



The Book Thief

Markus Zusak

Teacher's Guide

Written By Matthew Jewell

"BRILLIANT and hugely ambitious. . . . It's the kind of book that can be LIFE CHANGING."
—The New York Times

THE BOOK THIEF

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Synopsis

Prologue

The narrator, Death, introduces himself, reflects on the nature of his work, and previews the events of the book by recounting a few critical scenes in which he has observed the protagonist, Liesel Meminger. Liesel is nine years old when Death first notices her. It is just before the start of beginning of World War II, and Liesel is traveling by train across Germany with her mother and small brother to Munich, where the children are to be given to foster parents to live in relative safety for the remainder of the war. Death becomes interested in Liesel, against his better judgment, when he comes for the soul of her brother, who has died during the trip.

Part One

On the way to Munich to meet their foster parents, Liesel Meminger's six-year-old brother, Werner, dies of an unspecified illness. At the funeral, one of the grave diggers drops a black book, *The Grave Digger's Handbook*, which Liesel takes, her first theft. Shortly after, she arrives on Himmel Street in Molching just outside Munich and meets Rosa and Hans Hubermann, her new parents.

The first few months are difficult. Liesel suffers from recurring nightmares of her brother. Hans soothes her in the night, sometimes playing his accordion for her. In school, she is placed with children much younger than her because she is illiterate. She begins a close friendship with Rudy Steiner, who once painted himself black and ran one-man races in the middle of the night in imitation of Jesse Owens at the Olympics.

In May 1939, Liesel wets her bed during a nightmare. Hans helps her wash the sheets, then begins what turns out to be the first of many nighttime classes on reading

and writing. They practice with *The Grave Digger's Handbook*. Liesel spends the summer playing soccer with the neighborhood kids, helping Rosa deliver the ironing that she does for supplemental income, and learning words. In the autumn, World War II begins. She works her way back to her age group in school, though the process is not without friction; in a schoolyard fight she flattens Ludwig Schmeikl.

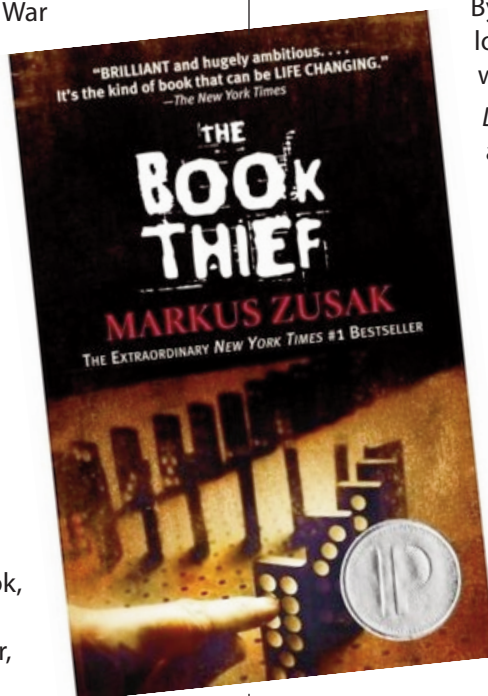
Part Two

By the end of 1939, Liesel has come to love Rosa and Hans and is best friends with Rudy. She finishes *The Grave Digger's Handbook* on December 17th and receives two new books, *Faust the Dog* and *The Lighthouse*, for Christmas. Hans has traded cigarettes for the books.

As times become harder, Rosa's clients begin to cancel her ironing service, so she forces Liesel to do the delivery and pick-up alone, reasoning that it would be harder to tell bad news to a child. In January 1940, school lessons turn to letter writing, inspiring Liesel to write a letter to her biological mother. She receives no reply, though she continues writing letters, eventually stealing a small amount from the

ironing money to mail them. Eventually she begins to realize that she'll never see or hear from her mother again.

Hans Junior and Trudi, the Hubermanns' two biological children, come home for the celebration of Hitler's birthday on April 20th. Hans Junior is an ardent Nazi and bickers with his father, who is less than enthusiastic in his support of the Führer. At the celebratory book burning, Liesel steals *The Shoulder Shrug* from the fire's dying embers. Afterwards she realizes that she was spotted by Ilsa Hermann, the mayor's wife.



Part Three

Hans instructs Liesel to keep the book, which portrays its Jewish protagonist in a positive light, a secret. She begins avoiding the mayor's house on the laundry rounds, telling Rosa that no one is home. Eventually she's forced to collect the laundry. To her surprise and awe, Ilsa invites her in and shows her the library.

Liesel reads *The Shoulder Shrug* with Hans. Ilsa lets her read books in the library on her laundry rounds. The mayor's wife has the habit of leaving the window open no matter the weather. When Liesel asks about the name inscribed in the cover of a book, she informs her that the book once belonged to her son, who died in the last World War. During the summer of 1940, Rudy and Liesel join a gang of juvenile thieves led by Arthur Berg, and plunder produce from nearby farms.

Part Four

Max Vandenburg, a Jew in hiding, arrives at the Hubermanns' in November 1940. Hans, whose accordion once belonged to Max's father, has agreed to hide him because his father saved his life in the last World War. Once an ardent fist-fighter, Max has been in hiding since Kristallnacht. His hiding and eventual relocation to the Hubermanns' was facilitated by his Nazi friend Walter Kugler. Max sleeps for three days after his arrival, during which time Hans and Liesel arrange a hiding place under the basement stairs.

Outside the home, the family tries to carry on as normally as possible. Liesel reads *The Whistler*, a murder-mystery, in Ilsa's library, a few pages per visit.

