



The Endless Steppe

Esther Hautzig

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

In June 1941, Esther Rudomin, an only child, takes a ten-year-old's delight in mystery books and her Grandfather Solomon's garden. At the Sophia Markovna Gurewitz School, she learns Yiddish and Jewish culture. Life in the family compound seems serene as war rages in eastern Europe. The Rudomin family's happiness ends with the arrest of Samuel and Raya. Along with Esther and Grandmother Anna Rudomin, the couple and 36 others board a cattle car to an unknown destination. They leave behind Grandfather Solomon, Grandmother Sara, Uncle Liusik, and Aunt Sonia.

Chapter 2

Labeled capitalists and enemies of the people, the family journeys for six weeks in a dim, fetid compartmentalized car. Samuel takes the role of leader of the forty deportees. Soldiers provide pails of cabbage soup and instruct deportees to use a v-shaped hole in the car wall as a toilet. To ease their hunger, the Poles buy cheese and black bread at rural stations. After passing into the Ukraine, they arrive at Rubtsovsk, a frontier village in the Altai Territory of the U.S.S.R.

Chapter 3

The Rudomins march for a mile in the summer heat and reunite with friends, Mrs. Marshak and her son Boris. Samuel provides a fatherly love for the boy. Lodged near a gypsum mine, the family undergoes rude, impertinent questioning from the self-important Comrade Popravka.

Chapter 4

Popravka ushers the deportees into a former school stripped bare of furnishings. Grandmother orders the waterboy to serve the elderly and children first.

Comrade Alexander Ivanovich Makrinin, the soft-spoken director of the mine, sets deportees to work: Esther in the potato fields, Raya as a dynamiter, Grandmother shoveling gypsum, and Samuel driving a horse cart. Two young villagers offer watermelon slices to the deportees. Rations of brinza cheese and bread are scant.

Chapter 5

The authorities allow six deportees to walk twelve kilometers to shop at the baracholka or village market on Sundays, their day off. Grandmother and Esther barter for food, trading Raya's elegant silk slip, Samuel's silk shirt, and Grandmother's black silk umbrella for flour, meat, and sunflower seeds.

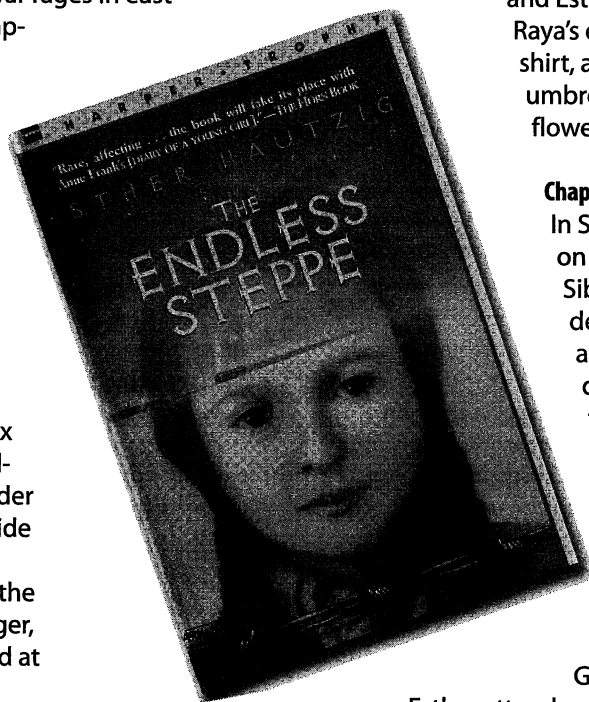
Chapter 6

In September, the arrival of winter on the steppes proves that Siberian storms are swift and deadly and that warm clothes are a must. After an amnesty declaration on July 30, deportees move closer to the village to work for rubles. The family shares bleak quarters with other Polish deportees, who sleep on plank beds. Raya works in the bakery; Samuel keeps books for a construction project. Esther and Grandmother are free of work;

Esther attends school. Life improves after the Rudomins share warmer housing with a farm family, Nina Ivanovna and Nikita Alexandrovich.

Chapter 7

In October, the snows begin. Lonely for a friend, Esther enters fifth grade among Russian-speaking children. She studies Russian literature and grammar, math, history, geography, and German. The steely-eyed teacher, Raisa Nikitovna, resents Esther's inability to speak Russian fluently and does little to help her adapt. Esther shares books with Svetlana and garners the last pages of a notebook. After she uses it up, she has to write between the lines of newspaper pages.



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Chapter 8

Even in shabby refugee clothing, Esther stands out as a poor little rich girl among Russian peasants. She faces the challenge of the Cyrillic alphabet. Compounding her problems is a months-long bout with bronchitis, which keeps her in bed for most of the winter. News arrives of the German assault on Russia. The family learns that Grandfather Solomon died in a labor camp. Grandmother Anna grieves aloud for her husband. Secret police question Samuel because Jews come to the house to observe funeral rites for Solomon.

Chapter 9

After the landlady becomes pregnant, the Rudomins move to a barren, dirt-floored hut and occupy a single room. Samuel undergoes questioning by an N.K.V.D. agent (secret police), who requests that Samuel become a spy. He refuses.

Chapter 10

In addition to singing Russian folk songs and the "Internationale," Esther attends an American movie, *Charlie's Aunt*. She makes friends with Svetlana by cutting her braids, the source of Svetlana's envy. Esther becomes adept at Russian language and literature and helps her friend with themes. Mastery of math proves more difficult.

Chapter 11

In spring, the family moves into an empty hut. They enjoy bathing at the public bania, a sauna where they clean themselves Finnish-style with twigs. After patching the walls with manure and digging a root cellar, they plant a vegetable garden. Esther dyes gauze with onion peel to make yellow curtains. Local authorities force them to shelter "Vanya the bum." Mutual respect and support transform him into Ivan Petrovich, an unfortunate Ukrainian shoemaker who lost a leg in a Siberian prison camp. One day, he disappears.

Chapter 12

During the hot summer, drought and typhus present new challenges. Samuel receives a letter ordering him to join a labor force on the front lines. The family fears for him and Esther weeps on his shoulder, but Samuel remains optimistic and reassures the women.

Chapter 13

The second winter is even more difficult than the first because of a summer crop failure and a flu epidemic. Esther joins other children in gathering coal and wood

shavings along the railroad tracks. To lighten the grimness of their lives, Raya organizes a party for Esther's twelfth birthday and serves potato goulash. After the party, Raya promises that life will get better.

Chapter 14

Samuel sends an uplifting letter, but news from the front is not promising. Esther loses a thirty-ruble note at school and sells the family's bread at the market. Raya saws the ends from the roof beams to burn in the stove. To ease family finances, Esther begins knitting a custom-made sweater for a little girl who is going blind. Esther's payment is potatoes and a pail of milk. The family makes friends with Yozia and Zaya, newcomers from Kharkov who have connections to the new tractor factory. The friendship provides a few extras, but Raya insists that the family not expect the couple to support them.

Chapter 15

Finding wool is even more difficult than finding customers. For Marya Nikolayevna, Esther measures her twice with a string. She washes and unravels a discarded red skirt and knits a sweater. Marya promises to pay Esther in flour, potatoes, and milk. When Marya tries on the sweater, her weight gain requires another two months of alteration.

Chapter 16

Esther fights the cold by knitting in bed. She finds warmth in reading books at the local library and locates another customer, who orders two sweaters. The family's new friends locate a new home and job as caretakers for Yosif Isayevich. The move near the tractor factory requires separation from Grandmother, who rooms with the Kaftals. That winter, the family is warmer and a little fatter from their good fortune.

Chapter 17

Father continues to write reassuring letters. After Yosif Isayevich's wife returns, the family takes new quarters with Natasha and Nikolay and their baby. Esther works hard to win the August declamation contest by memorizing Tatyana's dream from Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Her teacher embarrasses Esther for arriving at the contest barefooted. She returns home for a pair of Raya's felt slippers and runs back to recite her piece. Wearied by her exertions, she loses the contest. She determines to avoid humiliation and acquire a pair of shoes to replace her outgrown oxfords.

Chapter 18

Other challenges prove Esther's courage and persistence. She buys blue, rubber-soled shoes and enters a new school with less self-consciousness. To earn extra money, she crochets collars and cuffs for a dressmaker, Alexandra Lvovna, who delays payment. On the way home from delivering the first job, Esther gets lost in a white-out. Guiding her home is Raya's voice calling "Sh'mah Israel."

Chapter 19

From Natasha, Esther learns to spin and earns money from babysitting. To pay for more wool, Esther trades goods at the market for Yozia and Zaya in exchange for half the profits. The realization that people buy books to use the paper for smoking ends Esther's delight in trading. From Anna Semyonovna, she learns Russian literature and writes a successful paper on Pushkin. To gain the attention of Yuri, a fellow student, she runs successfully for the office of editor of the school newspaper.

