

# **When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit Study Guide**

**When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit by Judith Kerr**

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# Plot Summary

Judith Kerr's *WHEN HITLER STOLE THE PINK RABBIT* is a semi-autobiographical story about a nine year-old Jewish girl named Anna who lives with her family in Berlin just as the Nazis are rising to power in Germany. Anna has an older brother named Max. Her mother, just called "Mama," is a well-to-do housewife and her father, "Papa," is a famous writer and prominent critic of the Nazi regime and the Nazi party. The story is about the family's flight from the Nazis, who have put a price on Anna's father's head since he is one of their critics. The family moves from Weimar Germany to Switzerland, then to France and ends up in England, because Papa cannot find work in countries influenced by the Nazis, since they refuse to publish his work. The notable feature of the book, however, is that the complexities of pre-war European politics are seen through the eyes of a young girl, and are greatly simplified as a result. *WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT* thus gives a simple picture of Europe prior to World War II easily digestible for children.

Anna's life in Berlin is relatively comfortable and uncomplicated. She is an eager student and has several friends. Her family is rich and she is generally happy. Anna begins to register the concerns of Mama and Papa just prior to the election of 1933, when the Nazis come to power. She and Max see kids whose parents are Nazis and Sozis (the opponents of the Nazis) fighting at school and she sees that her father is quite upset at the possibility that the Nazis will come to power. When they are elected, Papa has already left the country for Switzerland and sends for them weeks later.

When the family arrives in Switzerland, they must learn to speak a new German dialect and get along with the children in the Swiss countryside. Papa does his best to make a living, since the family is far, far poorer as a result of having to flee Berlin. Their belongings and assets had been seized (even Anna's little rabbit doll Pink Rabbit, for which the story is named). And despite the fact that Papa is a widely regarded author, the Swiss are so desperate to maintain their neutrality that they are hesitant to publish Papa's writing. Eventually this so angers and frustrates Papa that he leaves for France to work for a Jewish refugee newspaper, *The Daily Parisian*. Mama goes with him and the children are left behind under the care of family friends.

When Papa and Mama find a home for their family in Paris, Max and Anna must now learn French and fit-in at a French school. This is very trying for Anna in particular, until one day she can speak French with ease. In each place they live, Max and Anna adjust quickly. But just as they are beginning to feel at home in Paris, Papa again becomes frustrated at his inability to support his family and sends off a script to a Hungarian film maker in England. After several weeks, the film maker decides to produce Papa's script which leads him to take his family to England. The book ends as they arrive in London.



# Chapters 1-6

## Chapters 1-6 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 1, the author introduces little Anna, a nine year-old Jewish girl living in Berlin in the winter of 1932-33. She has a brother named Max and her father is a famous writer and poet whose notoriety brings her family attention. It is winter and Anna, her school friend Elsbeth, Anna's brother Max and his friend Gunther walk home from school and play games. The chapter also introduces their house help, Fraulein Heimpel. At the end of the chapter, Anna speaks with her father before she goes to bed. In the morning he is gone. Germany is on the brink of an election between the Nazis and the Sozis. If the Nazis win, Hitler will come to power.

Chapter 2 opens in the morning. Anna is upset that she cannot find her father. Eventually Anna's mother explains to her and Max that their father has left for Prague because he fears that if the Nazis win the upcoming election he would be in danger, along with his family. Anna's mother swears her children to secrecy. They must tell no one where he has gone. Eventually he will send for them. They will probably end up in Switzerland for a while. So Anna and Max have to tell even their friends that their father has the flu. They then have to wait for him to send for them. Towards the end of the chapter, they hear that their father is safe in Prague.

Chapter 3 shows the family packing up their things, with the help of Fraulein Heimpel and Onkel Julius. After they've packed, Anna and Max must say goodbye to their teachers and friends, which is hard for them. They then board the train with their mother for Switzerland. That same day, the German Parliament house, the Reichstag, is burned down. The Nazis use the event to claim that only they could stop the "revolutionaries."

During Chapter 4, Anna, Max and Mama are on the train to Switzerland. They stop in Stuttgart and must have their passports checked by customs. They have fake passports so it is quite dangerous for them to try to trick the officials. Mama orders Max and Anna to be silent. The customs inspector inspects their things and signs off on their papers. They have escaped Germany without being identified with Anna's father, which is a relief given how well he is known. Eventually they are reunited with Anna's father in Switzerland.

