

number of the stars by lois lowry

Introduction to Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

Number the Stars is a historical fiction novel written by Lois Lowry, published in 1989. Set against the backdrop of World War II, the book follows the story of a young Danish girl named Annemarie Johansen as she navigates the dangers of Nazi occupation in Copenhagen. Through her journey, Lowry explores themes of bravery, friendship, and the moral complexities of war, making the novel a poignant read for both young adults and older readers.

Plot Summary

The story begins in 1943, where Annemarie Johansen lives with her family in Copenhagen. Denmark has been occupied by Nazi forces, and the Jewish population faces increasing persecution. Annemarie's best friend, Ellen Rosen, is Jewish, and their friendship becomes a focal point of the narrative. As the Nazis intensify their efforts to round up Jewish citizens, Annemarie's family decides to help Ellen and her family escape to safety.

The plot unfolds in a series of tense and suspenseful events as Annemarie and her family work to protect Ellen. With the help of her parents and other members of the Danish resistance, Annemarie learns about courage, sacrifice, and the importance of standing up against oppression. The climax of the story arrives when Annemarie must confront her fears and take on a critical role in the rescue plan.

Main Characters

The characters in *Number the Stars* are richly developed and serve to illustrate the various responses to the horrors of war. Key characters include:

- **Annemarie Johansen:** The protagonist, a brave and resourceful young girl who grows throughout the story.
- **Ellen Rosen:** Annemarie's best friend, a Jewish girl whose life is in danger due to Nazi persecution.
- **Mrs. Johansen:** Annemarie's mother, who plays a crucial role in the family's efforts to protect Ellen.
- **Mr. Johansen:** Annemarie's father, a strong supporter of the resistance and a symbol of moral integrity.

- **Peter Neilsen:** A family friend and member of the resistance who assists in the escape plan.

Historical Context

Number the Stars is set in a time of great turmoil and upheaval. The historical context of World War II, particularly the Holocaust, is integral to the novel. Lowry provides insight into the experiences of Danish citizens during this dark period in history.

Denmark During World War II

In April 1940, Nazi Germany invaded Denmark, and the country was occupied for several years. The Danish government initially cooperated with the Nazis, but as the persecution of Jews escalated, a significant portion of the population began to resist. Denmark became known for its relatively effective efforts to protect its Jewish citizens, particularly in the latter years of the occupation.

Some key points about Denmark's response:

1. The Danish resistance movement was formed to combat Nazi oppression.
2. Many Danes risked their lives to shelter and aid Jewish families, helping them escape to neutral Sweden.
3. The evacuation of Jewish citizens in October 1943 is a significant historical event, with around 7,200 Jews escaping to safety.

Lowry uses these historical events as a backdrop to enhance the narrative and educate readers about the moral dilemmas faced by individuals during times of war.

Thematic Exploration

Number the Stars delves into several themes that contribute to its enduring impact. The main themes include:

Courage and Sacrifice

The theme of courage is embodied in the actions of Annemarie and her family as they risk

their safety to protect Ellen. Lowry illustrates that true bravery often involves making difficult choices and sacrificing personal safety for the greater good. Annemarie's character development highlights how even the most ordinary individuals can rise to extraordinary challenges.

Friendship

The bond between Annemarie and Ellen serves as a poignant reminder of the power of friendship in times of crisis. Their relationship reflects the innocence of childhood and the strength that comes from loyalty and love. Throughout the story, Annemarie's determination to keep Ellen safe showcases the depth of their friendship.

The Complexity of Humanity

Lowry presents a nuanced view of humanity during wartime. Characters like the Johansens and Peter Neilsen embody the resistance against tyranny, while others, such as the Nazis, represent the darker aspects of human nature. The novel challenges readers to consider the moral implications of their choices and the responsibilities that come with standing against injustice.

Writing Style and Structure

Lois Lowry's writing style in *Number the Stars* is straightforward yet evocative. The narrative is accessible to younger readers, making it an excellent choice for classroom discussions. Lowry employs vivid imagery and emotional depth, allowing readers to connect with the characters' experiences intimately.

The structure of the novel is linear, following Annemarie's perspective as she navigates her world. This first-person point of view helps readers understand the fear and uncertainty faced by those living under occupation. Lowry's use of dialogue enhances character development and provides insight into the relationships between individuals in the story.

Reception and Impact

Upon its release, *Number the Stars* received critical acclaim and won several prestigious awards, including the Newbery Medal in 1990. It has since become a staple in educational curriculums, often used to teach students about the Holocaust and the importance of compassion and understanding.

The book's impact extends beyond the classroom. It has sparked discussions about the moral responsibilities of individuals in society and the consequences of standing by in the face of injustice. Many readers have found inspiration in Annemarie's courage, making the novel a timeless reflection on the human spirit.

Conclusion

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry is more than just a story about war; it is a powerful exploration of friendship, courage, and the moral complexities faced by individuals during one of history's darkest periods. Through the eyes of Annemarie Johansen, readers are invited to reflect on their values and the importance of standing up against oppression. As a poignant reminder of the resilience of the human spirit, Number the Stars continues to resonate with readers of all ages, ensuring its place as a significant work in children's literature.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Number the Stars' by Lois Lowry?

The main theme of 'Number the Stars' is the bravery and resilience of individuals during times of war, particularly focusing on friendship and the sacrifices made to protect loved ones in the face of oppression.

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

The main characters include Annemarie Johansen, a young Danish girl, her family, particularly her sister Kirsti, and her Jewish friend Ellen Rosen, whose safety becomes a central concern in the story.

What historical event does 'Number the Stars' depict?

The book is set during World War II and depicts the German occupation of Denmark and the efforts to save Jewish citizens from deportation to concentration camps.

How does Annemarie show courage in 'Number the Stars'?

Annemarie demonstrates courage by taking risks to protect her friend Ellen, including hiding her identity and confronting German soldiers while trying to help her family and friends escape danger.

What role does the concept of 'numbering the stars' play in the story?

The phrase 'number the stars' symbolizes hope, freedom, and the idea of preserving memories and identities, particularly in the context of the Jewish people facing persecution.

What is the significance of the setting in 'Number the Stars'?

The setting in Copenhagen during World War II is significant as it highlights the impact of war on everyday life, illustrating the courage and resourcefulness of ordinary people in their fight against tyranny.

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