Chapter 20

Esther improves her math by studying with Irena Maximovna and pays for the sessions by knitting a sweater. For a masquerade party, Esther tries unsuccessfully to borrow a dress from a theatrical company. Undaunted, she manages to put together a borrowed blue georgette dress and shoes from Anya and walks with her escort, Shurik. At the party, she discovers that the daughter of the mine supervisor was more successful in requesting a costume from the theater.

Chapter 21

In 1945, the final spring in Siberia brings greater evidence of war's devastation. Russian soldiers push back German insurgents and loot their towns. Cattle cars loaded with German prisoners of war overtax village housing. Workers throw together more barracks. Villagers who were once compassionate to Polish deportees show their resentment of German atrocities by vilifying and spitting on the prisoners.

In May, the war ends. The village hears of President Franklin Roosevelt's death. News of Samuel's release brings joy, but nearly all of his family has died. Raya learns that her two cousins and an aunt survive. From the caretaker Stanislav in Vilna, the family discovers that Germans ransacked the Rudomin home, which a member of the secret police occupied. Esther fears returning to Vilna. She suggests staying in Siberia and eases her concerns by demanding Siberian boots and a jacket.

Chapter 22

Esther spends the winter knitting for cash. Yozia gives her some rubles, with which she buys clothing. In December, Anna invites Esther to enter another declamation contest. On March 15, the family boards a cattle car once more. Esther misses the departure at one stop. Reiner tosses her back into the car. She burns her hand before their arrival in Moscow. Poles greet the train with catcalls against the Jews. In Lodz, the three women join Samuel.

Timeline

- October 18, 1930** Esther Rudomin is born in Vilna, Poland.
- January 30, 1933** Hitler is appointed chancellor of Germany.
- March 23** Hitler assumes the role of dictator and withdraws Germany from the League of Nations. Jewish civil workers lose their jobs.
- 1935** Nuremberg Laws deprive Jews of citizenship.
- October 1936** Germany allies with Italy.
- 1938** Kristall Nacht ["Crystal Night" or the Night of Broken Glass], a Nazi pogrom against German Jews, results in the destruction of 7500 Jewish-owned stores and synagogues and widespread emigration of Jews.
- March 1939** Hitler controls Austria and Czechoslovakia.
- August 29** Germany and the U.S.S.R. sign a ten-year nonaggression pact.
- September** World War II begins after Germany invades Poland.
- April 1940** Hitler conquers Norway, Denmark, and Belgium.
- May 10** Germany invades Holland.
- May 14** Holland capitulates to the Nazis.
- June** Russia annexes Lithuania. The Rudomins are deported from Vilna. Grandfather Solomon enters a labor camp.
- June 22, 1941** Hitler controls France.
- June 22** Hitler attacks Russia.
- July** The Rudomins arrive at Rubtsovsk in the Altai Territory of the U.S.S.R.
- Sunday** Esther and her grandmother bargain for rubles at the village market.

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July 30 An English-Russian pact assures freedom for Polish prisoners in Russia. The Rudomins move in with a farm family.

September The Rudomins begin to experience their first winter on the Steppes.

October The snows set in.

October 15 Nazis outlaw Jews.

December 7 Hitler declares war on the United States after his ally, Japan, bombs Pearl Harbor.

spring 1942 The Rudomins move into an empty hut.

summer Samuel is drafted as a laborer at the front.

October Esther celebrates her twelfth birthday.

winter She scavenges coal and wood shavings to burn in the stove and begins knitting sweaters.

1943 The graves of thousands of Polish officers are discovered in the Katyn forest of Russia.

March The Auschwitz crematory opens.

July Mussolini's government collapses.

August Esther loses a declamation contest.

December The Curzon Line becomes the boundary of eastern Poland.

June 6, 1944 The Allies invade Normandy at dawn.

July 20 Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg fails to carry out the assassination of Hitler.

August 1 An insurrection in Warsaw causes the S.S. to deport Jews from the ghetto and raze the city.

August 25 Allies liberate Paris.

February 1945 The Yalta conference allows Russia to annex more Polish territory.

March Anne Frank dies of typhus at Bergen-Belsen.

spring German prisoners begin arriving in the village.

April 12 President Franklin D. Roosevelt dies.

May 7 Germany surrenders to the Western Allies at Rheims.

August The Rudomins discuss their return trip.

winter Esther continues to knit for cash.

December Anna Semyonovna announces another declamation contest.

December 13 Eleven war criminals convicted of atrocities at Belsen and Auschwitz are hanged at Hameln.

March 15, 1946 The Rudomins board a train bound for Poland.

April They reunite with Samuel in Lodz, Poland.

1947 They emigrate to Stockholm.

May Esther departs alone to live with her uncle in the United States.

1950 She graduates from Hunter College and marries concert pianist Walter Hautzig.

1959 She begins writing *The Endless Steppe*.

1968 *The Endless Steppe* is published.

Author Sketch

A native of Vilno (Vilna), Poland (now Vilnius, Lithuania), Esther Rudomin Hautzig was born on October 18, 1930, to Chaja (Raya) Zuser (Cunzer) and Samuel Rudomin, a prosperous, refined middle-class Jewish family. She is the niece of poet, dramatist, and folk music composer Eliakum Zuser, the most influential Yiddish musician of his day. Her family owned a thriving factory complex that manufactured industrial equipment. The war entered Hautzig's life late in 1939, when the Russian army occupied the city. Following the deportation of Polish Jews to Siberia, ten-year-old Hautzig and her parents and paternal grandmother, Anna Rudomin, lived for five years in Rubtsovsk, where authorities moved war-threatened industrial facilities from the eastern front of World War II. Returned to Lodz, Poland, in 1945, Esther was terrified of noise and crowds and bereaved by recurrent bad news about Jews who didn't survive the war and of her friend Heniek, who committed suicide after his release from a labor camp. Nine months later, the family moved to Stockholm before emigrating to the United States. On a student visa, Esther led the way in May 1947.



After graduating from James Madison High School, Hautzig studied elementary education at Hunter College from 1948 to 1950, but could not get a teaching job because of her heavy accent. After receiving her degree, she married Viennese concert pianist, recording artist, and master teacher Walter Hautzig, a student of Arthur Schnabel at the Peabody Conservatory and a specialist in interpretations of the compositions of Frederic

Chopin and Johann Strauss. The author met Hautzig on the voyage to Scandinavia. Making their home in New York City, the couple reared two children, David and Deborah Margolee, both of whom became writers. Hautzig served as secretary at G. P. Putnam's Sons, publicity assistant of the Children's Book Council, director of children's book promotion at Thomas Y. Crowell, and consultant and freelance writer and translator from Yiddish for over forty years.

The author retired to Spencertown, New York, but continued to publish. In July 1993, against her mother's wishes, she revisited Vilna for the Gathering of Survivors 50th Anniversary. She explained, "I felt that I simply had to be there in person to pay respects to the spirits of those who perished during the Holocaust, and to do so where they lived, studied, worked, hoped, and dreamed. And where I thought I could feel their presence—and where, in fact, I did." The next year, she visited Israel.

Critic's Corner

In her comments to *Horn Book*, Esther Hautzig notes that *The Endless Steppe* was not originally intended for children. Beginning the writing in 1959 at the urging of Adlai E. Stevenson, she finally published the memoir in 1968 through a children's department. Because she remembered the war years from a child's perspective, she did not have to alter the text to meet the needs of young readers. Her judgement proved on target. The book is a frequently suggested title on young adult book lists and on the Holocaust Booklist for Young People.

In proof of the global response to *The Endless Steppe* is its availability worldwide in English as well as in Danish, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Japanese, and Swedish. It earned acclaim in the form of the Shirley Kravitz Award, ALA Notable Book, National Book Award finalist, Jane Addams Children's Book Award, Best Jewish Novel, Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, German Youth Literature Prize honor list, *Horn Book* Fanfare honor list, and honor book of the *Boston Globe* and Book World Spring Book Festival. In June 1994, Hautzig was a featured lecturer at the Children's Literacy Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. In 2002, she won the Sydney Taylor Book Award silver medal for *A Picture Of Grandmother*. She donated to the de Grummond children's literature collection at the University of Southern Mississippi her correspondence, manuscripts, and 23 boxes of fan mail from children who loved her memoir.