In Chapter 5, the family is in Zurich. When they arrive, Papa puts them up in a hotel. One day, they tour the city. However, Anna becomes sick with the flu and runs a terrible fever that leads her to start fading in and out of consciousness. When she is awake one morning, she overhears her father say that the Nazis have won the elections and that they won't be going back to Germany. Hitler has a majority and quickly takes over the government. Over the next month, Anna remains sick and cannot remember long stretches of time. But then she starts to return to normal and her swollen glands shrink back to normal. Fraulein Heimpel won't be joining them, apparently. Plus, Hitler has had

their property confiscated. He has stolen even Anna's stuffed pink rabbit, which makes her very angry.

Chapter 6 opens with Anna's family moving out of their expensive hotel and into an Inn in the Swiss countryside owned by Gasthof Zwirn. He has three children, one of whom is Anna's age, a girl named Vreneli. Anna and Max start school and Anna goes to school with Vreneli. They have to learn to understand the Swiss-German dialect as they go to school. Anna's teacher is named Herr Graupe. He is an old man and seems not to teach them much. Over the next few weeks, Mama takes up knitting to make clothes for Anna and Max. Onkel Julius visits as well, and explains to them that the Nazis have burned all the books of prominent Jewish intellectuals, including Anna's father's books. Her father even has trouble publishing in Switzerland because the Swiss are so intent on maintaining their neutrality with the Nazis. Nonetheless, their family manages to survive financially.



# Chapters 7-12

## Chapters 7-12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 shows Anna settling into school life. She enjoys it quite a bit and becomes better friends with Vrenli and makes new friends, like Roseli. She does not like playing separately from the boys and becomes bored with girl games. In the chapter, she has a fight with her teacher about cavemen and is chased by a red-headed boy and five of his friends until Mama slaps the red-headed boy and protects Anna from them. There is some tension between Anna and Vrenli over the attention Anna gets from the boys but they make up.

In Chapter 8, Anna turns ten and her family takes her on an outing that includes a visit to the Zurich Literary Society and a picnic. Anna feels sick most of the time and so does not have a lot of fun. Papa is very busy with an assistant of his and is constantly absorbed in his own thoughts. He expresses some frustration at being run out of his own country by his own people. He then explains to Anna that they probably won't stay in Switzerland because they won't publish Papa's writings for fear of upsetting the Nazis. He thinks they might go to France. He and Anna decide that they are refugees. Anna thinks it sounds adventurous.

Chapter 9 is a display of anti-Semitism. The author notes that Max is often totally unengaged in school, despite being clever. He spends a lot of his time playing with Anna and the Zwirn children. That is, until one day two young German children from Munich, Siegfried and Gudrun, start to play with them all. However, Siegfried and Gudrun's mother tells them not to play with Anna and Max. When they play with them a second time, their mother becomes even angrier. Max and Anna cannot understand why and neither can the other children. When Anna tells Mama, she considers talking to the mother but the family disappears soon thereafter. It appears that the mother didn't want her children to play with Jewish children.

Papa goes to Paris in the beginning of Chapter 10. When he leaves, their grandmother, Omama, comes to take care of them. She is a kind old woman but has a dreadful dog named Pumpel. Pumpel makes lots of trouble and no one likes him except Omama. One day he drowns and Omama is crushed, though no one else is. She can't stop talking about him. About the same time, Anna overhears Mama talking to Omama about all the horrible things happening to Jewish refugees inside and outside of Germany. When Mama tells the story of a professor in a concentration camp, Anna becomes incredibly upset and tells herself that she will try not to think about Germany ever again. At the end of the chapter, Omama leaves for her home in the South of France due to her grief over Pumpel.

Chapter 11 opens. When Papa first returns from Paris, he is happy. The people at The Daily Parisian, a refugee newspaper, had been happy to see him and work with him. Papa wants to go to France but Mama does not know French, so she is hesitant. They



spend the next two weeks talking about Paris. Eventually Mama and Papa decide to go to Paris themselves to find a place to live. They leave Max and Anna behind for a few weeks. Mama and Papa send cards every day, and Max and Anna do the same so they can stay in touch. Before they leave, Papa tells Anna that they must be on their very best behavior, for the Nazis say that Jews are bad and the only way the Jews can fight back is to be the best people they can. When Mama and Papa leave, Anna feels alone, though she and Max are taken care of by Frau Zwiirn. Anna learns that the Nazis have put a price of one thousand Marks on Papa's head which causes her to have a nightmare. When Papa does not send a postcard one day, Anna becomes scared, but the next day Papa and Mama show up in person. Anna is happy to see them.

