a week. Each set of orders increases because the number of children at the farm has increased. By the middle of the winter, Madame Horcada is attempting to feed ten children and more are expected. They have attempted to slow the flow, but the need is just too great. Madame Horcada and Benjamin pull Jo aside one day and tell him they need more money. Madame Horcada asks Jo to ask his grandfather to visit her so that she might speak with him about selling her pigs to him. Grandpere visits with Madame Horcada alone. The following day, he and Hubert drive the pigs to the family home.

A short time later, Jo is with his friend Laurent when he gets in trouble for sticking his tongue out at one of the female villagers. Laurent decides to get revenge on the woman. One night, he and Jo sneak up behind the woman moments before curfew as she walks home and pretend to be German soldiers. They ask the woman for her papers and check them carefully before sending her home, causing her a few minutes of anxiety. However, the two boys are caught by the lieutenant without their own papers. The boys are warned not to play pranks like that again and sent home.

A few days later, the Germans begin surprise searches of the villagers' homes. Jo takes the sheep up into the pasture and leaves them with Hubert so that he might go warn Madame Horcada. When Jo arrives at the farm, he finds his grandfather with Madame Horcada.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Things are becoming difficult at Madame Horcada's farm. While Benjamin cannot take the children into Spain, the people who are sending them these children continue to do so because they have nowhere else to send them. Madame Horcada is finding it increasingly difficult to come up with excuses for the extra food she is forced to buy to provide for these children.

Jo involves his grandfather by having him buy pigs from Madame Horcada, but does not tell him what he already knows. It turns out that grandpere was once engaged to marry Madame Horcada and that they have a close relationship. It is no surprise then that grandpere begins to disappear for days at a time and Jo finds him at Madame Horcada's house when he goes to warn about the surprise home searches. The only surprise is to Jo, who thought his grandfather told him everything.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Grandpere leaves when he hears the news and Madame Horcada has Jo sit and eat some bread so that the Germans will believe he has simply come to make another delivery. When the Germans arrive, they search the house and barns, but find nothing. Afterward, Madame Horcada takes Jo into the mountains and to a cave only his grandpere once knew about. Grandpere has fixed the cave so that Benjamin and the children can hide there unnoticed. Jo meets several of the children, including a young boy who is a master chess player.

One of the Germans, a corporal, asks Jo to go with him into the mountains to look for eagles. Jo refuses, insisting that he take Hubert. When the two return, Jo learns they saw a large eagle and traced it back to its nest. A week later, the corporal takes Jo to find the eagle's nest again. Jo is excited to see the nest and the two baby birds nestled inside. As he looks, however, the corporal becomes aware of a patrol below them. As the corporal tries to get the attention of his colleagues, Jo sees Benjamin appear not too far from the patrol.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Grandpere has found a better place for the children to hide and for this reason they escape a surprise house search by the Germans. It also shows Jo that his grandfather is as kind, generous, and brave as he is, perhaps even more. When Jo then interacts with the children, he finds them to be so much like himself despite the reasons the Germans have to separate and persecute them.

A corporal with the Germans wants to take Jo to look at eagles, something he does quite frequently alone. Jo does not want to befriend the Germans, but cannot resist when he learns the corporal and Hubert found the large nest of one of these birds. While with the corporal, however, the danger of the Germans comes home again when Jo spots an unaware Benjamin within yards of a German patrol.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The corporal shouts down to the German patrol, warning Benjamin of their existence and causing him to run for cover. The patrol and the corporal meet halfway down the path and are happy to see one another. Jo is simply relieved that Benjamin is safe. Later, when they separate, the corporal gives his binoculars to a very appreciative Hubert.

Jo returns home a few days later to find his father has returned. Jo's father has tuberculosis, so the Germans released him from the prisoner of war camp because he could no longer work up to their requirements. Jo's father is tired and angry, unhappy with all that has happened in the family over the past four years that he has missed. All the other kids in the village congratulate Jo a few days later at school, but he feels that there is nothing to celebrate because he feels as though he does not know his father anymore. In fact, Jo half wishes his father had not returned. A short time later, Jo's father nearly gets into a fight with the corporal at the local diner because he has the nerve to sit and eat with the villagers. A few days after this, Jo returns home with Hubert's binoculars. Jo's father accuses him of collaborating with the Germans. Due to this accusation, Grandpere tells Jo's father about Jo helping Madame Horcada protect the Jewish children.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The return of Jo's father is a turning point in the plot. Jo's father is suffering the effects of being kept from his family for four years and being kept against his will by the Germans. It is understandable that Jo's father has resentment for the Germans who have taken up residence in his home village. What might not be understandable to the reader is the fact that Jo's father takes out his anger and resentment on his family, particularly Jo.