Other Works by Esther Hautzig

- Let's Make Presents*, 1962
- Redecorating Your Room for Practically Nothing*, 1967
- The Endless Steppe: Growing Up in Siberia*, 1968
- In the Park: An Excursion in Four Languages*, 1968
- In School: Learning in Four Languages*, 1969
- Cool Cooking*, 1973
- Let's Make More Presents*, 1973
- The Case Against the Wind and Other Stories of I. L. Peretz* (translator), 1974
- Life with Working Parents*, 1976
- A Gift for Mama*, 1981
- Riches*, 1983
- Holiday Treats*, 1983
- The Seven Good Years and Other Stories of I. L. Peretz* (translator), 1984
- Make It Special*, 1986
- Christmas Goodies*, 1989
- Remember Who You Are: Stories about Being Jewish*, 1990, 1993
- On the Air*, 1991
- A Picture of Grandmother*, 2002

Bibliography

- Berger, Joseph. "Modern Holocaust Memorial: Thesis of Victim on Internet," *New York Times*, April 24, 1996, p. 37.
- Birmingham, M. L. "Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *Book World*, May 5, 1968, p. 5.
- Cullen, E. S. "Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *Horn Book*, June 1968, p. 311.
- "The Esther Hautzig Papers," <http://www.lib.usm.edu/~degrum/html/research/findaids/DG1165f.html?DG1165b.html~mainFrame>.
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- Goodwin, Polly. "Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *Best Sellers*, May 1, 1968, p. 64.
- Hautzig, Esther. "'The Endless Steppe' — For Children Only?," *Horn Book*, October 1970, pp. 461-468.
- Haviland, Virginia. "Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *Commonweal*, May 24, 1968, p. 302.
- Hopkins, Lee Bennett. *More Books by More People*. New York: Citation Press, 1974.
- "Review: *A Picture of Grandmother*," *School Library Journal*, January 1, 2003.
- "Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *National Observer*, October 7, 1968.
- "Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *New York Times Book Review*, May 5, 1968, p. 2.

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"Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *Publisher's Weekly*, February 17, 1969.

"Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *Times Literary Supplement*, April 3, 1969.

Segal, Lore. "Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *Library Journal*, October 15, 1968, p. 3982.

Sutherland, Zena. "Review: *The Endless Steppe*," *Saturday Review*, May 11, 1968, p. 42.

General Objectives

1. To comprehend elements of setting
2. To discuss the reactions of individuals to anti-Semitism, deportation, and forced labor
3. To note the importance of trade and bargaining
4. To envision the physical environs of the Russian steppes
5. To contrast loyalties to family, religion, and self
6. To analyze relationships between deportees, prisoners of war, and villagers
7. To discuss the theme of optimism versus despair
8. To note the effect of news from the outside world as the war comes to a close
9. To comment on the stark reality of isolation and loss
10. To analyze examples of risk, self-denial, and courage

Specific Objectives

1. To comprehend the background of the war years and their aftermath in Poland
2. To contrast Esther's relationship with her mother, father, and grandmother and to Miss Rachel
3. To note how the family prepares for departure and repatriation
4. To contrast the residences the Rudomins occupy in Siberia with their compound in Vilna
5. To analyze a change in Raisa Nikitovna's attitude toward Esther
6. To characterize Esther's abilities to help support the family
7. To account Esther's fear of returning to Vilna
8. To chart Esther's relationship with Russian youth
9. To list examples of girlish immaturity in Esther
10. To discuss Esther's perseverance in mastering the Russian language

Literary Terms And Applications

For a better understanding of Esther Hautzig's autobiographical writing, present the following terms and applications:

memoir a personal reflection over adventures or experiences. Esther Hautzig's memoir of a five-year experience expresses her maturity, acceptance of loss, and musings over the sufferings of others, including Vanya the bum, German prisoners of war, and Samuel. She imparts to readers her reluctance to leave Siberia and return to unknown conditions in her former home.

irony an implied discrepancy between what is said or done and what the characters believe will happen. Hautzig stresses the hardships of life on the steppes, but the good fortune of her family in being deported rather than remanded to labor camps, such as the one in which Grandfather Solomon dies.

tone the author's attitude toward the subject and audience, which accrues directly, subtly, and sometimes ambiguously from hints, diction, stylistic touches, and texture, for example, the balance of terror and heart-break with uplifting passages that express hope. Hautzig describes a family that doesn't allow loss to destroy their spirits. By turning to school work, projects, and community involvement, she is able to overcome the hardships of bronchitis, wandering in a buran, the death of her grandfather, and her father's placement at the front.

Related Reading

Avi, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*

Mariano Azuela, *The Underdogs*

Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*

Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game*

Howard Fast, *April Morning*

Zlata Filipovic, *Zlata's Diary*

Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*

Erik Haugaard, *The Samurai's Tale*

Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston,
Farewell to Manzanar

Irene Hunt, *Across Five Aprils*

Barbara Kingsolver, *The Bean Trees*

Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi*

Walter Dean Myers, *Fallen Angels*

Scott O'Dell, *Sing Down the Moon*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan
Denisovich*

Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*

Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*

Jessamyn West, *Except for Me and Thee*

Elie Wiesel, *Night*

Yevgeny Yevtushenko, "Baba Yar"

Jane Yolen, *The Devil's Arithmetic and Briar Rose*

The Importance Of Setting

The milieu of Esther Hautzig's *The Endless Steppe* becomes the focus of her narrative. The story opens in a comfortable, refined home of Polish Jews, who provide Esther with a garden and education in a nearby private institution, the Sophia Markovna Gurewitz School.

Moving from the hostile environment of German-controlled Vilna in a crowded, unspeakably filthy cattle car across the Ural Mountains to the Altai Territory, she expresses curiosity and joins her father in surveying the land. The extremes of seasonal changes shock her. From the heat of summer, the rapid advance of winter in September and snows in October warn the Rudomin family of the importance of warm clothing, particularly boots.

Housing varies from the crowded barracks set up in a classroom stripped of furniture and a single room shared by seven to a dirt-floored hut, where the family digs a root cellar. To heat spaces during the winter, Esther willingly joins other children in scavenging for coal and wood shavings along the tracks outside Rubtsovsk. Raya saws off the ends of ceiling beams to burn in the stove. Contributing to the enjoyment of their own residence is Esther's joy in saving onion skins to dye medical gauze yellow for curtains. Raya adds to her daughter's feeling of belonging by inviting friends and cooking potato goulash to celebrate her twelfth birthday.

Beyond home, Esther explores the area, taking in the gingerbread wood trim and the onion-domed structures in town. With Grandmother Anna, she scopes out the Sunday market in town and learns how to display her wares to prospective buyers and how to bargain for the best price. At the first school that she attends, conditions are cramped and unpleasant. As a reprieve from

being the outsider, she enjoys free time at the public library, which is warm and generously stocked with shelves of books. The second school proves more comfortable and more professionally operated. In addition to a declamation contest, Esther also returns to the building for a masquerade party.

The final scenes of Esther's repatriation return her to the cramped cattle car for another six-weeks of travel back to Poland. Less fearful as the train passes through known territory and into Europe, the journey delights families who are about to reunite with survivors of the war. Although Esther burns her hand severely on the stove and must forego a tour of Moscow, she forgets her pain and embraces Samuel at the reunion in the Vilna station. For good reason, the family does not linger in Poland. They choose to emigrate to Stockholm and on to New York, a city that offers opportunity and a respite from the bombed-out, sacked cities of Europe.

Cross-Curricular Sources

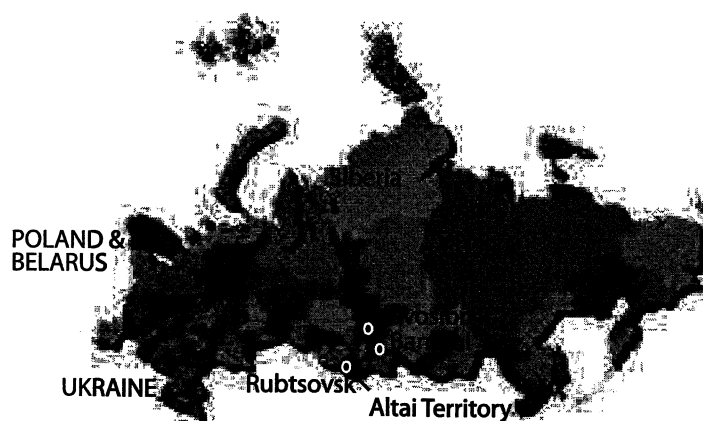
For more information about the Holocaust, Vilna, Judaism, Siberia, deportation during the 1940s, President Franklin Roosevelt, and other subjects and issues deriving from the memoir, consult these sources:

Articles

"Polish Veteran of WWII Overcame Family Tragedy,"
Toronto Star, January 2, 2004.

Simaite, Ona, and Julija Sukys. "Letters from a Librarian: Lost and Found in Vilna," *PMLA*, March 2003, pp. 302-317.

Weinstein, Norman. "Partisans of Vilna: The Songs of World War II Jewish Resistance," *Tikkun*, July-August 1990, p. 76.