That winter, Max comes up from the basement every night to sleep by the fire, then returns in the morning. He and Liesel become fast friends, finding common ground in their nightmares. For her twelfth birthday in February 1941, Liesel receives another book, *The Mud Men*. Max cuts out pages from *Mein Kampf* and paints them white, then writes a story for her on them, *The Standover Man*.

Part Five

In May 1941, Max begins a regular regimen of exercises to keep himself occupied, and engages in long, involved fantasies of fist-fighting Hitler. The following month he continues painting pages from *Mein Kampf* white with the help of Hans, Rosa, and Liesel. Ilsa discontinues Rosa's laundry service, eliciting a hateful tirade from Liesel. She tries to tell Rosa that Ilsa fired her because she was rude to her, but Rosa refuses to believe her. The

summer is a time of bullies. Rudy is consistently singled out by Franz Deutscher, the leader of his Hitler Youth section, and Viktor Chemmel takes control of the gang once Arthur Berg leaves. That October, Liesel sneaks through a window into Ilsa's library and steals *The Whistler*. In December, Chemmel throws *The Whistler* in the Amper River. Rudy wades in to rescue it and asks for a kiss as a reward. Liesel refuses, and it is the last time her asks.

Part Six

Liesel ferries enough snow into the basement to build a snowman. Max is delighted, but he falls ill and declines over the course of January 1942. In February, he collapses and falls into a semi-comatose state. Liesel brings him small gifts and reads to him. After finishing *The Whistler*, Liesel and Rudy return to Ilsa's to steal another book, *The Dream Carrier*. After a long illness, Max finally regains consciousness.

In June, the basements of Molching are subjected to a surprise inspection by air raid officials. Liesel contrives to warn her family in time, and their basement is rejected as too shallow for a proper air raid shelter.

Part Seven

That summer Hans finds steady work painting blinds black in preparation for air raids. Liesel accompanies him. He often works in exchange for trivial trades like a shared cigarette, though he does negotiate a shared round of champagne at a wealthier house. Rudy trains tirelessly for the upcoming Hitler Youth carnival, determined to win four gold medals. He wins the 1500-, 400-, and 200-meter races, but intentionally disqualifies from the 100. Liesel finishes *The Dream Carrier* and steals *A Song in the Dark* from Ilsa's library. A week later, she discovers that a gift has been left out for her on the library's windowsill: *The Complete Duden Dictionary and Thesaurus*.

The air raids begin in September, though the first alarm is a false one. A neighbor's basement has been designated as an air raid shelter. During the first actual bombing, Liesel reads aloud to calm the crowd. No one is killed in the bombing, but two apartment blocks are destroyed and the Hitler Youth field is gouged.

Frau Holtzapfel, with whom Rosa has had a long and bitter feud, appears at the Hubermann residence to propose a truce. She offers to stop spitting on their door (a daily occurrence) and to give them her coffee ration if Liesel will come read to her. Rosa agrees, neglecting to

consult Liesel.

About two weeks later, Nazis march a group of Jews through Molching on the way to Dachau. Hans gives a piece of bread to one of the prisoners, earning a whipping for both him and the Jew. Having drawn suspicion as a Jew-sympathizer, Hans can no longer safely harbor Max. He leaves that night with a suitcase of clothes and food. Hans waits for the Gestapo to come for him, but they never do, though they do come for Rudy.

Part Eight

Earlier that year, Rudy had been examined by Nazi officials for a special youth program. He has evidently been selected, but the Steiners refuse to let them take their son. Retribution comes in November. Both Hans and Rudy's father are drafted into the army. Alex Steiner is assigned to a hospital in Austria, tasked with repairing clothes. Hans is assigned to an air raid unit.

Liesel continues reading to Frau Holtzapfel. After finishing *The Whistler*, they move on to *The Dream Carrier*. After an air raid shortly before Christmas, Rosa gives Liesel *The Word Shaker*, a final book Max had made for her and asked Rosa to save for her birthday.

Part Nine

Liesel sneaks into Ilsa's library to steal another book, selecting *The Last Human Stranger*. Ilsa has left cookies out for her, which she takes, though they've gone stale. Ilsa walks in as she's preparing to leave. The meeting is casual. In a moment of inspiration, Liesel asks if the room belongs to Ilsa, having assumed that the books and room were the mayor's. She confirms that the room and most of the books are hers.

In January 1943, Michael, one of Frau Holtzapfel's sons, returns wounded from the fighting at Stalingrad. Her other son, Robert, died there. Hans writes home in February that he's being sent back to Molching after narrowly avoiding death in a car accident.

After an air raid in March, Rudy and Liesel spot flames nearby. Upon investigation, they find a dying pilot in a crashed plane. Rudy gives him a teddy bear as he dies. Hans returns to Molching in April.

Part Ten

Michael Holtzapfel hangs himself that summer. In August, Liesel spots Max in another march of Jews towards Dachau. Their brief reunion is interrupted by the Nazi soldiers, and Rudy has to restrain Liesel. Four

days later she tells him about Max and his having hidden in her basement. Later that month, she sneaks into Ilsa's library to steal another book, but in a sudden fit of grief shreds a volume and leaves an apologetic letter promising never to come again. She steals *The Rules of Tommy Hoffman* as she leaves.

Three days later, Ilsa comes to the Hubermann house and gives Liesel a blank journal, having been impressed with the writing of her letter. She implores Liesel to write, which she does, scribing the story of her life in the basement for long hours. She finishes in October. As she edits the final draft, Molching is bombed by accident. Everyone on Himmel Street is killed, except for Liesel.

Epilogue

After Himmel Street is cleared, Liesel stays with the Hermanns. When Alex Steiner returns, she accompanies him to work at his tailor shop. After the war, Max returns to Molching to find her.