Jo's grandfather tells his father all about Jo helping the Jewish children on Madame Horcada's farm. This is meant to convince the father that Jo is not the enemy, but it also opens up a line of communication that up to this point seemed too dangerous to open. The reader is unsure where this line of communication will lead, but the reader can only hope it will make things easier for Jo.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Grandpere brings Madame Horcada to their home in order to listen to an idea by Jo's mother. The idea is not made clear initially, but it hinges on a concert the priest is asked to give later in the week. At the concert, all the German soldiers are in attendance and all the villagers are thought to be in attendance. However, Grandpere and father are not there. After the concert, the reader learns that Grandpere and father have sneaked all twelve of the children from Madame Horcada's farm into the various homes of the villagers. The following day the entire village herds their animals into the town square for what they make the Germans believe is an annual migration to the summer grazing lands.

The entire village moves past the German soldiers into the mountains. It becomes a large party once they appear to have achieved at least part of their goal. The Germans seem to not notice the twelve extra children in the group. When they arrive at Jo's family cabin, the children are quickly hidden inside. The corporal arrives unexpectedly with several soldiers.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Jo's mother comes up with a plan to hide the twelve Jewish children among the villagers as they make a mass exodus into the mountains to their summer grazing lands. The plan depends on the villagers working together to guard the secret of the children, which they do most willingly, some surprising Grandpere and Jo's family.

The mass exodus works, proving that when people work together they can achieve the impossible. However, the plan appears to be in danger when the corporal arrives unexpectedly. The reader must now hope that the corporal, who has befriended all the children of the village, will not act within his duty and destroy the lives of these twelve innocent children.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The corporal asks Jo's father a bunch of questions as he stands in the doorway of the cabin. One of the soldiers with the corporal sees movement in the window and moves to check it out. The corporal, after seeing the look of fear on Jo's face, calls him back and wishes everyone goodbye before leaving. The next day, Jo silently waits for word on the safety of the children and his father, who has gone with Benjamin to sneak the children over the border of Spain. Before word can come, the village learns that Benjamin and Leah have been caught by a patrol. Jo later learns that Leah refuses to go across the border and instead insisted on returning to Madame Horcada's farm with Benjamin. On the way, they ran into the bear that Benjamin cared for all that time before. Leah became frightened and her screams brought a German patrol.

Benjamin and Leah are sent by train to a concentration camp. A short time later, the war ends. The Germans pack up to leave France ahead of the Allied troops. As they ride away, Hubert goes and gets Grandpere's gun, aiming it at the soldiers. Misunderstanding his intention, the lieutenant shoots and kills Hubert.

Months later, Jo has taken over the chore of caring for the sheep and making cheese in the mountain cabin. One day the family arrives, including Madame Horcada, who has married Jo's grandpere. With them is a young girl named Anya.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The children make it into Spain, but Benjamin, the man who has given up everything to help these children while hoping someone is caring for his own child, is caught and killed in a concentration camp along with the young girl who has become so attached to him. Again the reality of the war has come to Jo and his family. However, the reader must remember that eleven children have survived and Benjamin's daughter, Anya, is still out there somewhere.

In the end, Hubert is also killed when he pulls Grandpere's gun on the soldiers. Hubert never hurt anyone, but the soldiers could not leave without taking another soul with them. Hubert's death is more of a tragedy almost than Benjamin's, leaving the village paying for the kindnesses they showed the enemy. However, the book ends on a happy note when the reader learns that Grandpere has married Madame Horcada and Benjamin's Anya lives. Anya has finally found her family, fulfilling the only hope Benjamin ever had throughout his terrible ordeal.