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Audiocassette

Elie Wiesel Reads Night, Caedmon

Film

Hitler: Anatomy of a Dictatorship, Coronet

A World at War: 1942-1945, Coronet

Filmstrip

Judaism, SVE

Witness to History: Europe after World War II, Center for the Humanities

Plays

The Diary of Anne Frank, Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett

Poem

"Baba Yar," Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Reference Books

Adolf Hitler, Chelsea House

Anne Frank, Chelsea House

Atlas of the Holocaust, Morrow

Jewish Festivals, Rourke Books

Maus, Pantheon

The War Years: Volume Two, 1945-1949, Social Studies School Services

Video

The Holocaust, Video Center

Internet

The Anne Frank Center USA

<http://www.annefrank.com/afc/afc.html>

The Anne Frank House

<http://www.annefrank.nl>

The Anne Frank Internet Guide

<http://wwwth.phys.rug.nl/~ma/annefrank.html>

Anne Frank Online

<http://annefrank.com>

Defying the Death Ethic

<http://www.execpc.com/~jfish/na/052697n1.txt>

The Holocaust Web Project

<http://www.nizkor.netizen.org/hweb>

The Holocaust History Project

<http://www.holocaust-history.org>

Themes And Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Esther Hautzig's *The Endless Steppe* should include these aspects:

Themes

- family unity
- shock
- separation
- displacement
- survival
- bartering
- education
- hope
- repatriation

Motifs

- coping with family responsibilities
- experiencing war on a personal level
- adapting to climate extremes
- returning home to destruction and chaos

Meaning Study

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the memoir. Explain each in context. Chapter and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. I went to the Sophia Markovna Gurewitz School, where I learned Yiddish and was introduced to the literature and culture of my people. (Chapter 1, p. 3)
(Early in her childhood, Esther Rudomin studies the basics of Judaism. Key to her education is Yiddish, the language of Jews worldwide. Based on the Hebrew alphabet, Yiddish evolved from the central European Jewish communities during the Middle Ages into a polyglot of dialects from the remote corners of Jewry. Yiddish has a strong Germanic flavor and suits mundane conversation and folklore better than Hebrew, which Jews reserve for religious and philosophical matters.)
2. Next to him stood two Russian soldiers with fixed bayonets. (Chapter 1, p. 11)
(The menacing Russian soldiers who come to arrest the Rudomins are not amenable to negotiations. They have sharp-pointed bayonets firmly in place at the ends of their rifle barrels so they can use their weapons two ways—to shoot or to jab.)

3. You are capitalists and therefore enemies of the people . . . you are to be sent to another part of our great and mighty country. (Chapter 1, p. 12)
(In answer to Esther's question about the reasons for the Rudomins' abrupt arrest, a soldier replies that the family has grown rich from free trade, a great crime against the people in the communist system. Under the Soviet philosophy, authorities distribute work, property, and profits equally among people. Ideally, no one receives more than a fair share.)
4. Father said, with wonder, that these must be the Urals, and that once we passed them we would be in Asia. (Chapter 2, p. 32)
(During the six-week train trip from Vilna, Poland, to Rubtsovsk, Siberia, the Rudomin family journeys through the Ural Mountains, which divide Russia on a north-south axis from the Arctic Ocean south into two continents— Europe and Asia. From the Urals, the train continues eastward another thousand miles to a point on the steppes northwest of Mongolia and adjacent to the Kazakh border.)
5. "Mama," I whispered, "doesn't this remind you of the market in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?" (Chapter 3, p. 38)
(To Esther, the ticktacktoe arrangement of streets and lots in the frontier village of Rubtsovsk is reminiscent of the market scenes in Harriet Beecher Stowe's melodramatic novel Uncle Tom's Cabin, published serially in the National Era from 1851 to 1852. A powerful document favoring the abolition of slavery, the novel is the story of a noble African slave who is sold to Simon Legree, a merciless master who flogs Uncle Tom to death. Abraham Lincoln declared that Stowe's bold novel was one of the causes of the Civil War.)
6. Finished with his fun, he introduced himself as Popravka and told us that he was from the gypsum mine twelve kilometers outside the village. (Chapter 3, p. 39)
(Grandmother Anna is forced to shovel the granular crystals of gypsum or hydrous calcium sulfate, which is a component of portland cement and plaster of paris. The war effort steps up the need for medical plaster as more patients are treated for broken bones with plaster casts.)
7. These must be steppes, Esther. (Chapter 3, p. 41)
(Steppe is the Slavic name for grasslands. The Soviet steppes extend from the Ukraine along the Black and Azov seas to the Altai Mountains of Siberia. The climate is typically hot and dry in summer and bitterly cold in winter because the area is flat with no mountains or forests to slow the drying, freezing wind. Even though some of the rich black soil was first plowed after World War II, harvests have proved disappointing because of the region's early frosts and summer droughts.)
8. Summer or no summer—and who had ever talked about hot Siberia?—Siberia was the tundra and mountainous drifts of snow. Siberia was wolves. (Chapter 3, p. 42)
(Esther is correct in some of her schoolbook impressions of Siberia. The steppes are cold and the wind does pile up snowdrifts. But the treeless grassland of the tundra is not frequented by wolves, which require the protection and food chain of dense forests for their habitat.)
9. Once inside, it was obvious that this building was a school that had been stripped of everything but its blackboards and four huge portraits of Lenin, Stalin, Marx, and Engels. (Chapter 4, p. 44)
(Vital to the overthrow of the Russian monarchy and the establishment of communism in Russia was the work of Lenin, Stalin, Marx, and Engels. Philosopher Karl Marx, along with his associate, Friedrich Engels, composed the Communist Manifesto in 1848. It states the aims and beliefs of the Communist League and decries the purpose and methods of capitalism. Vladimir Lenin organized the revolution of 1917 that brought death to Tsar Nicholas II and the Tsarina Alexandra and their four daughters and son Alexis. After intense struggle, Lenin and his followers founded the communist state. Under the leadership of Joseph Stalin, Russia evolved into an industrial power and participated in the defeat of Hitler's Nazi party in World War II.)
10. There was a communal outdoor stove at the schoolhouse and we could boil the meat on it and, after mixing the flour with water, we could bake little cakes, the Siberian cakes of our Diaspora. (Chapter 5, p. 70)
(Esther's first trip to the baracholka requires cautious bargaining with one of Raya's elegant silk slips traded for rubles. The proceeds bring rewards—meat, flour, and a glass of sunflower seeds as a treat from Grandmother Anna. With these meager supplies, the Rudmin family is able to alleviate the constant hunger that plagues their emigration from Poland.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important. Be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the memoir.

Setting

1. Describe the difficulties of riding in a cattle car for six weeks.
(After being divided into groups destined for two trains—Esther, her parents, and Grandmother Anna in one train and Grandfather Solomon in a second train—the Rudomins march in a double line of forty people and board a cattle car. In the summer heat, the crowded car stinks of animal dung. Four small square holes in the upper corners of the car and “slivers of space between the filthy slatted walls” provide limited access to light and air. A divider separates the inside of the car. Deportees live on upper and lower bunks.

Most of the Polish peasants aboard the train carry personal belongings and food in sacks, shawls, and cardboard boxes. In lieu of a designated leader, Samuel Rudomin helps organize an orderly allotment of space to the families. Esther, who is bewildered by the unceremonious uprooting from their comfortable home, gets a last glimpse of Vilna from one of the holes high up in the car. Amid weeping and dismay, she and Raya withdraw into sleep.

By the next day, the squalor of the situation begins to sink in. Clean clothes are dirty and reeking. Hair becomes matted. There is no water for washing, no privacy for changing clothes, and no toilet. Private family communication requires whispering. In the dim twilight, Esther hears other deportees eating and wishes that she had brought food. At a tiny rural station, the train's first stop, a soldier supplies the inmates with a pail of water and ladle. He indicates a “V-shaped opening opposite the door,” which serves as the only toilet. Samuel rigs a privacy screen out of one of the sheets in the family's luggage.

A second soldier brings a “rusty pail of soup,” which he follows with bowls and spoons. The soup is an “orange liquid where shriveled bits of tomato, carrots, and cabbage floated like refuse.” Esther declines to eat, then battles nausea brought on by the smell of cooked cabbage. On occasion, the family purchases farmer's cheese, milk, and black bread

at a rural station. Travel across Belorussia, the Ukraine, and central Russia is ten to twelve miles per hour with frequent unexplained stops at sidings. Esther develops a fever and suffers the daily aggravation of heat, stench, and lice.)