Chapter 12 shows Anna's family leaving for France. They are sad to leave but they know they can return to see their friends. After riding on the train for a while, Anna sees a sign for Stuttgart and realizes that the porter has put them on a train to Germany. If they end up in Germany, Papa will be carried off by the Nazis. When Anna tells Papa, he has them stop the train before Stuttgart. Max gets their things and they get on a train for France. They wonder whether the porter had been trying to get the one-thousand Mark reward for Papa. When the family arrives in France, it is dark and they are tired. People are loud and active. When they find their new living quarters, they quickly unpack. An Austrian woman named Grete will be around to help Mama with the house, though Mama has to cook—something she is not used to doing.



# Chapters 13-18

## Chapters 13-18 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 13, the children meet their new teacher, a private tutor named Mademoiselle Martel. Before Jewish refugees had come to France from Germany, her ability to speak German and French had been underused. But now she can hardly keep up with all the lessons she has to give. Max and Anna have a terrible time communicating with her at first but they improve over time. The family is adjusting nicely to life in Paris.

Chapter 14 continues concerns about schooling. Anna wants to go to school but her family cannot afford private school and think she would not learn much in a community or public school. Anna becomes mildly sick during this time and Papa seems disturbed by his constant nightmares. One night when Anna prays for her father's health and has a nightmare of her own, her father's nightmares disappear soon thereafter. By the end of the chapter, Mama has found a school that is just right for Max and Anna.

In Chapter 15, Max and Anna go to school for the first time. Everyone speaks French and only French so they both face a linguistic uphill battle. Anna sits in class with a large number of students and is taught by a Madame Socrate who speaks a bit of German. Anna's first assignments are miserable failures since she can understand almost no French at all, but she is confident she will learn it eventually. Max is particularly desperate to learn so that he can look like and fit in with the other boys.

By Chapter 16, Anna and Max have settled into school. One day Mama takes Anna to see Mama's Aunt Sarah, Anna's Great-Aunt. Long ago she had married a Frenchman and has been living in France for thirty years. Great-Aunt Sarah is also a bit deaf and has an ear horn into which Mama and Anna have to speak. Sometimes, some rich Parisian ladies visit Great-Aunt Sarah and play cards with her. They also give her cloth to make clothes for needy children. She insists on giving some cloth to Mama, who accepts. Papa is furious that Mama has accepted "charity" since he is embarrassed at his inability to provide for his family. He makes far less money working for The Daily Parisian than he had made in Germany. The chapter ends as the family notes that they had expected to return to Berlin after six months of leave, but they have been gone a year.

Chapter 17 is fairly brief. It shows Anna's family spending time with the Fernand family. Anna and Max get along with Francine, the daughter and Papa and Mama get along well with Monsieur and Madame Fernand. Papa has good conversations with Monsieur Fernand. While they visit, Francine fits Anna for the clothes her mother has made her and they fit well. Anna has also written a poem about something other than disaster and it pleases her Great-Aunt Sarah.

With Chapter 18 comes a beautiful spring in Paris. Max and Anna are practically fluent in French and Mama is becoming a fabulous cook, which Papa much appreciates. Only





Grete, the Austrian housekeeper, was gloomy. She looked forward to going home, as did everyone else. July came and it was very hot, but on the anniversary of the French Revolution, July 14th, Anna's family had a wonderful time in the street fairs. The Zwirns invited Anna's family for a visit to Switzerland during summer holidays and Papa could afford it after writing three articles for The Daily Parisian, for which they paid him handsomely. In the meanwhile, Max is reported to have been participating happily in school. When Anna's family reached the Zwirns, they find them unchanged. But French has become something of a home for Anna and Max and this they were ok with.



# Chapters 19-24

## Chapters 19-24 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 19 explains how Anna struggles to learn to speak French and has somehow hit a wall when it comes to her linguistic ability. This holds her back in school and creates conflicts with her mother until one day, everything clicks, and Anna can speak French with ease.