Characters

Jo

Jo is a twelve year old boy living in a small French village during World War II. All the able bodied men of the village, those young and strong, have gone off to fight the war. This includes Jo's father. Unfortunately, all the men, with the exception of a cousin who was killed, have been taken as prisoners-of-war. This has caused young Jo and others like him to have to step up and do all the work that the men in the village would normally have done. In fact, when the novel begins Jo is in the field watching over his family's sheep.

Jo learns that a neighbor is hiding Jewish children in an attempt to move them over the border to Spain. Jo keeps this information to himself, proving that he understands the danger these children are in and how important it is to help them. However, Jo finds himself unable to do anything to help these children until the entire village bans together to help them. It is then that Jo proves himself to be a hero when he is able to convince a German soldier with a glance to let them be. This war changes Jo's world, leaving him grieving for people he might not have cared about in other circumstances and standing up to help when he becomes aware of what is right and what is wrong.

Grandpere

Grandpere is the father of Jo's father. Grandpere lives with the family and does all he can to make up for his missing son. When Jo learns about Benjamin and the children he is hiding at Madame Horcada's farm, he does not immediately tell his grandpere. Instead, Grandpere learns from Madame Horcada herself when he goes to buy her pigs from her. Grandpere takes it upon himself to help Madame Horcada, a woman with whom he once had a relationship, and Benjamin. This seems to show the reader where Jo got his courage and his moral drive to do what is right.

Grandpere grew up in the village and knows of a cave where the children can hide, a fact that saves the children from being discovered when the soldiers conduct a house to house search. Grandpere also tells Jo's parents about his bravery, a circumstance that leads to the idea that will help walk the children out of the village and across the border to Spain. Grandpere proves to be the driving force in solving the conflict that propels the plot of the novel.

Benjamin

Benjamin is a Jewish man who married Madame Horcada's daughter years before the war, when she ran away to Paris. Benjamin becomes a single father when his wife dies in childbirth. Benjamin believes he and his daughter are safe in Paris, but when the Germans invade the city, Benjamin and his daughter flee under fear of being forced into



the concentration camps. On the road, Benjamin and his daughter are separated. Benjamin goes to Madame Horcada's farm to wait for his daughter as they arranged before their flight.

Benjamin begins helping children like his daughter to escape over the nearby border with Spain while waiting for his daughter. Benjamin likes to think that there is someone helping his daughter the way he is helping these others. Unfortunately, Benjamin breaks his ankle during an attempt to reach the border and is unable to help the children for most of one winter. In the end, Benjamin manages to get all but one child across the border, but he is then caught and sent to a concentration camp where he is killed. However, Anya finally makes it to her grandmother's farm, safe and sound.

Madame Horcada

Madame Horcada is a widow who lives isolated on her farm just outside the village where Jo lives. Everyone in the village calls Madame Horcada the Black Widow because of her standoffish behavior. However, it turns out that Madame Horcada is braver than them all because it is she who hides Benjamin and the Jewish children he helps to cross the border.

Madame Horcada is a wise woman who manages to hide the children despite several obstacles, including Jo finding out the truth and a regiment of German soldiers making camp in the village. However, Madame Horcada has help from a long ago lover, Jo's grandpere. In the end, Madame Horcada survives the ordeal of the war and marries Grandpere.

Anya

Anya is Benjamin's daughter. Jo met Anya once when he was young when she came to visit her grandmother. Jo remembers Anya as a young, beautiful young girl who brought his father flowers. Anya becomes lost one day while on the road with her father. A plane flew overhead and shot down at them, forcing them to find cover. Anya and her father became separated. For this reason, Benjamin goes to Madame Horcada and waits for his daughter. Anya finally arrives at the farm after the war is over, but by then her father has died in a concentration camp.

Leah

Leah is a young Jewish girl who has been sent to Madame Horcada's farm so that Benjamin might help her cross the border. The child is very young and she becomes quite attached to Benjamin. Unfortunately, Leah becomes so attached to Benjamin that she refuses to go into Spain with the other children at the end of the book. Leah is caught with Benjamin on that fateful night and also dies in a concentration camp.



Hubert

Hubert is a simple minded young man who lives in the same village as Jo. Hubert is the son of the mayor and as such is allowed to beat the drum when something significant takes place in order to call all the people into the village square. Hubert likes to play soldier, and when the soldiers come, he pretends to shoot them with a stick. Later, when the soldiers leave, Hubert fires at them with Grandpere's hidden rifle. This ends in Hubert's death.

