

Literature Circle Guide to HITLER'S DAUGHTER by Jackie French

Book Summary

Mark and his friends often make up stories while waiting for the bus before school. While waiting together for the bus one rainy morning, Mark's friend Anna begins telling her friends a story about a young girl named Heidi who lived during World War II. Heidi was Hitler's daughter, hidden away from almost everyone so that her identity would be kept a secret. Mark and his friends become quickly fascinated by Anna's story, which seems too detailed and realistic to be imagined. As Mark learns about Heidi's cloistered life, her strange relationship with her father, and her growing awareness of her father's plans for a supreme race, he becomes interested in learning more about Hitler and World War II. He wonders what he would have done in Heidi's place, with an evil father responsible for the deaths of millions. At the end of Anna's story, Heidi escaped from the rubble of bombed Berlin and eventually immigrated to Australia, keeping her identity a secret until she finally told her granddaughter many years later.

Author Information

Jackie French was born in Sydney, Australia in 1953 and grew up in Brisbane. She wrote her first book while living in a shed with a wallaby, a snake, and a wombat, and when she submitted her manuscript to Harper Collins, the editor described it as the messiest, worst spelled manuscript they had ever received. French has since authored more than 100 books, and her work has won many awards and been translated into nine languages. She encourages young writers to write about what they care most about: "If you're not passionate about anything, you are a deeply boring person and should only write books for snails." French now lives with her husband in a stone house that they built themselves. She has one son and two stepdaughters.

Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions

1. When and where does Anna tell her story about Heidi?
Anna tells the story about Heidi on rainy days while the children wait under the bus shelter before school.
2. What about her appearance sets Heidi apart?
Heidi had a great red birthmark on her face, and one of her legs was shorter than the other, so she walked with a limp (p. 11).
3. As he hears Anna's story about Heidi, Mark has many questions for his parents and his teacher about Hitler and the Holocaust. What information does he learn through these conversations?
Mark learns that between 6 and 11 million people were killed during the Holocaust, because of Hitler's goal to create a super race, a pure Aryan race. He learns about Jesse Owens, the African American runner who won many

medals at the Olympics in Berlin but refused to shake Hitler's hand. He also learns about what life is like in a totalitarian state, and he begins to understand how Hitler was able to gain control of Germany and maintain his power.

4. Why does Heidi have to call Hitler "Duffi"?

Duffi is Heidi's name for her father. In order to keep Heidi's identity as Hitler's daughter a secret, she must never call him "father," but rather "Duffi."

5. Why do you think Fraulein Gelber seems uncomfortable talking to Heidi about the Jews?

Fraulein Gelber has been entrusted by Hitler himself with Heidi's care, and she must keep Heidi away from other people who might learn of her real identity as Hitler's daughter. When Heidi begins talking about the Jews, Fraulein Gelber realizes that Heidi has influences in her life that she has not been aware of. She worries about whom Heidi has spoken with and what she might be learning about her father.

6. One night Mark dreams that he is listening to Hitler give a speech in his town as the raid causes a flood. In the dream, Hitler screams, "You are all Hitler's children!" What do you think this dream means? What does this dream show about Mark's response to Anna's story?

Mark dreams that he and his friends go to hear a speech given by Hitler, and all of his friends join in wearing swastikas and saluting Hitler. Mark tries to stop them, but no one listens to him, and he feels more and more upset. The dream shows that Mark feels a connection to Anna's story, and he imagines how he would have responded to the injustices in Hitler's time. He is terrified by his friends' behavior but is unable to stop them.

7. How do you think you would feel if you discovered that someone in your family had committed an awful crime? How would your relationship change? Would you ever be able to forgive that person?

Students' answers will vary. Mark and his father discuss a similar question on pp. 40-1 as Mark wonders how he would have responded to Hitler if he were in Heidi's shoes. Mark's father tells him that even if his son did commit a terrible crime, he would always love his son, though he would turn him in to the police if necessary.

8. Heidi lives a very isolated life without any contact with other children and very little knowledge of the world outside her home. How do you think this kind of upbringing would affect a person?

Students' answers will vary. Without many experiences, Heidi lacked basic knowledge of the world. Anna tells her friends that when Heidi did go to regular school, it took her longer to finish, because she was so behind. Heidi eventually turned her back on her old lifestyle, because "she wanted a new

life. . . a real life, like everyone else, with a family and friends to laugh with” (p. 119). She was happy to leave behind the loneliness and isolation of her life with Fraulein Gelber.

9. After Anna starts her story about Heidi, she hesitates to continue. Why do you think this is?
Since the story, if true, is Anna’s own family history, she is deeply invested in it. Her grandmother who told her the story had told Anna that it was “just pretend,” so Anna wonders how much of the story really did happen. Since the story is personally so important to her, she waits until her listeners ask her for more of the story, and only then is she willing to continue.