Chapter 20 explains that Anna's family has an austere and simple Christmas, since they are still poor. Plus, the Depression in France is raging. It is the winter of 1935 and everyone is working hard. Mama is learning to run the house with ease though she still has great trouble sewing everything that needs to be sown. After a bit of a disagreement with Mama, Papa goes out and buys Mama a cheap sewing machine that he thinks is in working order. In fact, it is about forty years old and completely broken. Mama is angry that Papa has wasted the money on a worthless sewing machine since the money can no longer go to pay for Anna's shoes. They then take the sewing machine back to the antique shop where Papa had bought it and try to return it. When the seller refuses, Madame Fernand threatens to have Papa write a bad report about his shop. The seller relents and they get their money back. Anna gets her shoes.

Chapter 21 opens with Papa partly out of work due to the depression. Anna is doing well at school after her French abilities kick in. She writes some essays that please her father. Papa is around more since The Daily Parisian cannot afford to pay him full time, so they interact more. Anna has decided to go ahead and take the French elementary school exam even though she still does not feel confident about her French. The exam requires passing many subjects. To pass the exam, all subjects have to be passed unless some subjects are passed with distinction. They can then be used to cancel the failed portion of the exam. Anna does well enough to earn distinction in physical fitness and thus passes her exam. Max passes his own exam as the best student in the class. Anna's composition essay for her exam is so good that she receives some money and a letter from the Mayor of Paris congratulating her. She has one of the top twenty compositions in French in the city, which is especially impressive given the fact that French is her second language.

In Chapter 22, there is some hope that Papa's film script might be picked up by some French film Studios, but they reject it quickly. Papa had sent the script to a Hungarian Film Director in England but he has not read the script. This experience increases Mama's desire to go to England where many of their friends are finding attractive work. Pressure to go to England builds after a confrontation with the concierge about paying the rent. Papa cannot make any money in France despite his talents. So towards the end of the chapter, Papa and Mama explain to Max and Anna that, just as when they had come to France, they will have to go away to England and leave Max and Anna behind, again by themselves.



Chapter 23 bears good and bad news. The bad news is that Onkel Julius has died, apparently committing suicide after being severely oppressed by the Nazis. A Jewish actor brings Anna's family Julius's pocket watch. The good news is that the film director in England has bought Papa's script. They can now go to England together and begin to plan their move.

In Chapter 24, Anna's family travels to England on a boat. They are happy and energetic. Anna and Max are optimistic about their ability to learn English. Anna reflects on her childhood after being asked and realizes that her childhood has not really been difficult despite moving around. In fact, it is something of an adventure.



# Characters

## Anna

Anna is the main character of *WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT*. When the book begins, she is nine years old. Anna is Jewish, as is her family. They live in Berlin in the first several chapters. Anna is depicted as a fairly ordinary young girl. She is naturally happy and enjoys having friends though she has only a few close friends. Anna seems neither particularly outgoing nor shy. She likes school and admires her parents enormously. In many ways, Anna is a window into the events of the book, since her reactions and perceptions of events are described despite the fact that her personality remains relatively simple and largely unchanged.

The most significant development for Anna is her ability to adapt to new environments in Switzerland, France and England as her family moves around Europe to escape the Nazis and to find work for Papa, who is responsible for supporting the family. Anna has particular trouble getting used to living in Paris, because she must learn the French language and French cultural norms despite her German upbringing. Anna is depressed at first in France as she finds the prospect of adjusting to Parisian life overwhelming. She must learn an entirely new language and she cannot imagine how she can pull it off. As the book progresses, Anna becomes confident that she can adjust and indeed, she does. Anna is strong enough by the end of her time in France that she eagerly anticipates life in England and believes that she will be able to adjust rather easily.

## Papa

While Anna is the main character in the book, Papa is, in many ways, the character who drives the storyline. In Germany, Papa had been a very famous writer and critic of the Nazi Party. He is Jewish and had foreseen long before others that life would be dangerous for Jews if Hitler became Chancellor. He also knows that he would probably be captured by the Nazis if and when they came to power. It is for this reason that Papa leaves the country before the elections of 1933 and brings his family from their long-time home in Berlin to Switzerland and the Gasthof Zwirn. Papa is the reason that the family leaves Germany and he is also the figure who travels ahead to the next location where the family will reside until they can return to Germany.