Jo's Father

Jo's father is prisoner-of-war who suddenly returns to the village when he contracts tuberculosis. This illness makes it impossible for Jo's father to be of use to the Germans. Jo's father is an angry man when he returns, refusing to accept the German soldiers in his village. Jo's father nearly gets into a fight with one of the soldiers. In the end, however, when Jo's father learns about the Jewish children Grandpere and Jo have been trying to help, he becomes a hero himself by helping to lead them into Spain. Unfortunately, Benjamin is caught afterward and Jo's father feels like a coward because he did nothing to stop it.

Laurent

Laurent is a childhood friend of Jo's. Laurent is also angry with the Germans who have become a fixture in their village. One day Laurent imitates the soldiers in order to get revenge on a woman who got him in trouble for sticking out his tongue at her. This nearly leads to disaster, however, when he is caught without his own papers at curfew.

Corporal

The corporal is an older man who is part of the regiment of German soldiers who have come to live in Jo's village. The corporal speaks French and he attempts to befriend many of the children in the village, including Jo. While Jo does not want to befriend a German, he finds himself drawn to the corporal first because of his interest in eagles and later when the corporal's daughter is killed in the bombings in Berlin. In the end, Jo believes that the corporal stops the Germans from finding the twelve Jewish children in his father's cabin simply because of an empathy with Jo. However, in the end it is the corporal who sends Benjamin and Leah to the concentration camps under orders from the lieutenant.



Objects/Places

Shoe

Jo finds a broken shoe in Madame Horcada's barn that leads him to discover Leah, one of the Jewish children on their way to Spain.

Binoculars

The corporal gives a pair of binoculars to Hubert, a gift Hubert appreciates deeply. However, the binoculars becomes a symbol of collaboration with the enemy to Jo's father.

Miniatures

Hubert spends a great deal of his time making miniatures out of bread. Everyone in town has a great collection of these tiny items, a symbol of friendship with Hubert.

Grandpere's Rifle

Grandpere hides his rifle in the family crypt in the funeral because he resents the Germans' request that everyone turn over their weapons. This rifle is used by Hubert at the end of the novel to take a shot at the retreating German soldiers, causing Hubert to be shot and killed by the lieutenant.

Honey

Madame Horcada pays Jo for his services as an errand boy in honey.

Sheep

Jo's family raises sheep. Jo spends a great deal of his time watching over the sheep in the grazing fields.

Pigs

Madame Horcada raises pigs, one of the only people in the village to do so. Madame Horcada sells her pigs to Grandpere in order to get the money she needs to feed twelve children.



Eagle's Nest

Jo likes to watch the eagles and attempts to see their nests. The corporal takes Jo to see the nest of a large eagle through his binoculars in an attempt to befriend the boy.

Cave

Grandpere hides the children and Benjamin in a cave where he once played as a child.

Madame Horcada's Farm

Madame Horcada lives on a farm situated above the village. Madame Horcada hides Benjamin and numerous Jewish children on this farm in an attempt to help them find escape in Spain.

Cabin

Jo's family has a cabin in the mountains where they graze their sheep in the summer. It is here that the village takes the twelve Jewish children before sneaking them across the border with Spain at the end of the novel.

Berlin

Berlin is a major city in Germany that was targeted by Allied forces toward the end of World War II. The corporal's daughter is killed during one of these bombing raids in Berlin while the corporal is living in Lescun.

Lescun

Lescun is the name of the tiny French village where Jo lives. Lescun is close to the Spain border, making it an ideal crossing point for those needing to escape the invading Germans.



Themes

Atrocities of War

During World War II, the Germans had the idea that Jews were criminals who weakened the government and the pure Aryan bloodlines of true Germans. For this reason, the Germans rounded up all the Jews in their own country and the countries they invaded during the war and placed them in camps where they would be put to death or worked to death.

Benjamin is a Jewish man living in Paris when the war begins. Despite word of what the Germans are doing to Jews in Germany, Benjamin believes himself and his daughter to be safe because of where they live. However, when Germany invades Paris, Benjamin realizes he must quickly move himself and his daughter out of the area. Unfortunately, Benjamin loses his daughter during an air raid on the road and he comes to Madame Horcada's farm to wait for her to find him.