Motivation

2. Why are the Rudomins released from custody? *(In September 1941, Makrinin calls a meeting of the Polish deportees. Impatient to make his announcement, he yells over the wintry wind that, as of July 30, the Soviet government recognized a pact with Poland to grant amnesty to Polish deportees. The political maneuver comes about because the Polish government, in exile in London, is allied with Great Britain, which is also Russia's ally.*

As a result of the release of deportees, the Poles are free to leave the mine and move closer to the village. There they take assigned jobs and receive a stipend of a few rubles in lieu of wages. Housing in barracks on the outskirts of Rubtsovsk seems preferable to most of the Poles. Some who choose to remain at the gypsum mine die during the long winter months.)

3. Describe Esther's first journey to the village. *(Makrinin brings news of an unexpected treat—every Sunday he allows six people to walk twelve kilometers to the village baracholka. Because Raya's feet are too painfully ulcerated for the trip, Samuel allows Esther to go in his place with Grandmother Anna serving as chaperone. Two weeks later, the two women trudge to the outdoor market to exchange goods for rubles so the family can buy food. The Rudomins contribute quality merchandise—Grandmother's black silk umbrella with a silver handle, Samuel's custom-made silk shirt, and Raya's elegant silk slip.*

Singing as she and Grandmother make their way across the steppe, Esther feels light and free of the rigors of exile. Three hours later they arrive in Rubtsovsk, where the square is alive with people, some in colorful Kazhak costumes. Lured by the smell of roasting sunflower seeds, Esther urges her grandmother to begin the bartering. With no self-consciousness, Esther holds up the lacy pink slip and awaits a buyer. She and Grandmother prove to be natural traders.

The atmosphere around the bargainers is alive with activity—girls playing with rag dolls, boys wrestling, peasants bartering for necessities and luxuries. Their trading done, Grandmother and Esther survey the produce in nearby stalls. First Grandmother buys a glass of sunflower seeds for Esther, then purchases meat and flour. At sunset, the pair reluctantly begins their long trudge home. Esther makes a mental list of items she wants to trade on future forays—three dresses, a blouse, a coat—and prays that one day she can move closer to the village “within sight and sound of the Sunday baracholka.”)

Conflict

4. Why does Esther perform poorly at the declamation contest?

(Following months of intense study and presentation of Tatyana’s speech from Alexander Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin to anyone who will listen, Esther readies herself for the contest. Shabbily dressed, she travels the hot, dusty road to the school, feeling dust cling to her freshly washed feet and legs. The first to arrive, Esther enters the building alone, but soon confronts her grim, disapproving teacher, Raisa Nikitovna, who doubts that Esther has registered for the contest. Convinced that Esther is indeed listed, the teacher brings up a second problem—that Esther has no shoes. She forces the child to hurry home for shoes and threatens not to wait if she delays.)

Esther, her feet clad in her mother’s old felt slippers, races back. No sooner does she take her chair than it is her turn because the other contestants have already performed. Wearied by the long walk to and from school, Esther focuses on the floor and delivers Pushkin’s poetry in lifeless, dispirited fashion. Still, the magic aroused by months of preparation rivets the attention of Raisa Nikitovna on Esther’s face. Shortly, the judges announce that Katiusha is the winner. Esther, who is stung by the humiliating experience, determines that she will have shoes.)

Character

5. Why is Esther reluctant to return to Vilna?
(Esther and her mother rejoice in Samuel’s letters, but mourn the deaths of family members and the destruction of Poland. Taking her mind off the terrible news, Esther longs for months to participate in a second declamation contest to prove her mastery of the Russian language and literature. She tries to persuade Raya to let her wait three days after the

departure of deportees before returning to Poland to rejoin Samuel in Lodz. Raya is determined that she and her daughter take the train together on March 15, 1946, three days before the contest. Esther comforts herself by wearing her new sapogy and fufaika; also, there are goodbyes from friends and cookies baked from the flour and eggs that Shurik’s mother sends.)

Stopping and starting in haphazard fashion, the train travels for weeks as it moves westward toward Europe. Passengers are more hopeful than the deportees were on the trip east to Siberia and sing to pass the time. In the Ural Mountains, Esther, filled with the beauty of the scenery, nearly misses the train. A friend named Reiner jumps off, throws Esther back on the car, and runs to catch up.

At a day stop in Moscow, Esther looks forward to visiting Red Square, the Kremlin, the Museum, and the Bolshoi Theater. A sudden lurch throws her against the stove in the middle of the car. She suffers a third-degree burn on her hand and has to cancel her tour of Moscow. Upon arrival in Poland, the passengers incur catcalls from anti-Semitic Poles, the first evidence of the country’s hardships under Nazi tyranny.

The first view of Lodz informs the deportees that life in war-torn Poland has been difficult. Rubble fills the streets. The Rudomins can no longer call their compound home. Even with the dismal outlook, the first view of Samuel fills Esther with joy. She rushes through the throng to embrace her tata.)

Character Development

6. How does Esther mature during her exile in Siberia?

(Life for Esther is not so very different from other pre-teens. She ponders her personal wants and needs, often to the exclusion of the welfare of other family members. She demands shoes, newer and more fashionable clothes, the cutting of her braids, school, jobs, the privilege of shopping at the baracholka, and attention from her harried parents. Because the family has grown close through love and respect, Samuel and Raya respond with tenderness, firm discipline, and sacrifice, neither spoiling Esther nor ignoring her restlessness.)

Esther learns that life in Siberia demands labor, ingenuity, and sacrifice. She nearly loses her way in a buran and locates home through the selfless love of Raya, who calls “Sh’ma Israel” into the white-out. After Marya tries on the red sweater and finds it too

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small, Raya encourages her daughter to stop moaning, pull out the stitches, and begin again. Together the family shares greater trials—the sadness of Grandfather Solomon's death in a labor camp, Samuel's reassignment to labor in a war zone, and the overwhelming news that their house belongs to someone else and that the remainder of their Rudomin relatives are dead.

The final tug at Esther's self-centered thinking comes when Anna Semyonovna tries to persuade Raya to allow Esther to stay behind, compete at the declamation competition, and catch up with the returning train in Barnaul. Raya, who is glad to end the wretched exile away from Samuel and her homeland, halts all discussion of the arrangement with a firm, "no." Esther compensates for her disappointment, to some degree, by buying shiny black boots and a green quilted vest, a duplicate of the outfit of her school rival.)

Character Responses

7. Why does Esther come to love Siberia? (Even though life lacks the convenience, camaraderie, and luxury of the family compound in Vilna, Esther manages to praise some aspects of their exile on the steppes. The wind-swept beauty of open countryside, the flight of a hawk, and the crispness of cold air delight her at times. She feels hopeful from the privilege of reading at the library, shopping at the baracholka, catching Yuri's eye, going to the costume party, and practicing lyric lines from Eugene Onegin.)

Another endearing aspect of life in Siberia is the openness of Russian peasants, who form lasting, memorable friendships with Esther and her family. From a rocky beginning on the first day of school, she achieves the respect of Siberian classmates, who elect her editor of the school newspaper. On the day of her departure, Esther holds back tears and promises to write to Katiusha, Shurik, Svetlana, and Zina, who have made life more bearable for her during the long exile.)

Interpretation

8. How does Hautzig demonstrate community networking? (Sharing and helping out, both in physical and emotional matters, is a means for the exiled Poles in Siberia to cope with overwhelming loss and deprivation. From the beginning, people get along well during the long, miserable train trip from Vilna. They

share food, discuss the arrival of the Sabbath, and respect each other's privacy. Once settled near the mine, the deportees continue to live in harmony. Samuel, to help Mrs. Marshak, offers the love and support of a father to Boris, her only family member. Anya, who goes into exile well supplied with makeup and niceties, lends Esther a blue georgette dress and shoes for the costume party.

Uncle Yozia and his wife Zaya befriend Raya. At their comfortable two-room dwelling, Raya slips away from the rigors of her existence in a dirt-floored hut and enjoys the stimulus of intellectual conversation. Still, she rejects outright charity, except for the time that Zaya casually leaves behind a cake of soap. It is too great a temptation to a woman who is accustomed to cleanliness and order.

Esther sprinkles other examples of sharing and mutual support throughout the memoir. Her twelfth birthday party is a treat for all who miss the gaiety of a normal life. The gifts and refreshments are meager, but the occasion marks an important day in her life. Even more moving is the arrival of Jewish community members to sit shivah and comfort Grandmother Anna after an unknown well-wisher gently breaks the news of Solomon's death in the labor camp. Without these touches of human compassion, the test of five years on the steppes might have proved more devastating for the deportees.)

Comparative Literature

9. What aspects of the memoir delineate it from the style and form of Anne Frank's diary? (Comparisons between *The Endless Steppe* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* are unavoidable. The memories of Anne Frank are more terrible than Esther's because she and her family remain in Holland and endure the daily menace of house-to-house searches by Nazi soldiers. Anne lacks the opportunity to move about and to develop as normally as Esther does because Anne cannot be seen outside the annex, the family's hiding place in the upstairs portion of her father's Amsterdam spice business. Another great difference is the edginess of Anne's tone, which carries not only the tedium of confinement and terror of brutal tyranny in the streets, but also the loss of privacy and the chance to grow up without adults continually reprimanding her for girlish lapses.