Death reveals that Liesel has died "yesterday," having lived a long life after expatriating to Australia. When he takes Liesel's soul from her body, he shows her the book she'd written, which he had salvaged from the rubble of Himmel Street. She asks if he understood it, to which he replies, "I am haunted by humans."

The Book Thief Timeline

- Apr. 20, 1889** Adolph Hitler born.
- Nov. 9, 1938** Kristallnacht; Max goes into hiding.
- Jan. 1939** Werner Meminger dies. Liesel is taken in by Hans and Rosa Hubermann.
- Jan. 13, 1939** Liesel steals her first book, *The Grave Digger's Handbook*.
- May 1939** Liesel and Hans begin their private reading lessons.
- June 16, 1939** Walter Kugler asks Hans to help him hide Max.
- Sept.-Nov. 1939** World War II begins; Liesel beats Ludwig Schmeikl.
- Dec. 25, 1939** Liesel is given *Faust the Dog* and *The Lighthouse*.
- Jan.-Feb. 1940** Liesel awaits her mother's replies to her letters.
- Apr. 20, 1940** Liesel steals *The Shoulder Shrug*.
- May 1940** Hans sends Max a copy of

- Mein Kampf* and a key to his house.
- Summer 1940** Rudy and Liesel join Arthur Berg's gang.
- Nov. 3, 1940** Max reads *Mein Kampf* on a train en route to Molching.
- Nov. 1940** Max arrives at the Hubermann residence.
- Feb. 1941** Liesel's 12th birthday; she receives *The Mud Men*. Max makes *The Standover Man* for her.
- May 1941** Max begins fantasizing about fist-fighting Hitler.
- June 24, 1941** Ilsa Hermann discontinues Rosa's ironing service. Liesel delivers a spiteful diatribe.
- Summer 1941** Max works on his journal. Rudy's problems with Franz Deutscher and Viktor Chemmel escalate.
- Oct. 1941** Liesel steals *The Whistler*; is first labeled as a "book thief."
- Nov. 1941** Rudy is caught trying to steal a potato.
- Dec. 1941** Rudy rescues *The Whistler* from the Amper River; he asks for a kiss for the last time.
- Dec. 24, 1941** Liesel brings snow into the basement with which to build a snow man.
- Feb. 1942** Liesel turns 13; Max collapses.
- June 1942** The Hubermanns' basement is inspected as a possible air raid shelter.
- Summer 1942** Liesel accompanies Hans as he works painting blinds black.
- Aug. 1942** Liesel is given *The Complete Duden Dictionary and Thesaurus*.
- Sept. 1942** First air raid, a false alarm.
- 19 Sept. 1942** First real air raid.
- Oct. 1942** Liesel begins reading to Frau Holtzapfel. Hans throws bread to a Jew; Max is forced to flee.
- Nov. 1942** Hans and Alex Steiner are drafted into the army.
- Dec. 1942** Rudy and Liesel throw bread to a group of Jews being marched to a concentration camp. Rosa gives her *The Word Shaker*.
- Jan. 1943** Liesel steals *The Last Human*



- Stranger*. Michael Holtzapfel returns from Stalingrad.
- Feb. 1943** Liesel turns 14. Hans writes that he's coming home after being injured.
- March 9, 10** The bombing of Munich. Rudy gives a teddy bear to a dying pilot.
- April 1943** Hans returns to Molching. Liesel spots Max in a group of Jews being marched to a concentration camp. She begins writing *The Book Thief*.
- July 24, 1943** Michael Holtzapfel hangs himself.
- Oct. 2, 1943** Liesel finishes *The Book Thief*.
- Oct. 7 1943** Molching is bombed. Liesel is the sole survivor of Himmel Street.
- Oct. 1945** Max returns to Molching to find Liesel.

Author Sketch

Markus Zusak was born in Sydney, Australia in 1975. The youngest of four children born to Austrian and German immigrants, he began writing at age sixteen and completed his first full manuscript (unpublished) at age eighteen. He published his first novel, *The Underdog*, in 1999 and has since been recognized as one of Australia's premiere authors of young adult fiction. He currently resides in Sydney with his wife and daughter.

Critic's Corner

Hailed with terms like "brilliant," "audacious," "hugely ambitious," "beautiful and important," the book has made a largely positive impact on critics. Liesel is praised as a likable character of substance, and Death is seen as a pleasant surprise, a deviation from what one would expect. Similarly, other inventions, such as Max's writing his story on a copy of *Mein Kampf* after having cleverly used the book to escape detection by the Nazis, allow a new perspective on a familiar subject.

As noted by the reviewer in *Bookmark* magazine, "the only serious criticism came from Janet Maslin (of the *New York Times*), who faulted the book's 'Vonnegut whimsy' and Lemony Snicket-like manipulation. Yet even she admitted that *The Book Thief* 'will be widely read and admired because it tells a story in which books become treasures.' And, as we all know, 'there's no arguing with a sentiment like that.'"

The book, a best-seller in several languages, has won a number of awards, including the Association of Jewish Libraries inaugural Teen Book Award, the Jewish National Book Award (in the Young Adult\Children's

division), and a Printz Honor Award. There are plans by Fox 2000 Studios to produce a film version.

