

number the stars lois lowry

Number the Stars is a historical fiction novel written by Lois Lowry, published in 1989. Set in Copenhagen during World War II, the story follows the life of ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen as she navigates the perils of Nazi occupation in Denmark. The book explores themes of bravery, friendship, and the moral complexities of war, making it a significant piece of literature for both young readers and adults. Lowry's ability to weave a narrative that is both poignant and educational has solidified "Number the Stars" as a staple in children's literature and an essential read for understanding the impact of the Holocaust.

Overview of the Plot

"Number the Stars" opens in 1943, with the Johansen family leading a quiet life in a Copenhagen neighborhood. However, the shadows of World War II loom large, as Jewish citizens, including Annemarie's best friend, Ellen Rosen, are in grave danger due to the Nazi regime's increasing oppression. The novel primarily focuses on the friendship between Annemarie and Ellen, highlighting the innocence of childhood amidst the harsh realities of war.

As the story unfolds, the Johansens become involved in the Danish Resistance movement, which seeks to protect the Jewish population from the Nazis. When the Nazis come to arrest the Rosens, Annemarie must think quickly to protect her friend. She bravely lies to the soldiers, claiming that Ellen is her deceased older sister, Lise, thereby saving Ellen from capture. This act of courage sets the stage for the rest of the narrative, as Annemarie and her family work to help the Rosens escape to safety in Sweden.

Key Characters

Understanding the characters in "Number the Stars" is crucial to grasping the novel's themes and emotional depth. Here are the main characters:

Annemarie Johansen

- The protagonist and narrator of the story.
- A ten-year-old girl who exhibits bravery and quick thinking.
- Represents the innocence of childhood in wartime.

Ellen Rosen

- Annemarie's best friend, who is Jewish.
- Represents the plight of Jewish people during the Holocaust.
- Her character embodies the themes of friendship and loyalty.

Mrs. Johansen

- Annemarie's mother, a strong and resourceful woman.
- Plays a crucial role in protecting Ellen and guiding her family through danger.

Mr. Johansen

- Annemarie's father, a member of the Danish Resistance.
- Provides the moral backbone of the family, emphasizing the importance of standing against injustice.

Peter Neilsen

- A family friend and member of the Resistance.
- Serves as a mentor to Annemarie and symbolizes the adult struggle against oppression.

Thematic Elements

"Number the Stars" is rich with themes that resonate throughout the narrative. Some of the most prominent themes include:

Bravery and Courage

- Annemarie's evolution from a naive child to a courageous young girl is central to the story.
- The novel illustrates that bravery can manifest in small, everyday actions, such as lying to protect a friend.

Friendship and Loyalty

- The bond between Annemarie and Ellen serves as the emotional core of the story.
- Their friendship highlights the importance of loyalty in times of crisis.

The Impact of War

- Lowry portrays the effects of war not just on soldiers, but on families, children, and communities.
- The novel illustrates how ordinary lives are disrupted by political turmoil and violence.

Moral Choices

- Characters are frequently faced with difficult decisions that challenge their morals and ethics.
- The narrative invites readers to consider what they would do in similar situations.

Historical Context

To fully appreciate "Number the Stars," it's essential to understand the historical context in which it is set. The novel takes place during the Nazi occupation of Denmark, which began in 1940 and lasted until 1945. Denmark's relatively swift and peaceful surrender to Nazi Germany shocked the world, but the Danish people later became known for their efforts to protect their Jewish population.

- Approximately 7,500 Jews lived in Denmark before the war.
- In October 1943, when the Nazis ordered the arrest of all Jews in Denmark, many citizens risked their lives to help them escape.
- The Danish Resistance organized a significant effort to smuggle Jews to neutral Sweden, often using fishing boats and other discreet methods.

Lois Lowry's novel sheds light on this important historical period, illustrating the courage of everyday people who stood against tyranny.

Literary Style and Techniques

Lowry employs various literary techniques to enhance the narrative and engage readers:

First-Person Perspective

- The story is told from Annemarie's point of view, allowing readers to experience her emotions and thoughts.
- This perspective fosters a deep connection between Annemarie and the reader, making her struggles more relatable.

Symbolism

- The title itself, "Number the Stars," refers to a passage in the Bible, suggesting themes of hope and faith.
- The use of stars can symbolize guidance, safety, and the idea of remembering those who have suffered.

Imagery and Descriptive Language

- Lowry's vivid descriptions create a strong sense of place, making readers feel as though they are in wartime Copenhagen.
- The imagery portrays both the beauty of friendship and the harsh realities of war.

Critical Reception and Legacy

Upon its release, "Number the Stars" received widespread acclaim and won several awards, including the prestigious Newbery Medal in 1990. The novel has been praised for its sensitive portrayal of a difficult subject and its ability to convey complex themes to a younger audience.

- The book has been incorporated into school curricula worldwide, often used to teach about the Holocaust and the importance of standing up against injustice.
- Its impactful narrative and relatable characters have made it a beloved classic in children's literature.

Conclusion

"Number the Stars" by Lois Lowry remains a poignant exploration of friendship, bravery, and the moral complexities of war. Through the eyes of Annemarie Johansen, readers gain insight into the human spirit's resilience in the face of oppression. Lowry's ability to weave historical facts with a compelling narrative allows the novel to resonate with audiences of all ages. As we reflect on the lessons of history and the enduring power of friendship, "Number the Stars" continues to inspire and educate, reminding us of the importance of courage in the darkest of times. Whether read in a classroom setting or enjoyed independently, this timeless tale serves as a powerful reminder of the capacity for kindness and bravery in the face of adversity.

Frequently Asked Questions

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

The main theme of 'Number the Stars' is the importance of courage and the impact of war on individuals, particularly the bonds of friendship and family during times of conflict.

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

The main characters include Annemarie Johansen, her family, her best friend Ellen Rosen, and the Nazi soldiers who represent the oppressive regime.

How does 'Number the Stars' portray the Holocaust?

'Number the Stars' portrays the Holocaust through the eyes of a young girl, illustrating the fear, bravery, and the moral choices faced by those living under Nazi occupation in Denmark.

What historical context is important for understanding 'Number the Stars'?

Understanding the Nazi occupation of Denmark during World War II is crucial, as it provides the backdrop for the story's events and the characters' struggles to protect their Jewish friends.

What literary devices does Lois Lowry use in 'Number the Stars'?

Lois Lowry employs symbolism, foreshadowing, and imagery to enhance the emotional depth of the story and to convey the themes of bravery and sacrifice.

What lessons can readers take away from 'Number the Stars'?

Readers can learn about the importance of standing up against injustice, the value of friendship and loyalty, and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

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