Anna's family leaves Germany to escape danger but their reasons for leaving Switzerland and France have to do mainly with Papa's inability to find good work writing in either country. Papa is a critic of the Nazis and as such is politically controversial. The Swiss are desperate to maintain their neutrality with the Nazis and so refuse to publish his work. The French are also hesitant to publish him, though he has an easier time of it. Papa refuses to settle for other work and takes low paying jobs writing in order to support his family. Rather than relent to Nazi pressure he takes his family further and further away from their sphere of influence.



## **Mama**

Mama is Anna's mother. Raised a well-to-do daughter of a wealthy German family, Mama has to adjust to doing housework, cooking and sewing for her children.

## **Max**

Max is Anna's older brother. He is somewhat lazy and disengaged in school but adjusts to French life well and finds the energy to excel in his studies.

## **Heimpi**

Heimpi is the maid in Anna's family's home in Berlin.

## **Onkel Julius**

A friend of the family and naturalist, Onkel Julius declines to leave Germany as Papa had. His decision ultimately results in his death, which is tragic for Anna's family.

## **Herr Zwirn and Frau Zwirn**

Herr Zwirn and Frau Zwirn are the Swiss couple in Zurich who help shelter Anna's family. Their children become Anna and Max's friends.

## **Adolf Hitler**

The dictator of Germany from around 1933 to 1945, Hitler is responsible for the persecution of the Jews that leads Papa to evacuate his family to Switzerland.

## **Omama**

Mama's mother who lives in the south of France and who is hard of hearing is called Omama.

## **Grete**

Grete is Anna's family's Austrian help who adjusts poorly to life outside of Germany.



## **Madame Fernand**

Madame Fernand is a French woman and friend of Mama's whose family helps Anna's family adjust to life in Paris.

## **The Hungarian Film Director**

Papa submits his film script to the Hungarian film director . While the director takes some time to respond to Papa's request, he ultimately decides to make a movie out of Papa's script. This allows Papa to move his entire family to England where his work will be published.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Berlin**

Berline is the capital of Germany and initial home of Anna's family.

### **Gasthof Zwirn**

Gasthof Zwirn is the hotel owned by Herr Zwirn and where Anna's family lives for a time.

### **Zurich**

Anna's family lives in Zurich, a major Swiss City, before they go to France.

### **Paris**

Anna's family moves to Paris after they leave Switzerland.

### **Ecole Communale**

Ecole Communale is a type of French school which Anna and Max attend while they live in Paris.

### **London**

England's capital is London and this is the city where Anna's family travel after leaving France.

### **Pink Rabbit**

Anna's rabbit doll that is, along with her family's other belongings, stolen by the Nazis. Pink Rabbit is a symbol of the attempt by the Nazis to destroy Anna's life and especially her childhood and of her ability to withstand these attempts all the same.

### **The Daily Parisian**

The Daily Parisian is a newspaper run by German refugees in France which publishes Papa's writings, giving him an income (though a low one) while the family lives in France.



## **Papa's Film Script**

Papa writes a film script after a discussion with his children about Napoleon. The script is eventually accepted for production by a Hungarian Film Producer in England, allowing Anna's family to live there.

## **Nazism**

The nationalist and socialist ideology that animated the German Nazi Party during the 1930s and 1940s is called Nazism. Its anti-Semitic elements lead Papa to take Anna's family out of the country.

## **Bounty**

The Nazis placed a small bounty on Papa's head, since he is a critic of their regime. The bounty causes the family some trouble along the way, though no major concerns.

## **French**

Max and Anna find learning French very challenging. Their struggles to learn French are symbolic of their struggles to retain their childhood happiness despite fleeing the Nazis. Both eventually master French and become confident in their abilities to adjust to new circumstances.



# Themes

## Anti-Semitism

Given that *WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT* is a book about the rise of the Nazi Regime in Germany and the consequences thereof imposed upon a German-Jewish family, anti-Semitism is bound to manifest itself throughout the book and is also bound to be a prominent theme within it. Anti-Semitism is present in *WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT* in two ways: a more prominent and explicit form and a more pervasive but less explicit form.

The first form that anti-Semitism takes in the book is the explicit discrimination faced by Anna's family. Anna and her brother Max are, for instance, not allowed to play with another German refugee family's children due to the fact that they are Jewish. This is not stated completely explicitly in the book but it is very clear. Similarly, explicit anti-Semitism is mentioned in relation to the fact that Papa must flee Germany, not merely due to his criticism of the Nazi Regime but due to the fact that he is a Jewish intellectual.