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Selected Other Works

Novels

The Underdog, 1999

Fighting Ruben Wolfe, 2000

When Dogs Cry, 2001

Getting the Girl, 2004

I Am the Messenger, 2005

Audiobook

The Book Thief, Random House Audio, 2006, unabridged

Large Print

The Book Thief, Gale Group, 2006

Objectives

General Objectives

- 1.To read and discuss contemporary fiction
- 2.To develop critical reading, thinking, and writing skills
- 3.To track and discuss significant themes
- 4.To gain a deeper appreciation of literature through close reading and analysis
- 5.To read literature with an understanding of historical context
- 6.To decode figurative language
- 7.To analyze text/image combinations
- 8.To analyze style and its function
- 9.To synthesize different kinds of text into a unified reading experience
- 10.To understand the relationship between structure and content

Specific Objectives

- 1.To track Liesel's development
- 2.To analyze the novel's use of layering and repetition
- 3.To discuss the novel's use of lists and enumeration
- 4.To evaluate the narrator's style
- 5.To list and discuss examples of substitution/effacement
- 6.To decode the power of words in the novel
- 7.To unravel the relationship between the two books entitled *The Book Thief*
- 8.To list the books important to Liesel
- 9.To analyze the narrator's concept of "distraction"
- 10.To characterize the narrator

Literary Terms and Applications

Concretization: the description of intangible objects like thoughts in terms of physical objects. The narrator frequently concretizes language: "the words—their bodies stranded on the paper, beaten down for her to walk on."

Synaesthesia: the description of one sense in terms of another. The narrator often blends sight and taste: “a sky to slowly suck on.”

Narrator: the character relating the events in a narrative. *The Book Thief* is narrated by a personification of Death.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Film/Video

Amen, Kino Video, 2002
Au Revoir, Les Enfants, MK2, 1987
Conspiracy, HBO, 2001
The Grey Zone, Lions Gate, 2001
Jakob the Liar, Sony, 1999
Judgment at Nuremberg, MGM, 1961
Invincible, New Line, 2001
Life is Beautiful, Miramax, 1997
Max, Lions Gate, 2002
The Pianist, Universal, 2002
Schindler’s List, Universal, 1993

Literature

Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*
Denise Giardina, *Saints and Villains*
Bette Greene, *Summer of My German Soldier*
Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*
Meyer Levin, *The Fanatic*
Louis Lowry, *Number the Stars*
Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*
Art Spiegelman, *Maus*, vols. 1, 2
William Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*
Elie Wiesel, *Night*

Poetry

Kenneth Patchen, *Collected Poems*
Rainer Mari Rilke, *Duino Elegies*
Mary Ellen Solt, Ed., *Concrete Poetry*
Emmett Williams, Ed., *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*

Essays

Nicholson Baker, *The Size of Thoughts*
Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus*

Maps

Collins Atlas of the Second World War, Collins
The Routledge Atlas of the Holocaust, Third Edition,
Routledge

Holocaust and World War II Maps

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/>

[holomaptoc.html](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html)
“Holocaust Timeline”
<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html>
“World War II in Europe Timeline”
<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/ww2time.htm>

History

Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*
David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, *An Introduction to Book History*
Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany: A History*

Themes and Motifs

Themes

- writing
- language
- family
- death
- war
- society
- bravery
- thievery

Motifs

- Lists and enumerations as narrative devices
- Words described as having physical properties
- Explorations of the narrator’s complex relationship with humanity
- Characters existing outside of social norms

Meaning Study

1. My one saving grace is distraction. It keeps me sane. (p.5)
(In the prologue, the narrator, Death, explains that he is irreplaceable and thus unable to take vacations. Instead, he indulges in distractions as mini-vacations. Ostensibly he is referring to his preoccupation with colors, especially the colors of skies. Taking notice of details obscures the greater brutality around him. However, this passage also serves to contextualize his narrative style, which is pocked with interpolations, flashbacks, and foreshadowing. The choppy narration is exactly what one would expect from a narrator who explicitly claims a penchant for “distractions.”)
2. I saw the book thief three times. (p. 5)

(This line, too, occurs in the preface. It introduces a pattern that recurs throughout the novel. Many significant events are alluded to twice before they are actually narrated, and Death passes over characters twice before actually claiming them. In Liesel's case, the narrator sees her first when her brother dies, then when the pilot dies, and finally when she dies. Reinhold Zucker's death is alluded to twice before it is narrated, as are a number of other significant events in the plot. This layering produces meaning in strata, accruing context and emotional resonance with each repetition.)

3. Mystery bores me. ... It's the machinations that wheel us there that aggravate, perplex, interest, and astound me. (p. 243)
(This line appears to explain the narrator's habit of stating significant events long before they appear chronologically in the plot. Uninterested in mystery, the narrator dwells on the "machinations," the tangled network of cause and effect that lead to the events. As promised, the narrator is also far more interested in the details of any given event than in the "mystery" of what will happen. This myopic focus has been criticized as presenting a claustrophobic world, but it is loyal to the novel's internal logic.)
4. It was a year for the ages, like 79, like 1346, to name just a few. Forget the scythe, Goddamn it, I needed a broom or a mop. (p. 307)
(The narrator frames the bloodiness of 1942 in terms of 79 A.D., the year Pompeii and Herculaneum were destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, and 1346 A.D., the year marking the beginning of the spread of the "Black Death"—bubonic plague—across Europe. Both resulted in terrifying mass death, but the references perform different functions as well. At Pompeii and Herculaneum, a single catastrophic event rained fiery death on the inhabitants of two entire towns, killing a relative handful of people (about 10,000). The Black Death was a pandemic that killed between thirty percent and sixty percent of Europe's population during the course of several years, both through the disease itself and through widespread collateral problems like starvation and massive social disruption. The two events compare to different aspects of World War II experienced by the characters in the book: the eruption of Vesuvius to

the instantaneous destruction caused by bombings (including the air raid that kills everyone in Himmel Street; the massive devastation and death caused by the plague to the "plague" of the World War. The first reference highlights the sheer destructiveness of World War II, while the second refers to the far-reaching suffering and loss of life. The "Forget the scythe" comment is one of the examples of the narrator's levity, which has been criticized as trivializing the tragedies of the war.)