10. When Heidi leaves her first home with Fraulein Gelber, she is tempted to leave behind all the dolls that her father had given her – “the pretty perfect dolls.” Why?
Heidi’s birthmark and short leg are considered to be physical defects, marking her as flawed to those who subscribe to the ideal of Hitler’s master race. Her pretty, perfect dolls are in contrast to her own disfigurement, reminding Heidi every day of her own physical flaws, so she is tempted to leave them behind when she first flees her home.

11. Why does everybody in Heidi’s life seem to think she is a “lucky girl”?
In Hitler’s Germany, many people with physical defects like Heidi’s would have been sent to a concentration camp, but Heidi is hidden away and lives a life of relative luxury in wartime Germany. Her father gives her expensive toys, a lovely home, and good food, and he even visits her on occasion. Heidi often wishes for a more normal life in which she could have friends and go to school, but Fraulein Gelber continues to remind her how “lucky” she is compared to others.

12. How does Fraulein Gelber change as the story progresses? Were you surprised when she left Heidi alone in the bunker?
At first, Fraulein Gelber is an attentive nanny to Heidi, giving her lessons and taking her for daily walks. As the story progresses and it becomes clear that the Germans are losing the war, Fraulein Gelber becomes more and more distracted and distraught. She hears news of family members in the war, and she becomes sad and anxious. She is too worried to give Heidi her lessons, and spends most of her time alone in her room rereading letters from her family. She neglects Heidi, letting her spend long hours listening to Frau Lieb gossip about other townspeople. In the end, she deserts Heidi in Hitler’s underground bunker, leaving her to go search for remaining family members.

13. Near the end of the story, Heidi calls Hitler “Father” for the first time. Why did she do this? And why did Heidi’s father act as though he didn’t know her?

Heidi is alone since Fraulein Gelber deserted her, and she is terribly scared of the bombs she hears shaking the ground above and the walls of the bunker. When she glimpses Hitler, she calls out to him without thinking, “Father!” Even in that moment, Hitler refuses to recognize his daughter, telling his guards to take her away. In front of his soldiers, he does not acknowledge his disfigured daughter, probably out of embarrassment and fear of exposure.

14. Do you think Anna’s story is true or “just pretend”? Explain.
Students’ answers will vary. Mark is increasingly convinced that Anna’s story is true, partly because of the detail and historical facts in her story. Anna seems to know far too much to have made up this story like she made up the others. Yet at the end of the story, we learn that Anna’s grandmother told her that the story was “just pretend,” so we are left wondering how much of the story really did happen.
15. Anna's story causes Mark to wonder whether a child of an evil person is likely to follow in his or her parent’s footsteps. Discuss reasons why this might happen. What are some factors that might prevent a child from going the way of his or her parent?
Anna’s story causes Mark to wonder: If Heidi was a descendant of Hitler, would she be likely to follow in her father’s evil ways? Why could she not influence her father to discontinue his plan to exterminate the Jews? Students will have various answers to these questions. A child of an evil person might be influenced by his parent, genetically or by example, and so might follow in his parent’s footsteps. Or a child might reject the choices of his parent, following another path instead.

Note: These literature circle questions are keyed to Bloom’s Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-11; Synthesis: 12-13; Evaluation: 14-15.

Activities

1. You’ve been selected to design a cover for the newest edition of *Hitler’s Daughter*. Draw a new cover to represent the book to students who haven’t yet read it, and include reviews from other “critics” in your class to create interest in the book.
With this assignment, students have a chance to consider how to market this book to other students. They will need to obtain quotes describing the book from their classmates and be prepared to select the quotes for their book cover that they think will best help to “sell” the book.

2. As he learns about Hitler's Germany and the Holocaust, Mark hears new terms such as "genocide" and "totalitarian country." Use a dictionary to define these terms and explain how these definitions add to your understanding of what happened in Hitler's Germany. How do these terms fit with what you already knew about Hitler and the Holocaust?

Definitions from www.dictionary.com: Genocide: "The systematic and planned extermination of an entire national, racial, political, or ethnic group." Totalitarian: "Of, relating to, being, or imposing a form of government in which the political authority exercises absolute and centralized control over all aspects of life, the individual is subordinated to the state, and opposing political and cultural expression is suppressed." These terms describe Hitler's plan for creating a master Aryan race and help explain how he was able to carry out his plan and maintain his control over Germany for as long as he did.

3. Imagine the conversation after Anna's grandmother has finished telling the Heidi story to her granddaughter. What questions does Anna have for her grandmother, and how much is her grandmother willing to tell her? Does Anna really believe her grandmother's story is true? Write the dialogue between Anna and her grandmother.

With this activity students will be challenged to imagine Anna's response to the story as well as her grandmother's reasons for telling her story. After writing dialogues, students might practice reading them aloud, presenting them to their classmates, and then discussing the different ways each dialogue completes the story.

Author's Web Site: www.jackiefrench.com

Copyright © 2003 Scholastic Inc. All rights reserved.