Benjamin and his daughter are not the only French citizens who are threatened by the Germans. As Benjamin waits for his daughter to find him, he spends his time helping other children make their way over the border to Spain. Jo learns about this and attempts to help in his own small ways. In the end, eleven children make it over the border to Spain thanks to Benjamin and the people of Lescun village. Unfortunately, Benjamin does not escape and he and a child named Leah are sent to the concentration camps at the end of the war and killed.

Family

Family is an important theme to this novel. The first family the reader is introduced to is Jo's. Jo's family has been torn apart and redefined by the absence of his father. While Jo's father is held as a prisoner-of-war, Jo must take over some of his father's duties around the house. When Jo's father suddenly reappears, it is four years after he left. This causes some upheaval in the household. The father feels as though he has missed out on so much while Jo feels that his role in the family has again been redefined and he does not know exactly where he belongs.

Family is also important to Benjamin. Benjamin has dedicated his life to his young daughter, Anya, and comes to Lescun to wait for his daughter to find him. Benjamin knows that his daughter is at the mercy of men like himself; therefore, he does all he can to help other children escape over the border to Spain. Most of the children Benjamin is helping have already lost their families to the German concentration camps. If not for family, Benjamin would not be in Lescun and Jo would never have become involved in the atrocity against the Jews.

Bravery

Bravery is an important theme to this novel. In this novel, Jo helps Benjamin and Madame Horcada hide and provide for a dozen Jewish children in need of help. Jo knows that if he is caught, if any of them are caught, they will be shot on sight. This danger becomes even more intense when a regiment of German soldiers come to live in the village so that they might patrol the border with Spain easily.

Jo is not the only brave one in this novel, however. Jo's grandpere learns the truth about the Jewish children and does all he can to help. Later, the entire village becomes involved, helping the Jewish children sneak up into the mountains as part of a mass migration to the summer pastures. In the end, everyone, with the exception of the weak German lieutenant who kills a mentally ill man, proves to be brave in the face of adversity.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person omniscient point of view. The narration follows Jo, the main character, and never focuses on another character. However, there is some distance in the narration that allows the author to show the story in such a way that the reader feels some compassion for the main characters but still understand the motivations of other characters in the novel.

The point of view of this novel is important because it allows the reader to see all the action of the plot without the bias of an adult who might have certain opinions about what is going on around the main character. The main character is naive and does not truly understand the atrocities of war until they visit him in his own village. It is then that the main character becomes biased against the enemy, but by then so much has already taken place that the reader is able to understand the novel through the innocence and naivety of the young.

Setting

The novel is set in a tiny French village a short walk from the border with Spain. The village is a quiet place where the same families have lived for many generations. The people of this village spend their days caring for their sheep and their families, a place that is so small everyone knows everyone else. In this village there is one church, one store, and a small school. It is an intimate village that is pushed into chaos when the Germans invade.

The setting of this novel is important to the plot on two points. First, the village is so small that everyone knows everyone else; therefore, Jo is aware when a stranger shows up. Second, the village is located close to the border with Spain, making it an ideal place for people to attempt to flee the invading Germans. It is this latter reason that causes Madame Horcada's farm to be the perfect place to hide and aid Jewish children, and makes the village an ideal place for German soldiers to set up a command post for patrols of the border. For these reasons, the setting of this novel is essential to the overall plot of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. Many of the characters of this novel speak French or German, but the author has not placed many of these words in his novel. In fact, the novel is written in English with the understanding that the characters are speaking French. For this reason, there is no need for there to be foreign phrases in the novel that might confuse or stall the comprehension of the intended audience, young adult readers.



The language of the novel works well with the plot of the novel because it is not complicated by foreign phrases, but remains simple enough that the intended audience has little trouble comprehending what is intended by the author. The language also works with the plot because it is a story about a young boy, a boy about the same age as the intended audience. For this reason, the language remains the simpler language a child of this age might think in and speak, making it easy for the reader to relate with this main character.