5. Somewhere, too, in the gaps between a period and the next capital letter, there was Max. (p. 381)
(This is one of the examples of the narrator's use of figurative language that resolves under scrutiny. The gap between sentences allows a pause, during which the mind wanders. Max exists in Liesel's consciousness as she pauses between sentences. This use of language is essentially a textual enactment of a cognitive process.)
6. They were going to Dachau, to concentrate. (p. 388)
(This is one of the examples of fanciful language that fails to resolve under scrutiny. It's simply a play on words reflecting a child-like point of view, much like the "bombing carpets" comment. These usages contrast starkly with the usages previously described.)
7. In the messy space of a few months, Reinhold Zucker would be dead. He would be killed by Hans Hubermann's seat. (p. 432)
(Although Death professes to dislike mystery, he often deepens mystery under the guise of dispelling it. While the line ostensibly dispels any mystery surrounding Zucker's fate, it introduces another through the ambiguous phrasing. We know that Zucker will die, but how he is killed by Hans' seat is a more opaque mystery than Zucker's fate. These examples of false foreshadowing are one of the many examples of displacement in the novel; one mystery displaces another. Functionally, they allow the narrator to shuffle chronology, profess a disdain for mystery, and make extended use of layered references to events while still maintaining the reader's attention.)

8. She survived because she was sitting in a basement reading through the story of her own life, checking for mistakes. (p. 498)
(Liesel survives the bombing of Himmel Street because she's in the basement editing The Book Thief. At the surface level, her survival is a continuation of the novel's theme of the randomness of death. At the figurative level, it's another example of the power of words and books, which are often portrayed as having physical properties and effects. Situationally, she survives in a moment of self-awareness. Her life continues while she's looking at it. Everyone else's life ends while they are looking away.)
9. I have hated the words and I have loved them, and I hope I have made them right. (p. 528)
(These are the last lines of Liesel's The Book Thief. Ostensibly they are a simple tribute to her love of language and an expression of a typical writerly concern with finding the "correct" formulation. The "hate" of words stems from two main sources. First, and most obviously, books have been her escape from misery, which has led to guilt; hence her destruction of one of Ilsa's books. Also, words are portrayed as the center of the power of Adolph Hitler, (e.g., in The Word Shaker), whom Liesel holds personally responsible for her misfortunes.)
10. I am haunted by humans. (p. 550)
(This is the last line of The Book Thief. The narrator tells us what he told Liesel: that he is haunted by humans. Death's being haunted by humans is one of the unexpected substitutions that occur throughout the novel. The most interesting thing about the line is that it's the second ending to the second The Book Thief, a sort of echo. Liesel's The Book Thief ends with lines about her personal obsession: words. Death's The Book Thief ends with lines about his personal obsession: humans.)

Comprehension Study

1. Discuss the theme of effacement/replacement in the novel.
(There are a number of startling and sometimes ironic substitutions in the novel. The most obvious example is Max's writing The Standover Man and The Word Shaker on painted-over pages of Mein Kampf. A similar example is

Hans' painting over the anti-Semitic slurs on a shop door. It is highly significant that Hans is a painter. His profession centers around covering/replacing surfaces, just as his character is thematically centered around replacement. He survived World War I because he was substituted, just as he survives the truck accident because Zucker displaces him from his seat. With Liesel, he displaces her ineffectual parents with a good one, as he replaces her bad dreams, "painting" over her nightmares with his quiet affection and reading lessons.)

2. List Liesel's books and their provenance.
(In Part One, the narrator notes that Liesel owns fourteen books, but that only ten of them are significant. These titles can be culled from the ten section titles: The Grave Digger's Handbook (stolen), The Shoulder Shrug (stolen), Mein Kampf (Max via Hans), The Standover Man (Max), The Whistler (stolen), The Dream Carrier (stolen), The Complete Duden Dictionary and Thesaurus (the narrator evidently considers it stolen, but it is left as a gift on a windowsill), The Word Shaker (Max), The Last Human Stranger (stolen), and The Book Thief (her autobiography). Additionally, she owns Faust the Dog (gift), The Lighthouse (gift), The Mud Men (gift), A Song in the Dark (stolen), and The Rules of Tommy Hoffman (stolen), which adds up to fifteen books. The discrepancy can be resolved thus: Mein Kampf is one of the books important to her, but she doesn't actually own it, instead owning the two books written over its pages.)
3. Explain the text and image in the eighth page of *The Standover Man* (p. 231).
(The scene is set in the basement, where Liesel is painting words on the wall. In the novel, she paints words she doesn't know. In The Standover Man, the words she's painting are in reference to the floating text. "Trains Dreams Fists" are the things they discover that they have in common. They both arrived in Molching via train, they both have recurring nightmares, and they both have a history of fist-fighting, though Max's experience is somewhat more extensive than Liesel's. The typed text bleeding through the page is the remnants of Mein Kampf. Max is shown as a bird primarily because Liesel says that he has "feathery" hair. Thematically, this

page is another example of the use of layering to accrue meaning. The page begins as Mein Kampf, then Max paints over it, and in the painting, Liesel is shown painting words.)

