

number the stars literature guide

Number the Stars is a poignant historical novel by Lois Lowry, set in Nazi-occupied Denmark during World War II. This literature guide aims to delve into the themes, characters, and historical context of the book, making it a valuable resource for students, teachers, and anyone interested in understanding the depth of Lowry's work. Through its exploration of courage, friendship, and the struggle against oppression, Number the Stars serves as an important narrative that encourages readers to confront the moral complexities of human behavior in times of crisis.

Overview of the Novel

Number the Stars follows the story of ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen, who lives in Copenhagen during the German occupation. Along with her family and friends, Annemarie navigates the challenges of living under oppressive regimes while protecting her Jewish friend, Ellen Rosen. The novel not only depicts the harsh realities of war but also highlights the resilience of the human spirit.

Plot Summary

The plot unfolds as Annemarie and her best friend Ellen face the increasing dangers posed by the Nazis. When the German soldiers begin to round up Jewish citizens, Annemarie's family comes to Ellen's aid, hiding her in their home. The tension builds as the Johansens work to protect Ellen from the dangers outside. Key events include:

1. Annemarie's Interaction with Soldiers: The chilling encounters with German soldiers highlight the constant fear that pervades the lives of the characters.
2. The Decision to Hide Ellen: The Johansen family's choice to risk their own safety for Ellen underscores the themes of bravery and loyalty.
3. The Escape Plan: The climax revolves around the Johansens' efforts to help Ellen escape to Sweden, a neutral country.

Main Themes

Number the Stars is rich with themes that resonate deeply with readers of all ages. Understanding these themes is crucial to grasping the novel's full significance.

Courage and Heroism

The theme of courage manifests in various forms throughout the novel:

- Personal Courage: Characters like Annemarie demonstrate personal courage by standing up to oppressive forces, even when scared.
- Collective Courage: The resistance movement in Denmark showcases how

communities can band together to support one another in times of peril.

Friendship and Loyalty

The bond between Annemarie and Ellen serves as the emotional heart of the story:

- **Sacrifice:** Annemarie's willingness to risk her safety for Ellen illustrates the depth of their friendship.
- **Support:** The Johansen family's support for Ellen emphasizes loyalty in the face of adversity.

The Loss of Innocence

As the children are forced to confront the realities of war, they experience a profound loss of innocence:

- **Understanding Evil:** Annemarie's encounters with the soldiers and the harsh realities of the world around her force her to grapple with the concept of evil.
- **Maturity:** The experiences shape Annemarie into a more mature individual, aware of the complexities of morality.

Character Analysis

The characters in *Number the Stars* are well-developed and serve to enhance the story's themes.

Annemarie Johansen

Annemarie is the protagonist, a brave and resourceful young girl. Her character arc is central to the narrative:

- **Growth:** Annemarie evolves from a naive child to a courageous individual who understands the gravity of her situation.
- **Relatability:** Her struggles make her a relatable character for young readers facing their own challenges.

Ellen Rosen

Ellen is Annemarie's Jewish best friend, representing the plight of Jews during the Holocaust:

- **Symbol of Innocence:** Ellen's character symbolizes the innocence lost during the war.
- **Courage in Vulnerability:** Despite her vulnerable position, Ellen shows remarkable bravery.

The Johansen Family

Annemarie's family plays a crucial role in the narrative:

- Parental Guidance: Annemarie's parents are strong moral figures who teach her the importance of courage and sacrifice.
- Representation of Resistance: The Johansens embody the spirit of resistance against tyranny.

Historical Context

Understanding the historical context of *Number the Stars* enriches the reading experience and provides insight into the real events that inspired Lowry's narrative.

The Holocaust

The Holocaust was a period of immense suffering and loss for Jewish communities across Europe. Key

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Number the Stars'?

'Number the Stars' explores themes of bravery, friendship, and the impact of war on individuals and families, particularly focusing on the resilience of the human spirit in the face of oppression.

Who are the main characters in 'Number the Stars'?

The main characters include Annemarie Johansen, her family, her best friend Ellen Rosen, and various members of the Danish resistance who help protect Jews during World War II.

How does the setting of 'Number the Stars' influence the story?

The story is set in Nazi-occupied Denmark during World War II, which creates a tense atmosphere that drives the plot and highlights the dangers faced by the characters, emphasizing their courage and the moral dilemmas they face.

What literary devices are prominent in 'Number the Stars'?

The book employs symbolism, such as the use of the Star of David and the metaphor of the handkerchief, as well as imagery to convey the emotional weight of the characters' experiences and the horrors of war.

What is the significance of the title 'Number the Stars'?

The title references a biblical passage from Psalm 147:4, which speaks of counting the stars. It symbolizes hope and the idea of preserving one's identity and humanity, even in dark times.

How does 'Number the Stars' address the concept of courage?

'Number the Stars' illustrates courage through the actions of young Annemarie and her family, who risk their lives to protect their Jewish friends, showing that courage can manifest in both small and significant acts.

What role does friendship play in 'Number the Stars'?

Friendship is central to the narrative, particularly the bond between Annemarie and Ellen. Their relationship symbolizes loyalty and the strength found in unity, especially during challenging times.

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