Structure

The novel is divided into nine chapters. Each chapter is fairly long, longer than ten pages in most instances. The novel is told in both exposition and dialogue, allowing the reader to see the story rather than being told the story. This structure is designed to be linear, telling the story from beginning to end, showing the reader that time is passing by the mention of passing seasons and the change in the behaviors and actions of the characters.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Jo as he attempts to help Benjamin and Madame Horcada hide the Jewish children on their farm. One subplot follows Benjamin's deep hope that his daughter will one day come to the farm and find him again. Another subplot follows Jo's relationship with his father as he first goes away to fight in the war and later comes back a bitter and broken man. All these plots are happily resolved at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"Jo should have known better. After all Papa had told him often enough: 'Whittle a stick, pick berries, eat, look for your eagle if you must,' he said, 'but do something.'"

Chap. 1, p. 7

"The whole day had been like a bad dream that had turned suddenly and intensely intriguing—a dream he wanted to cling to."

Chap. 2, p. 21

"For some weeks after this the village was diverted, its spirits lifted by stories of the great bear hunt, stories that eclipsed even the grim news of the war, of more German victories everywhere."

Chap. 2, p. 28

"Never in his life had he felt like screaming until this moment."

Chap. 2, p. 35

"Within days there'll be a company of soldiers living here."

Chap. 3, pp. 47

"Someone had to go and find out what had happened to them and Jo knew it would have to be him."

Chap. 4, p. 54

"And even then they respected him and not just for his size but because Hubert was always game—he would always join in whatever was going on. He was like a chameleon; whatever they were—pirates, soldiers, Red Indians—he would be too."

Chap. 4, p. 63

"Hostility towards the German occupiers was silent but as time passed they were proving more and more difficult to hate."

Chap. 5, p. 73

"Jo lay in bed and listened to the murmur of voices from his parents' room next door. Papa really was back home."

Chap. 7, p. 124

"Jo did not even try to sleep that night, he knew it would be pointless. His mind went over the plan again and again. He tried to visualize it as the soldiers would see it. Would it all look normal to them?"

Chap. 8, p. 145

"It wasn't that the language was a barrier between them and the village children—after all some of the cave children were French—but there seemed to be an instinctive reserve that kept them apart."

Chap. 8, p. 151



"And then he saw the girl. She was walking towards him. She had red hair that she pushed back out of her eyes and tucked behind her ears. 'I'm Anya,' she said."
Chap. 9, p. 172



Topics for Discussion

Who is Jo? What comes to the pasture while Jo is watching the sheep? Why does Jo feel guilty about this own behavior in this situation? What does Jo fear when the men come back with the dead bear? Why does Jo rush into the mountains again while everyone else is celebrated? What does he find? How does this discovery alter Jo's life?

Who is Benjamin? How is he related to Madame Horcada? What is he doing on Madame Horcada's farm? Why is Madame Horcada angry with him for leaving the farm during the daylight hours? Why does Madame Horcada fear Jo? What does Madame Horcada expect Jo to do? Does he? Why or why not?

Who comes to the village and warns that people found helping Jews will be shot? Why does this upset Jo? What is Jo afraid of? Does Jo's fear come true? What else does this visitor to the village tell the mayor about? How will this man's words change the people of the village? Is this a good change or bad change? Explain.

Where does Benjamin go in the middle of the night before Jo can warn about the soldier's visit to the village? When should he have returned? Did he? Why does Jo go into the mountains? Where does Jo find Benjamin? What has happened to Benjamin? What does this injury mean for Benjamin's future? For the future of the children he helps? What does Madame Horcada predict will happen?

Who does Madame Horcada want to sell her pigs to? For what reason? Does this person buy the pigs? What happens next? Who does Jo find at Madame Horcada's when he goes to warn about the surprise house searches? Why is this person there? What does Jo think of this person's surprise presence? What does Jo learn about this person and his involvement with Madame Horcada? Explain.

Who is Jo's father? Where has he been for four years? Why? What does he do when he returns home? How does he react to the German soldiers in the village? How have the villagers treated the soldiers? What does Jo's father think about this? Why does Jo's father call Jo a collaborator? What is a collaborator? Is Jo a collaborator? Who defends Jo?

How does Benjamin get caught by the German soldiers? Who caught him? Where is he taken? For what reason? Who goes with Benjamin? What does Benjamin say to Jo before he is taken to the train station? Who feels guilty about what has happened to Benjamin? What does Jo say to this person? Whose fault is it that Benjamin is caught?