4. Analyze the novel's use of lists and enumerations. *(The novel is structured around a list; each section bears the title of one of the books important to Liesel. Within the narrative, lists are often used to encapsulate larger chunks of time. For example, the interpolated lists of the presents Liesel gives Max while he's ill form a poetically abbreviated synopsis of events not otherwise narrated. More generally, the narrator's obsession with enumeration appears to be an attempt to understand humanity. He writes that human hearts are linear, while his is circular. The numbered lists capture the essence of this linearity.)*
5. List the different kinds of text found in the novel. *(While the bulk of the novel is narration, a number of different kinds of text are inserted at intervals. The boldfaced narrator's insertions are the most frequent. The inclusion of Max's two books are the most striking examples. Other types include letters, Hans' drawing, excerpts from books, lists, and definitions. These inclusions multiply the fictional authors within the novel. Zusak wrote a novel that contains text ostensibly composed by a wide variety of fictional authors, and one real author, Hitler.)*
6. How are words presented as having power in the novel? *(The most traditional portrayal of language's power is the novel's concern with Hitler and its assertion that his power was founded primarily on words. However, the bulk of the novel's descriptions of words' power are highly figurative. Language is presented as having a physical presence and material consequences. Words "climb" on people or "lean" against them. They are "heavy." They save Liesel's life.)*
7. Is this an adult or young adult novel? *(Zusak claims to have had no specific audience in mind when writing The Book Thief. This ambiguity extends to the publishing world, where it was released as an adult title in Australia, then a young adult title in the United States. There is, obviously, no way to issue a*

definitive judgment on the matter. Those who claim it is an adult novel point to the length, the nature of its narrator, and the recurring tragedies. Others classify it as young adult primarily based on its whimsical style and young protagonist; one critic compared it to "Harry Potter and the Holocaust." One could argue that it's an adult novel written by a young adult author. The novel's structure, style, and content are sophisticated and literary. It only reads as young adult fiction at periodic stylistic failures like overly whimsical phrases or rare child-like uses of figurative language that don't resolve into any literal meaning.)

8. Explain the title. *(In keeping with the narrator's penchant for layering in threes, the title points to three referents: Liesel, Liesel's autobiography, and the book that is narrated by Death. The exact relationship between Liesel's The Book Thief and Death's The Book Thief is murky. It is clear that Death retrieves Liesel's book and that his narrative is some combination of her writing and his observation, but the line between the two is often obscure. One assumes that the use of the third person omniscient is based on Liesel's account; i.e., that when Death knows what Liesel is thinking in a situation, his information must be based on her written remembrance of her thoughts.)*
9. Contrast Hans and Rosa Hubermann. *(Rosa and Hans are so polarly opposed that critics have sometimes disparaged them as unrealistic caricatures in contrast to Liesel's depth of personality and feeling. Hans is saintly and infinitely patient, while Rosa is ill-tempered, quick to brandish her wooden spoon, and foul-mouthed. Physically, Rosa is short and stout, Hans thin. She garners a relatively steady income doing domestic work (until hard times force her clients to discontinue her services); Hans brings in sporadic income outside the home. Their dealings with Liesel constitute a reversal of their normal roles. Rosa, the food-maker whose life is essentially domestic, is harsh with Liesel, while Hans, the food-eater whose life is mostly outside the home, is the care-giver.)*
10. Does the novel's tone trivialize the Holocaust?

(This is one of those questions to which there is no definitive answer. Some critics have accused the narrator's flippant levity of trivializing the narrated events, including the Holocaust. While the narrator is certainly given to levity, it is true to the novel's internal logic. The narrator, Death, is light in his narrative precisely because of his long, intimate acquaintance with human suffering. His light treatment of events enables him to remain sane. Beneath the surface of the narrator's style, the plot details the suffering imposed by the Holocaust from a new perspective. Liesel's myopic worldview makes the tragedy more personal, and Death's far-flung excursions serve to place events in a wider context.)

How Language Works

1. The novel's use of fanciful language is not limited to the narrator; Max also has a poetic streak.: "It was a Monday, and they walked a tightrope to the sun." (p. 249).
2. When Rudy first calls Liesel a "book thief," the narrator comments, "It was the first time Liesel had been branded with her title" (p. 292). At first read, this seems to be another example of the physical power of words; Rudy brands her with words, which is a defining sort of inscription. However, the particular phrasing of the line seems to suggest that she was already inherently a book thief and that Rudy's branding is simply an acknowledgement of her role as a book thief.
3. In describing a summer, the narrator says, "For the book thief, everything was going nicely. For me, the sky was the color of Jews" (p. 349). Set as two one-line paragraphs, the stark contrast serves to highlight Liesel's isolation from the greater atrocities of World War II. The second line, though powerful, is one of the uses of figurative language that fails to resolve under scrutiny. Ostensibly the line refers to the smoke from crematoriums, but smoke is not color-specific to Jews nor are Jews the color of smoke. The line is all surface, no depth.
4. At times the narrator's asides read like jokes a child might tell: "Dying men always ask questions they know the answer to. Perhaps it's so they can die being right." (p. 469)

5. Some of the most powerful figurative language describes the battle of Stalingrad: "The sky ... was becoming an enormous drop sheet. Blood was bleeding through, and in patches, the clouds were dirty, like footprints in melting snow." (p. 470) These lines are a good example of symmetrical composition; the bloody snow-like sky reflects the bloody snow below.
6. Rudy's affection for Liesel extends to accepting violent outbursts: "He collected her punches as if they were presents" (p. 515). It is interesting that her relationship with Rudy begins to mirror the one between Hans and Rosa as it develops. She becomes increasingly violent and foul-mouthed; he becomes increasingly supportive and tolerant.

Across the Curriculum

Drama

1. Gathering details from the novel, script and act out one scene from each of the parts of the book.
2. Choose one character and read his or her lines aloud. Make a list of defining characteristics and discuss the character in relation to the themes of the novel and the other characters. Contrast the character's voice to the narrator's voice.
3. Attend a stage production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Does Anne's experience of hiding reflect Max's? Is her diary similar to *The Standover Man* and *The Word Shaker*? Is Anne tangentially similar to Liesel?