The more pervasive form of implicit anti-Semitism is the idea that the Nazis are out to persecute the Jews (though not yet to outright kill them as the book takes place in the early 1930s). This fact motivates Anna's family's moves and the fact that Papa cannot publish his work regularly in Switzerland or France. It is due to a pervasive fear of the Nazis for promoting the work of Jewish intellectuals that Papa's work is often suppressed.

## Adaptability

Anna's family moves three times throughout the book, first from Berlin to Zurich, then from Zurich to Paris, and finally from Paris to London. Each move is jarring for them and requires significant adjustment. Thus Anna's family's ability to adapt is a consistent theme throughout the book. The story begins in Berlin just prior to the 1933 elections when Hitler comes to power in Germany. The first adjustment that Anna's family must make, as a result, is finding a home in Switzerland as a result of their flight from Germany. The Swiss in the area where Anna's family settle are German-speakers but speak a very different German dialect than what Anna and Max are used to hearing. It is in Switzerland where Mama has to get used to doing housework and Papa has to face an increasingly difficult struggle to publish his writing.

The move to France, however, is far more challenging. Anna and Max have to learn an entirely new language and have to learn to fit into a new culture. Anna and Max initially despair at their inability to quickly adapt to French life but they persevere and eventually start to feel at home in Paris. Their ability to adapt to Parisian life gives them full



confidence in their ability to adjust to life in London, where they end up at the end of the book. Anna's family acquires the ability to adapt to difficult circumstances.

## Having a Childhood Against the Odds

The most important theme of *WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT* revolves around the preservation of childhood. The rise of the Nazi Regime is one of the great tragedies of human history, due to the mass murder, torture and persecution that arises from their brief period in power. Many Jewish children are far less fortunate than Anna and Max. Their childhood innocence is destroyed by their encounter with radical evil. But Anna's family struggles to avoid such a fate for themselves and are ultimately successful.

Nonetheless, they are not untouched by the Nazi Regime. Their home is destroyed and Anna's own Pink Rabbit is confiscated. The Pink Rabbit represents Anna's childhood that is stolen by Hitler. Anna survives and adjusts nonetheless. The book shows this by displaying Anna's ordinary life events as she grows up — challenges in school, making new friends, fights with her brother, and so on. Despite the odds, Anna survives the attempt by the Nazis to destroy her childhood.

Perhaps the greatest threat to Anna's childhood is the fact that she must constantly move and integrate herself into new cultures. For a child, this is somewhat easier than for adults, in part due to the ability of children to quickly learn languages. But Anna's linguistic challenges are not the only ones she faces. For instance, she struggles to make new friends and to stay engaged in her studies, along with enduring a lower standard of living due to the fact that her family has been impoverished by the Nazis. Yet again, though, her childhood is preserved.

# Style

## Perspective

When *WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT* is written from the third-person point of view. Anna is the main character, however. The point of view is therefore not omniscient. It only knows what Anna herself knows with a few exceptions, like discrete knowledge of dates and times and a bit about the doings of her father and mother. One of the points of *WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT* is to describe the events of the rise of the Nazi Regime and its consequences through the eyes of a child. And in this way, the book achieves its purpose. Often complex events are referenced, events the reader will recognize (like the election of 1933) but the book will provide relatively little explanation. Instead, the events are left largely unexplained in order to communicate to the reader the inability of a child to comprehend the full significance of events.

One interesting illustration of this point of view comes when Anna's family is in Switzerland and Anna and her brother Max are busy trying to make friends after moving from Berlin. Anna and Max do play with the children of Herr and Frau Zwirn. However, when some German children move in, they are not allowed to play with Anna and Max by their parents, despite their initial interest. This is a veiled description of anti-Semitism though it is never explicitly called such. Thus the point of view often suggests a deep point but only gives the literal facts as they would be perceived by Anna, a pre-teen child.

## Tone

The tone of *WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT* is constructed for a young adult audience. It is also built around explaining the story of Anna's family from Anna's perspective, who begins the book only nine years old. Accordingly, the language must remain relatively simple and straightforward. Complex meanings communicated by the language must remain relatively straightforward as well, though they do frequently go deeper than the text itself. Author Judith Kerr is attempting to explain how Anna and her family preserve her childhood despite the fact that they are on the run from the Nazis and trying to avoid the repression of her father's writings.