Most painful of all is the realization that deportation rescued Esther from the terrors of the Holocaust, which exterminated over six million Jews. In contrast

to Esther, who reunites with her father and emigrates to the United States, Anne does not outlive her arrest and internment at Bergen-Belsen, even though the war is nearly at an end when she and sister Margo die of typhus. Both spokespersons have their message to share concerning the horrors of war. For Esther, the five years in Siberia are an integral part of her youth and education. She exits Rubtsovsk with skills in Russian language and literature and the ability to earn money by crocheting and knitting. For Anne, the time spent in a garret hideaway are the last months of her life. The promise indicated in her diary suggests that the world is a little less beautiful because of the loss of so sweet and humane a voice.)

Purpose

10. What does Esther Hautzig teach readers about humanity?

(The message of Esther Hautzig's memoir uplifts the reader with a belief that hard work, family, friends, and optimism make any cataclysm bearable. Esther never allows her spirit to sink into despair, even after her beloved Tata leaves to join a press gang at the front. She nurtures hopes for a reunion with her family, despite the fact that Grandfather Solomon dies in a labor camp, leaving Grandmother Anna to mourn his ignoble passing.)

The arrival of trainloads of German prisoners of war gives Esther a chance to gloat and sneer, yet she restrains her disgust at the aggressors who took her family so far from their home in Vilna. Her brief outburst of spitting on the road which the prisoners have passed over seems mild and almost ladylike compared to the catcalls and curses of vindictive Siberians. In the end, Esther appears to return home with little bitterness or self-pity, even when she hears the anti-Semitic jeering of Poles. Rather, she seems glad to get her Tata back and to renew the relationship that gives wholeness and meaning to her life.)

How Language Works

Hautzig models clever composition by creating dialogue from a variety of sentence types and rhetorical patterns. The resulting texture of language keeps the reader's mind alert to shifts in thought and subtle nuance.

1. Esther prioritizes her youthful desires in parallel clauses of a single sentence: "To be one of them became my greatest ambition; my next greatest ambition was to do well at my work; other ambitions, such as to be a famous writer, were temporarily overshadowed."
2. Temporal concerns cause her to diminish the terrors of exile by focusing on the discomfort of the train journey. With a rhetorical question, she exhibits her childish outlook: "Who cared what was at the end of the journey?"
3. To characterize worry about Samuel, she uses short sentences and phrases indicative of her inability to concentrate on her surroundings: "The hours went by. The stars came out. And a full moon. But no Tata."
4. Esther creates drama with her exasperation at unfair treatment: "So! When a little deportee makes a request it's strange, is it? But when the daughter of the head of the factory makes the identical one, it's a command—isn't it."
5. Esther can be blunt about wartime loss. Of her return to the homeland, she states matter-of-factly, "It was official and final: Poland, yes; home, no."
6. She manages to remark on deaths of loved ones without melodrama: "It took a long time before we stopped hugging and kissing each other, we four who were left of our family."

Across The Curriculum

Drama

1. Work with a group on a first-person description of shoveling gypsum, making a costume for a masquerade party, trading knitting and crocheting for potatoes and milk, tossing Esther aboard a moving train, trudging home in a white-out, treating bronchitis, or locating felt shoes to wear to a declamation contest. Alter point of view to cover various characters.
2. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of the reunion with Samuel in Lodz, Poland. Supply sketches of costumes and props, such as railroad uniforms, Samuel's handsome coat, Esther's new boots and jacket, a bandage for her burned hand, the cattle car, and bags and parcels.
3. Compose a first person account for the BBC of the loading of Polish-Jewish deportees on cattle cars in June 1941. Describe the picture albums and other belongings left behind and the anguish of families who abandon their homes and part forever on their way to unknown destinations.
4. Role-play your own response to the deportation of a portion of your home town. Indicate how you would cope with confusion, rumors, fear, hunger, thirst, lice, epidemic disease, pain, separation, and loss. Describe skills you would need, such as first aid, knowledge of a foreign alphabet and language, self-control, bargaining, scavenging burnables for the stove, and food procurement.

Speech

1. Organize a discussion of the nature of anti-Semitism and other forms of persecution and exclusion. Answer basic questions, such as: What makes people hate and demonize identifiable groups, even innocent members such as babies and children, biracial families, prisoners of war, or victims of AIDS? Why do people humiliate or destroy others in the name of religion or patriotism? Why do occurrences of anti-Semitism continue to crop up, even after the hideous example of the Holocaust? How do memoirs, plays, monuments, music, murals, dance, and other forms of creativity help quell hatred and prejudice?
2. Listen to recordings of speeches and commentary about the early years of World War II, including pep talks by Winston Churchill and Franklin D.

Roosevelt and news dispatches by Edward R. Murrow and other key news gatherers. Explain how these comments reflect the world's ignorance of Hitler's systematic extermination of "undesirables," including Jews, Gypsies, Seventh Day Adventists, political dissidents, retardates, homosexuals, prostitutes, the handicapped, and the elderly.

Cinema

1. View the films *Playing for Time*, *Schindler's List*, *The Pianist*, *Reds*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Anne Frank*, *The Hiding Place*, *Julia*, *Shoah*, or *Sophie's Choice*. Compare the movies' themes to those of *The Endless Steppe*. Comment on the Rudomins' luck in being sent to Siberia rather than to a death camp.
2. View a film of *Eugene Onegin*. Explain why the romantic situation would appeal to Esther.

Religion

1. Explain the significance of braiding challah, sitting shivah, burning a yearzeit candle, observing the Sabbath, and chanting Kaddish and Sh'ma Israel. Contrast the value of religious customs before and after the family leaves Vilna.
2. Analyze world response to the creation of a Jewish state of Israel in 1948. Explain how the Zionist movement grew out of reaction to the Holocaust. Discuss how the new state violated the rights of Palestinians and gradually destabilized the Middle East.

Science and Health

1. Compose a lecture on the dangers of traveling or living in crowded, unsanitary conditions, for example, odor, rodents and insects, the lack of personal hygiene infection, disease, or emotional strain.
2. Explain the effects of breathing Zyklon B, the gas used in Nazi gas ovens to exterminate Jews and other undesirables.
3. Discuss why Raya is so fearful of infection from trachoma. How does the disease spread?

Geography and Culture

1. Create a mural or web site that introduces these settings: the Altai territory, Rubtsovsk, Ukraine, Kharkov, Moscow, Siberia, Barnaul, Warsaw, Novosibirsk, the Urals, Lodz, Vilna, Stockholm, the Russian front, and New York.

2. Explain why Vilna earned the title "the Jerusalem of Europe." How did the city change in importance and influence after World War II.
3. Outline a tour over famous battlegrounds and historic spots in Europe, such as Auschwitz, Berlin, Omaha Beach, Normandy, Baba Yar, the Warsaw ghetto, Dunkirk, Paris, Anzio, Catania, Messina, and the Frank family's secret annex in Amsterdam. Describe markers and public places that have been dedicated as war memorials.
4. Sketch contrasting maps of Poland before and after World War II. Explain why the borders shifted.

Art

1. Make an illustrated notebook of Jewish customs, including the celebration of a girl's twelfth birthday. Highlight the background, chants, ritual items, foods, and ceremonies that mark each occasion. Cite prayers, scripture, and hymns that are central to Jewish worship. Include the Sh'ma Israel and Kaddish, a universal prayer for the dead.

Law

1. Read biographical comment about President Franklin D. Roosevelt's unprecedented four terms of office. Explain why radio broadcasts featured his activities and saddened hopeful Europeans with news of his sudden death before the end of World War II.
2. Decide how history should judge war crimes, including deportation, looting of Jewish homes and businesses, the Holocaust, and genocidal acts. Include comment on the fairness of the Nuremberg Trials.
3. Enumerate on a poster the Geneva Conventions, which detail the manner in which prisoners of war, exiles, sick and handicapped, elderly, displaced persons, widows and orphans, and refugees are to be treated.
4. Explain the role of Eleanor Roosevelt in the United Nations and in securing human rights for the most vulnerable of the world's citizens.

Social Studies

1. Explain to a small group why Esther Hautzig decided to write a memoir of her years in Siberia. Discuss social issues that she raises, e.g., displacement, police authority, housing, food, epidemics of flu and typhus, prisoners of war, religious persecution, and repatriation.