Gender Studies

1. Make lists defining gender roles in the novel. Which gender performs which social, sexual, emotional, economic, and physical roles? Are gender roles the same across different couples?
2. Are the novel's gender roles historically accurate, or do they present a contemporary sensibility? Is Liesel's gender ever an issue?

Art

1. Draw portraits of five of the main characters. Explain your artistic decisions with references

to the novel.

2. Using desktop media, design a desk jacket for one of Liesel's books. Base your design on clues about the content of the book garnered from the text.
3. Retaining the original text, redesign *The Standover Man* or *The Word Shaker* using your own drawings, collages, electronic art, or other media.
4. Sketch drawings of what you consider to be the most significant moments of the novel. Indicate the significance of each drawing in its title. Present and discuss the drawings in class.

Social Studies

1. Gathering names and places from the novel, make a map of Molching. Include significant streets, shops, residences, and places. Provide a key and mark important events in the proper location.
2. Make an historical map of World War II Europe. Make sure to mark events and places mentioned by the narrator.

Language

1. Analyze and list the novel's major stylistic characteristics. Include sentence structure and length, word choice, point of view, structure, and authorial insertions.
2. Make a glossary of the German words and phrases used in the novel. Provide translations, synonyms, and pronunciation notes.
3. Choose any paragraph and rewrite it in your own words. Discuss how your style of writing differs from Zusak's. How do the styles affect the content? Which is more clear? Which is more pleasing aesthetically?
4. Choose what you consider to be the most emotionally striking line in the novel and rewrite it ten different ways. Read the line and your rewrites aloud and discuss how particular phrasings alter the literal meaning and emotional resonance.

Journalism

1. Write an obituary for Liesel, Rosa, Hans, Rudy, Michael, or another prominent character.
2. Compose a review of the novel. Examine online and print literary reviews and mimic the general format. Include a plot summary, comparisons to other literary works, and a judgment of its literary merit.

Composition

1. Write an essay in which you identify and explain one of the novel's major themes.
2. Choose what you consider to be the novel's most important line or paragraph and write an essay explaining its significance.
3. Choose what you consider to be the novel's most interesting line or paragraph and write an essay explaining its significance.
3. Choose two characters from the novel and write an essay comparing/contrasting them. Be sure to consider their personalities, relationships with other characters, actions, attitudes, and functions in the plot.

Literature

1. Examine the "painted poems" in Kenneth Patchen's *Collected Poems*. How are they similar aesthetically to Max's writings? Do the text and image function the same ways?
2. Study examples of concrete poetry. How are they similar to Max's writings? How are they different? Do they provide new ways of understanding Max's writings?
3. Read Art Spiegelman's *Maus* graphic novels. Choose one character from *The Book Thief* and one from *Maus* and write an essay comparing/contrasting them.
4. Read a novel or nonfiction book by a Holocaust survivor like Elie Wiesel or Primo Levi. Contrast the book's perspective with *The Book Thief's*. Does the book illuminate things left unsaid in Zusak's novel?
5. Research palimpsests and explain how they are relevant to *The Book Thief*. Present your findings.

Alternate Assessment

1. Choose one chapter from the novel and rewrite as if it were Liesel's original writing. Model your style after the examples of her writing like letters.
2. Compose a short story detailing the fate of Liesel's biological mother. Is she sent to a concentration camp? Does she ever receive Liesel's letters? Is she ever reunited with her daughter?
3. Write a series of love poems from Rudy to Liesel. Be sure to include details of places, situations, and characters from the novel.
4. Sketch an outline for your own autobiography and write a sample chapter. Be sure to consider narrative technique, style, structure, length, main events, significant people, and important places.

Standardized Test Preparation

Vocabulary

1. Keep a vocabulary journal while you read the novel. Note and least ten words in each part that you do not know, look them up, and write their definitions. Then add a list of synonyms and antonyms for each word.
2. Make a glossary, choosing twenty of these words:
 - affable
 - animosity
 - appall
 - arid
 - audacious
 - auspicious
 - blatant
 - callous
 - capitulate
 - castigate
 - caustic
 - compliance
 - copious
 - culpable
 - desecrate
 - deplorable
 - despondent
 - deterrent
 - detriment
 - elated
 - emulate
 - exemplify
 - flippant
 - forlorn
 - frugal
 - fruition
 - genial
 - gloat
 - gratuitous
 - hiatus
 - immutable
 - imperative
 - inconsolable
 - innate
 - innocuous
 - irrefutable
 - iridescent
 - jocular
 - lament
 - litany
 - ludicrous
 - luminary
 - lustrous
 - machinations
 - melancholy
 - miscreant
 - misogynist
 - morose
 - nefarious
 - nonchalance
 - opaque
 - ostracism
 - pallid
 - pensive
 - perplex
 - placid
 - plethora
 - ponderous
 - prudent
 - relinquish
 - reprieve
 - reprimand
 - slander
 - sporadic
 - tact
 - temerity
 - tentative
 - tepid
 - trepidation
 - vehement
 - vociferous

Grammar and Mechanics

1. There are seven ways to use a comma in the English language. List each way and select an illustrative example from the novel.
2. Choose a chapter and count the number of simple, compound, complex, and compound/complex sentences. Discuss how the statistics may be used as an interpretive tool.

Writing

1. Compose an essay discussing the power of words and books in the novel. Note significant moments and cite specific passages. You should have an introduction with a thesis statement, at least three body paragraphs with a main idea each, and a conclusion. Use MLA documentation when citing quotes.

Vocabulary Test

Circle the definition that *best* fits the word.