Meanings are usually "close to the surface" though they require context not wholly given by the text alone. The reader must know something about the political and social circumstances in Western Europe in the 1930s. While the history is relatively well-known, the young adult reader will need to be astute enough to pick up on anti-Semitism that is not explicitly explained by the author, such as those situations where Germans treat Anna's family poorly seemingly inexplicably. While the author shows Anna's parents making comments about it, she rarely brings out the theme explicitly, though there are some clear instances. One such instance occurs when Papa explains

to Anna that they must try to be as good, honest, decent and kind as anyone else around them in order to combat the lies that are spread about Jews by the Nazis.

## Structure

WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT has twenty-four chapters. They run serially, from the winter of 1932-1933, to Anna's family's trip to London in 1934. The book divides into roughly three sections, though these are not explicitly marked in the book. The first section is the period covering Anna's family's life in Germany. These chapters introduce the main characters and the political and social circumstances that force Anna's family to leave Berlin. The chapters set up the basic plot of Anna's family's need to flee the Nazis and the inability of Papa to find work publishing his writing.

The next chapters of the book cover Anna's family's stay in Switzerland and their first attempts to adjust to a new culture and having significantly less money. Anna and Max must settle into a country school, Mama must learn to do housework and Papa must deal with having his writing suppressed and not being able to support his family on the terms he would like. While Anna and Max adjust well, Papa cannot handle not being able to publish and eventually pushes for his family to move to France, where he hopes to find a more hospitable environment.

The third and largest section of the book discusses Anna's family's life in France. Adjusting to Parisian life is much more challenging for Anna and Max, who must learn a new language and fit in with children who speak another language and have another culture. The first half of the section shows Anna and Max struggling to do so, but the second half shows the happiness they experience when they begin to adjust well. The section ends as Anna's family leaves France for London where Anna's father will help create a movie from a script he wrote.



## Quotes

"It's not a bit like Charlie Chaplin except for the moustache." (Chapter 1, 8)

"It's quite simple. Papa thinks Hitler and the Nazis might win the elections. If that happened he would not want to live in Germany while they were in power, and nor would any of us." (Chapter 2, 18)

"Yes ... yes ... I wish you luck." (Chapter 3, 27)

"Papa!" (Chapter 4, 38)

"You know Hitler won the elections. Well he very quickly took over the whole government, and it's just as Papa said it would be—nobody's allowed to say a word against him. If they do they're thrown into jail." (Chapter 5, 46)

"And snuggling my Pink Rabbit!" (Chapter 5, 47)

"You know of course they burned all your books." (Chapter 6, 52)

"If the Swiss won't print anything I write for fear of upsetting the Nazis across the border we may as well live in another country altogether." (Chapter 8, 66)

"He didn't like us anymore at the end. Not by the time his mother had finished with him." (Chapter 9, 74)

"In future she would try never to think about Germany at all." (Chapter 10, 82)

"By being better than other people. For instance, the Nazis say that Jews are dishonest. So it's not enough for us to be as honest as anyone else. We have to be more honest." (Chapter 11, 85)

"To our new life in France!" (Chapter 13, 111)

"How we used to think we'd be back in Berlin within six months. We've been away more than a year already." (Chapter 16, 135)

"The words just seemed to arrive from nowhere, in perfect French, without her having to think at all." (Chapter 19, 153)

"It's your first professional fee as a writer. It's really remarkable to have earned it in a language not your own." (Chapter 21, 172)

"Hitler knew what he was doing when he got rid of people like you!" (Chapter 22, 177)

"We can all go to England together!" (Chapter 23, 183)

"Welcome to England!" (Chapter 24, 189)



## Topics for Discussion

Why does Anna's father leave the country before the 1933 elections?

Discuss two ways in which Anna personally experiences anti-Semitism.

Why does Anna's family eventually leave Germany?

Why does Anna's family eventually leave Switzerland?

Explain three challenges Anna faces in learning to live in France.

Why does Anna's family eventually leave France?

Explain three ways in which anti-Semitism is characterized and illustrated in *WHEN HITLER STOLE PINK RABBIT*, particularly through Anna's eyes.

What is the symbolism of Pink Rabbit? What does Pink Rabbit represent?