2. Report orally on Hitler's attempt to annihilate the Jews. Explain why history books remind people of the huge numbers of deportees who did not survive the death camps.
3. Divide the class into small groups to study events leading to Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Prepare a time line of parallel world events. Explain why other nations and the Vatican failed to halt his creation of a master race.
4. Compose an extended definition of genocide as it applies to Jews and Gypsies during the Holocaust. Discuss why survivors accept responsibility for reviving the past for the sake of the future. Comment on the slogan "Never again."

Psychology

1. Describe aloud the importance of survival. Explain why some refugees die more quickly than others. Discuss the importance of food, warmth, letters, shopping, soap and hot water, medical treatment, letters, religious customs, and family unity as essential supports of Esther, Raya, Samuel, and Anna Rudomin.
2. Suggest ways survivors like Esther, Samuel, Raya, and Anna might cope with grief, emotional trauma, and loss, such as with meditation, prayer, counseling, group therapy, exercise, work, writing, speaking, creative projects, bartering, or community involvement.
3. Explain in a short speech the combined effect of terror, shock, alienation, loneliness, separation, loss, envy, hunger, disease, and fatigue on deportees. Discuss the survival instinct, which causes Raya to stand in a white-out and chant to guide Esther safely home.
4. Using incidents from the book, comment on the gradual changes in Raya and Anna's outlook. Discuss how inhuman conditions replace the refinement and high standards of their comfortable life in Vilna.

Mathematics and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies the Nazi labor and death camps, particularly the Auschwitz-Buna complex, Bergen-Belsen, Belzec, Birkenau, Chelmo, Dachau, Majdanek, Mauthausen, Ravensbruck, and Treblinka. Include the totals of people killed and their nationalities. Contrast the numbers with the

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deportees who leave Vilna and survive to repatriation.

- Using a word processor, prepare an illustrated glossary of unfamiliar terms, such as steppe, mentor, eccentric, Nazis, tsar, Peter the Great, deloused, Catherine the Great, cretonne, Rasputin, Ivan Krylov, Russian Revolution, Tolstoi, shivah, *The Cherry Orchard*, L'Heure Bleu, Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, proficiency, Dumas, clapboard, pima boots, Dickens, millet, permafrost, Balzac, selenite, nari, tundra, Spartacus, ruble, salutation, challah, aberration, Sh'ma Israel, trachoma, baroque, tata, dunning, deference, typhus, humanitarian, jehu, sapogy, pilfer, bania, buran, fufaika, baracholka, surreptitious, censor, grippe, prudence, futile, amenities, and "Internationale." Define each.

Music

- Work with a group to list music suitable for a BBC program announcing D-day. Select patriotic and nationalistic songs that people will recognize, including "God Save the King," the American national anthem, "The Marseillaise," and the "Internationale."
- Explain why the "Internationale" replaced the Russian national anthem.

Language Arts

- Write a news release for radio transmission announcing the deportation of Jews from Vilna, Poland, or their subsequent repatriation. Outline the types of photographs and diagrams that should accompany the print version.
- Prepare a dialogue dramatizing Samuel's confrontation with the secret police and his refusal to be a spy. List the information he might volunteer, e. g., his arrest and the route of the train from Vilna, and details that he should conceal, such as the whereabouts of dissident Jews and their support groups.
- Design a war memorial that creates a positive outlook while recalling the slaughter of innocent people. Write or quote a dedication that will remind people of the worth of peace, such as verses from Psalms, Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus," speeches by Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, Elie Wiesel, or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., verse by Walt Whitman, Robert Lowell, or Yevgeny Yevtushenko, lines from *The Diary Of Anne Frank*,

or the words of Eleanor Roosevelt on the founding of the United Nations human rights charter.

Literature

- Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, and stories about war and survival. Include Alexander Solzhenitsin's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Zlata Filipovic's *Zlata's Diary*, Erik Haugaard's *The Samurai's Tale*, Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose* or *The Devil's Arithmetic*, Karel Capek's *R. U. R.*, Yoko Kawashima Watkins's *So Far From the Bamboo Grove*, Theodora Kroeber's *Ishi*, Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*, Avi's *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, Walter Dean Myers's *Fallen Angels*, Mariano Azuela's *The Underdogs*, and Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*.
- Explain in a theme the significance of the title, particularly as it applies to Esther's emotions and her relationship with family and schoolmates during the long, brutal winters.

Composition

- Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor character, such as children collecting coal, Vanya the bum, Grandmother Sara, Uncle Liusik, Aunt Sonia, Mrs. Marshak, Boris, the doctor, Comrade Popravka, Comrade Alexander Ivanovich Makrinin, Nina Ivanovna, Nikita Alexandrovich, Raisa Nikitovna, Zina, Svetlana, Grandfather Solomon, an N.K.V.D. agent, Yozia, Zaya, Marya Nikolayevna, Yosif Isayevich, Natasha, Anna Semyonovna, Yuri, Irena Maximovna, Anya, Shurik, German prisoners of war, the doctor, and Stanislav.
- Keep a diary from the point of view of an innocent party who suffers during another war, such as the American Revolution, Indian Wars, Sudanese and Ugandan massacres, Russian Revolution, Peloponesian War, Crimean War, Boer War, Boxer Rebellion, Korean War, Persian Gulf War, Vietnam War, Napoleonic Wars, Iraq War, English Civil War, or French and Indian War. Note what commodities were scarce, such as staple foods or medicines, and what ordinary people had to do to survive.

Education

1. Brainstorm ways of preparing subsequent generations to carry the message of the Holocaust and its devastation of Jews.
2. Outline the first week's lessons for a student who must learn the Cyrillic alphabet before developing Russian as a second language. Design charts, posters, games, and flash cards to ease the transition.

Alternate Assessment

1. List in chronological order and describe significant events connected with the troubled Rudomins. Mention deportation, Solomon's death, Esther's return in a buran, Reiner's tossing Esther onto the moving cattle car, Shurik's companionship at the masquerade party, losing a gift of money from Uncle Ben, bartering a silk shirt and slip, sharing textbooks, working in a gypsum mine, stealing coal and wood shavings, getting burned on a stove, cutting off braids, reading the Cyrillic alphabet, hearing news from the front, learning of President Franklin Roosevelt's death, crying over Samuel's draft notice, and hearing Grandmother Anna weeping for Solomon.
2. List events from the memoir that express strong attitudes toward kinship, love, regret, obedience, piety, law, payment, hunger, separation, repatriation, and loss. Indicate what you think is Esther Hautzig's personal philosophy on each subject.
3. Compose brief definitions of tone, irony, and memoir. What changes in the text would produce a more fearful narrative? a sadder ending? a better understanding of World War II and the losses of the Jews?
4. Summarize scenes that depict familial concern, particularly disagreements about work, food availability, welcome to Vanya the bum, moving to a dirt-floored hut, buying shoes, treating bronchitis, sawing ceiling beams, writing letters on newspaper, preventing trachoma, competing in a second contest, making a costume, digging potatoes, and returning to Vilna.

Vocabulary

Underline a word to complete each of the following sentences.

1. The letter was one meant for the (**ensor, facade, gazetteer, mentor**)'s eyes as well as ours.
2. My father did manage a smile, a (**swarthy, bucolic, squeamish, rueful**) one.
3. Usually she was composed and (**fastidiously, derisively, raucously, subtly**) groomed, but now her face was flushed and her beautiful crown of braids was tumbling down.
4. That day I looked up at the clouds, thought of the storm to come, our bare (**deference, larder, calisthenics, salutation**), and our short supply of wood, and said to myself that it was now or never: today, I would ask this lady if I could do some knitting for her.
5. After considerable (**inducing, doling, oppressing, dunning**) on my part, Alexandra Lvovna paid me, a fraction of what she should have; but there was no more work from her.
6. This lipstick is guaranteed to be one hundred per cent (exuberant, opulent, baroque, indelible).
7. Everyone who could went to school this way in the Siberian winter; no one was ever (**inconsolable, psychic, excluded, invulnerable**); everyone was needed.
8. He never did know why he had been sent to prison in Siberia; such a piece of information had been considered (**entranced, superfluous, explicit, disbanded**).
9. In this world of scarcity, the (**premonition, acquisition, tyranny, mirage**) of the most trivial or seemingly useless object was a topic for conversation.
10. As if she had not committed an (**anguished, eccentric, egregious, lavish**) social blunder, she blushed and stopped herself.
11. I (**reverted, admonished, disheveled, scrounged**) to the time when I was younger and I spoke to the shaft of moonlight.
12. In the midst of a (**divan, jaunt, cataclysm, sarcophagus**), she also had to contend repeatedly with a child's bladder—or thirst; I was also thirsty.
13. Mother pointed frantically to the walls, and he dropped his voice until it was barely (**interminable, audible, adulterated, sardonic**).
14. Mother had (**incomprehensibly, presumably, scoffingly, incessantly**) said snowman; how amazed she would be to see her daughter as the Snow Queen.
15. I stood there (**fetid, ravenous, abstract, mute**), just holding the book up.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Identification (20 points)

