

number the stars by lois lowry

Introduction to "Number the Stars"

Number the Stars is a historical fiction novel written by Lois Lowry, published in 1989. This poignant story is set in Denmark during World War II and explores the themes of bravery, friendship, and the impact of war on human lives. Through the eyes of a ten-year-old girl named Annemarie Johansen, Lowry intricately weaves a narrative that reveals the horrors of Nazi occupation and the resilience of the human spirit. This article delves into the characters, themes, and historical context of "Number the Stars," providing a comprehensive understanding of this impactful work.

Plot Summary

"Number the Stars" follows the life of Annemarie Johansen, a young Danish girl living in Copenhagen during the German occupation. The Johansen family, along with their Jewish friends, the Rosens, face the harsh realities of war as the Nazis intensify their efforts to capture and deport Jews.

The story begins with Annemarie and her best friend, Ellen Rosen, navigating the dangers of their daily lives. Ellen is Jewish, and as the Nazis tighten their grip on Denmark, her family becomes increasingly at risk. The plot thickens when the Johansen family decides to help the Rosens escape the Nazis.

The climax of the story occurs when the Johansen family devises a daring plan to hide the Rosens and help them flee to safety. Annemarie's bravery is tested as she must confront her fears and take risks to protect her friend. Ultimately, "Number the Stars" is a testament to the courage of ordinary individuals in extraordinary circumstances.

Character Analysis

The characters in "Number the Stars" are well-developed and serve to highlight the various responses to the oppressive conditions of war. Here are some key characters:

- **Annemarie Johansen:** The protagonist and narrator of the story. Annemarie is a courageous and resourceful girl who evolves from innocence to a deeper understanding of the complexities of human nature and the realities of war.

- **Ellen Rosen:** Annemarie's best friend, who is Jewish. Ellen's character represents vulnerability and the fear experienced by those targeted during the Holocaust. Her friendship with Annemarie symbolizes hope and loyalty.
- **Mrs. Johansen:** Annemarie's mother, who embodies the strength and resilience of women during wartime. She is protective of her family and plays a crucial role in the decision to aid the Rosens.
- **Mr. Johansen:** Annemarie's father, who is depicted as a calm and rational figure. He supports his wife in their efforts to help the Rosens, demonstrating the importance of family unity in times of crisis.
- **Peter Neilsen:** A member of the Danish Resistance and a friend of the Johansen family. Peter's character provides insight into the organized efforts to resist Nazi oppression and the sacrifices made by those involved in the Resistance.

Themes Explored in "Number the Stars"

Lois Lowry's "Number the Stars" explores several profound themes that resonate with readers of all ages. Some of the key themes include:

Bravery and Courage

One of the most prominent themes in the novel is the concept of bravery. Annemarie's journey reflects the courage required to confront danger and stand up for what is right. Her willingness to face fear head-on, particularly when hiding Ellen and helping the Rosens, showcases her growth as a character. The novel suggests that bravery can manifest in various forms, from small acts of defiance to significant risks taken to protect loved ones.

Friendship and Loyalty

The bond between Annemarie and Ellen is at the heart of the story. Their friendship symbolizes hope amid despair. The loyalty they exhibit towards each other, particularly in times of crisis, reinforces the idea that human connections are vital for survival. The novel beautifully illustrates how friendship can inspire individuals to act selflessly and courageously.

The Impact of War on Society

"Number the Stars" does not shy away from depicting the harsh realities of war. The narrative reveals how ordinary lives are disrupted by the presence of the Nazis, showcasing the fear and uncertainty that permeate everyday existence. Lowry emphasizes the effects of war on families, communities, and individuals, fostering a deeper understanding of the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Hope and Humanity

Despite the dark backdrop of war, "Number the Stars" ultimately conveys a message of hope. The characters demonstrate resilience and compassion, finding ways to support one another in the face of adversity. The novel suggests that even in the darkest times, humanity can prevail through acts of kindness and solidarity.

Historical Context

Understanding the historical context of "Number the Stars" enriches the reading experience. The novel is set during the German occupation of Denmark, which lasted from 1940 to 1945. During this period, the Danish government initially adopted a policy of cooperation with the Nazis, but as the war progressed, many Danes began to resist the oppressive regime.

Denmark is notable for its relatively successful efforts to protect its Jewish population. In 1943, when the Nazis intensified their efforts to round up Jews, the Danish Resistance organized a large-scale operation to help Jewish citizens escape to safety in Sweden. This historical backdrop serves as a foundation for the events in "Number the Stars," illustrating the bravery of those who risked their lives to save others.

Literary Devices

Lois Lowry employs various literary devices to enhance the story and convey its themes effectively. Some notable devices include:

- **Imagery:** Lowry uses vivid descriptions to create a sense of place and evoke emotions. The imagery of Copenhagen during wartime contrasts with the innocence of childhood, heightening the impact of the narrative.
- **Symbolism:** The title itself, "Number the Stars," symbolizes hope and the idea that each life is precious. The stars also represent the idea of

guiding light in dark times, serving as a metaphor for the characters' resilience.

- **Foreshadowing:** Lowry skillfully foreshadows events, creating tension and anticipation. The subtle hints about the dangers facing the Rosens build a sense of urgency throughout the story.

Conclusion

"Number the Stars" by Lois Lowry is a powerful and thought-provoking novel that tackles difficult themes through the lens of a young girl's experience during World War II. The story's exploration of bravery, friendship, and the impact of war serves as a reminder of the strength of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Lowry's ability to weave historical facts with compelling character development ensures that "Number the Stars" remains a vital piece of literature for readers of all ages. Through Annemarie's journey, we are encouraged to reflect on our own capacity for courage and compassion in challenging times.

Frequently Asked Questions

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

The main theme of 'Number the Stars' is the bravery and resilience of individuals during difficult times, particularly in the context of World War II and the Holocaust.

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

The main characters include Annemarie Johansen, her best friend Ellen Rosen, and Annemarie's family, particularly her sister Kirsti and her parents.

What historical event does 'Number the Stars' revolve around?

'Number the Stars' revolves around the Nazi occupation of Denmark during World War II and the efforts to save Jewish families from persecution.

How does Annemarie demonstrate courage in the story?

Annemarie demonstrates courage by helping her Jewish friend Ellen escape from the Nazis and by facing dangerous situations to protect her family and friends.

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

Friendship is a central element in 'Number the Stars,' as it showcases the bond between Annemarie and Ellen, highlighting loyalty and sacrifice during perilous times.

How does the author use symbolism in 'Number the Stars'?

The author uses symbolism, such as the Star of David, to represent the Jewish identity and the struggles faced by the Jewish community during the Holocaust.

What lesson does 'Number the Stars' teach about empathy?

The novel teaches that empathy is crucial in understanding the struggles of others, encouraging readers to stand against injustice and support those in need.

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

The setting of Nazi-occupied Denmark creates a backdrop of tension and danger, influencing the characters' actions and highlighting the realities of wartime life.

Why is 'Number the Stars' considered an important book for young readers?

'Number the Stars' is considered important for young readers because it addresses complex themes of bravery, friendship, and the moral choices faced during times of oppression, helping to educate about history and humanity.

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