Identify the following characters. Some names may be used more than once. Choose names from the list that follows:

Anna Semyonovna, Anya, Ben, Boris, Esther, Grandmother Anna, Grandmother Sara, Karl, Liusik, Makrinin, Marya, Miss Rachel, Nina, Popravka, Pushkin, Raya, Reisa, Samuel, Shurik, Solomon, Stanislav, Svetlana, tsar, Vanya the bum, Yorenko, Yosif, YoZIA, Zaya, Zina

- _____ 1. shares books with Esther
- _____ 2. insists on being called comrade
- _____ 3. owns a blue georgette ball gown
- _____ 4. gets fat after buying a cow
- _____ 5. is humiliated for bare feet
- _____ 6. works as an electrical engineer
- _____ 7. announces a second contest
- _____ 8. wrote *Eugene Onegin*
- _____ 9. pretends not to recognize a brother
- _____ 10. longs to see a photo album
- _____ 11. calls a child "lalinka"
- _____ 12. thinks of Samuel as a substitute father
- _____ 13. looks forward to being a soldier
- _____ 14. loses a leg
- _____ 15. directs the mine

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the following terms with their definitions:

- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| ___ 1. sapogy | A. Papa | H. ruler |
| ___ 2. fufaika | B. market | I. stringed instrument |
| ___ 3. tata | C. sugar treat | J. bread |
| ___ 4. challah | D. boots | K. spy |
| ___ 5. N.K.V.D. | E. planks | L. jacket |
| ___ 6. tsar | F. Russian money | M. wood shavings |
| ___ 7. baracholka | G. supervisor | N. secret police |
| ___ 8. ruble | | O. goat cheese |
| ___ 9. nari | | |
| ___ 10. balalaika | | |

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Identify the speaker of each quotation and name the person to whom it is addressed:

_____ 1a. A masquerade party? In Siberia? ... And what pray tell are you going to go as?
A snowman perhaps?

_____ 1b.

_____ 2a. You! ... What do you do? What's your work?

_____ 2b.

_____ 3a. Lalinka, we must be brave.

_____ 3b.

_____ 4a. See that you come back on time. We shall not wait for you.

_____ 4b.

_____ 5a. I measured you and I measured the sweater. It has to be right, it just has to be.

_____ 5b.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Account for multiple deaths in the novel.
2. Defend Esther's immersion in Russian literature, especially the works of Alexander Pushkin.
3. Compare deportation and repatriation.
4. Describe survival qualities that save the Rudomins.
5. Describe the circumstances that precede the first declamation contest.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a term to answer the following questions:

- _____ 1. Who gets pregnant and requires the Rudomins to move?
- _____ 2. Where does Solomon die?
- _____ 3. Who wears a sealskin coat and diamond earrings?
- _____ 4. What does Esther regret leaving behind in Vilna?
- _____ 5. Whom does Raya pretend not to recognize?
- _____ 6. What does Anna Rudomin shovel?
- _____ 7. Where does Samuel promise to reunite with his family?
- _____ 8. What does Svetlana envy?
- _____ 9. What burns Esther's hand?
- _____ 10. Who loses a bakery job?

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark each of the following statements with T for true and F for false.

- _____ 1. Esther celebrates her twelfth birthday in a dung hut.
- _____ 2. The Rudomins write letters between the lines of old newspaper.
- _____ 3. Because she loses the fifty rubles at the market, Esther finds a job to pay it back.
- _____ 4. Esther borrows a saw so that she and Raya can remove logs from the cellar to sell in the baracholka.
- _____ 5. Raya refuses gifts of food from Zaya, but accepts soap.
- _____ 6. One of Esther's customers pays for knitted sweaters with a chifforobe.
- _____ 7. Yosif Isayevich agrees to give the Rudomins a home and food in exchange for piano lessons.
- _____ 8. Grandmother Anna believes that a Polish deportee deserve no place in a Soviet declamation contest.
- _____ 9. Raya saves Esther from the buran by chanting.
- _____ 10. Uncle Yozia promises to buy wool for Esther if she will sell Zaya's lipstick.

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Fill-in (30 points)

Fill-in a word from the list below that completes each statement below. Place your responses in the blanks provided.

album	brinza	felt slippers	knitting	onion peelings	supervisor
alphabet	bronchitis	fish	labor camp	pima	synagogue
America	capitalists	gauze	Lodz	potato	Tata
amnesty	chifforobe	ghost	market	Rubtsovsk	tsar
balalaika	coal	grippe	mine	secret police	typhus
beet	cologne	gypsum	Moscow	seeds	Vilna
bookkeeper	contest	Kharkov	N.K.V.D.	Stalin	watermelon
braids					

1. My grandmother opened the door, took one look at this " _____ " and screamed, "Oh, dear Lord, I didn't get the cheese."
2. My father—called _____—was my most favorite person in all the world.
3. You are _____ and therefore enemies of the people.
4. At once, this _____ became my most important possession.
5. _____, which was the oldest seat of Jewish culture in eastern Europe, the Jerusalem of Europe, was also the place where many of my ancestors had distinguished themselves.
6. We were now in _____ in the Altai Territory.
7. Two young girls from the village had stolen a _____ . . . to give to the Polish slave laborers.
8. Were these men using _____ because they were dizzy?
9. His government granted _____ "to all Polish citizens now detained on Soviet territory."
10. Father was more fortunate and, because of Mother, quite embarrassed; he had been given the job of _____ at the construction job.
11. History was taught with some curious omissions, one being the late _____.
12. Did they know that to run a _____ was against the law?
13. In school, we had learned that _____ when boiled in water exuded a yellow pigment.
14. This was from my Uncle Ben in _____, to whom my mother had written.
15. Thus it was that I found myself on a moonless night part of a band of children, each equipped with a burlap bag, stealing little pieces of _____.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain what Samuel communicates to his family by letter.
2. Compare Svetlana, Anya, Yuri, Shurik, and Zina as minor characters.
3. Contrast the Rudomins' life in Vilna and Rubtsovsk.
4. Describe Esther's numerous projects.
5. List examples of humor that lighten the memoir.

Answer Key

Vocabulary

- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. censor | 6. indelible | 11. reverted |
| 2. rueful | 7. excluded | 12. cataclysm |
| 3. fastidiously | 8. superfluous | 13. audible |
| 4. larder | 9. acquisition | 14. scoffingly |
| 5. dunning | 10. egregious | 15. mute |

Comprehension Test A

PART I: IDENTIFICATION (20 POINTS)

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------|--------------|
| 1. Svetlana | 6. Samuel | 11. Samuel |
| 2. Popravka | 7. Anna Semyonovna | 12. Boris |
| 3. Anya | 8. Pushkin | 13. Shurik |
| 4. Marya | 9. Raya | 14. Vanya |
| 5. Esther | 10. Esther | 15. Makrinin |

PART II: MATCHING (20 POINTS)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. H |
| 2. L | 7. B |
| 3. A | 8. F |
| 4. J | 9. E |
| 5. N | 10. I |

PART III: QUOTATION IDENTIFICATION (20 POINTS)

1. Raya, Esther
2. Popravka, Samuel
3. Samuel, Esther
4. Raisa Nikitnovna, Esther
5. Esther, Marya

PART IV: ESSAY (40 POINTS)

Answers will vary

Comprehension Test B

PART I: SHORT ANSWER (20 POINTS)

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. Nina | 6. gypsum |
| 2. labor camp | 7. Lodz |
| 3. Marya | 8. Esther's braids |
| 4. photo album | 9. stove |
| 5. Liusik | 10. Raya |

PART II: TRUE/FALSE (20 POINTS)

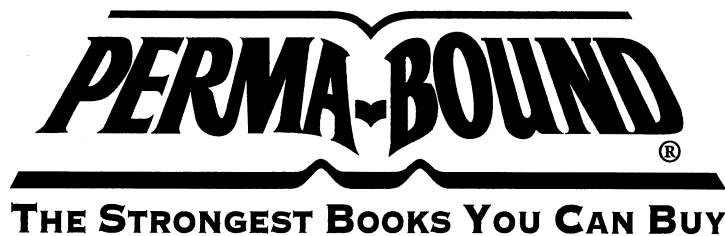
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T |
| 2. T | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. F | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. F |

PART III: FILL-IN (30 POINTS)

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. ghost | 6. Rubtsovsk | 11. tsar |
| 2. Tata | 7. watermelon | 12. synagogue |
| 3. capitalists | 8. cologne | 13. onion peelings |
| 4. album | 9. amnesty | 14. America |
| 5. Vilna | 10. bookkeeper | 15. coal |

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Answers will vary



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