1. castigate

- a) to cut short
- b) to enclose securely
- c) to swear
- d) to severely punish or criticize

2. litany

- a) lengthy enumeration
- b) long line
- c) unspoken agreement
- d) disagreement

3. slander

- a) to defame in print
- b) to verbally defame
- c) to accuse
- d) to sully

4. gloat

- a) to swell to unnatural proportions
- b) to smirk
- c) to share a secret
- d) to observe with triumphant satisfaction

5. emulate

- a) to imitate
- b) to invent
- c) to investigate
- d) to interrogate

6. vociferous

- a) characterized by extreme hunger, usually from deprivation
- b) related to the love of books and reading
- c) characterized by vehement outcry
- d) mindless

7. misogynist

- a) earthy in flavor
- b) hating women
- c) heedless, impulsive
- d) poorly educated

8. temerity

- a) shyness
- b) twitching, shaking
- c) rashness, recklessness
- d) surprise

9. jocular

- a) loud
- b) snide
- c) playful
- d) bellicose

10. pallid

- a) wan or dull
- b) dead or dying
- c) dirty
- d) dry

11. flippant

- a) lightweight
- b) marked by a contempt for authority
- c) possessing a penchant for thievery
- d) lacking respect or seriousness

12. miscreant

- a) socially reviled
- b) unhealthy, diseased
- c) villainous, depraved
- d) malformed, broken

13. prudent

- a) formally educated
- b) diligent
- c) self-taught
- d) wise

14. trepidation

- a) act of walking at a slow, measured pace
- b) fear, apprehension
- c) desire, fantasy
- d) act of reading out loud

15. nefarious

- a) flagrantly wicked
- b) hidden, secret
- c) dark, dim
- d) unconcerned with the suffering of others

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Name the character(s) who fits these descriptions.

- _____ 1. A painter.
- _____ 2. Helps Max go into hiding on Kristallnacht.
- _____ 3. Gives a teddy bear to a dying pilot.
- _____ 4. Reads for Frau Holtzapfel.
- _____ 5. A good woman for a crisis.
- _____ 6. Author of *The Standover Man*.
- _____ 7. Receives a beating from Liesel.
- _____ 8. Sends a copy of *Mein Kampf* to Stuttgart.
- _____ 9. Habitually leaves windows open.
- _____ 10. Sent to repair clothing at an army hospital.
- _____ 11. Subject of Liesel's recurring nightmares.
- _____ 12. Gives Rudy a haircut.
- _____ 13. Narrator.
- _____ 14. Subject of Max's recurring fantasies.
- _____ 15. Rescue *The Whistler* from the Amper River.

Part II: Fact or Opinion (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true, F for false or O for opinion.

- _____ 1. Hans and Rosa Hubermann are killed in an air raid.
- _____ 2. Alex Steiner is killed in an air raid.
- _____ 3. Max Vandenburg dies in a concentration camp.
- _____ 4. Liesel Meminger dies of heart failure.
- _____ 5. Michael Holtzapfel dies at Stalingrad.
- _____ 6. Robert Holtzapfel dies at Stalingrad.
- _____ 7. Max Vandenberg's family dies in a concentration camp.
- _____ 8. Rudy Steiner is killed in an air raid.
- _____ 9. Ilsa Hermann is killed in an air raid.
- _____ 10. Reinhold Zucker dies of a broken neck.

Part III: Chronology (20 points)

Using the spaces provided, number the events in chronological order.

1. _____ Liesel acquires a journal.
2. _____ Liesel acquires *The Word Shaker*.
3. _____ Liesel acquires *The Mud Men*.
4. _____ Liesel acquires *The Grave Digger's Handbook*.
5. _____ Liesel acquires *The Standover Man*.
6. _____ Liesel acquires *Faust the Dog* and *The Lighthouse*.
7. _____ *The Book Thief* is returned to Liesel.

8. _____ Liesel acquires *The Last Human Stranger*.
9. _____ Liesel acquires *The Whistler*.
10. _____ Liesel acquires *The Complete Duden Dictionary and Thesaurus*.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

1. How does the novel represent the power of words?
2. Why does Max have to leave the Hubermanns'?
3. Analyze Liesel's relationship with books.
4. Describe Liesel's relationship with Rudy.
5. Discuss the authorial voice and perspective.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

Identify speakers of quotations.

- _____ 1. You filthy pig!
- _____ 2. You can certainly write. You write well.
- _____ 3. He's dead and it's pathetic that you sit here shivering in your own house to suffer for it.
- _____ 4. With a smile like that, you don't need eyes.
- _____ 5. Could you go up and tell me how the weather looks?
- _____ 6. Wanting more is our fundamental right as Germans.
- _____ 7. Four gold medals. Like Jesse Owens back in '36.
- _____ 8. I'll stop spitting on your door, and I'll give you my coffee ration.
- _____ 9. I mailed my letters.
- _____ 10. If we gamble on a Jew, I would prefer to gamble on a live one.
- _____ 11. Are you a man who likes to keep a promise?
- _____ 12. I am haunted by humans.
- _____ 13. Eight cigarettes per book.
- _____ 14. There were stars. They burned my eyes.
- _____ 15. How about a kiss, *Saumensch*?

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Provide an answer to each of these questions:

- _____ 1. How old is Liesel when she first arrives in Molching?
- _____ 2. On what street does she live in Molching?
- _____ 3. What is her first gift to Max while he is sick?
- _____ 4. Where does Liesel eventually move after the war?
- _____ 5. Why does Max have to leave Molching?
- _____ 6. What was Max's most notable pastime as a young man?
- _____ 7. When does Liesel kiss Rudy?
- _____ 8. Who has a nervous condition that causes twitching?
- _____ 9. Which part of the newspaper is Max's favorite?
- _____ 10. How does Rosa earn extra money?

Part III: Books (20 points)

Indicate whether Liesel stole, wrote, or was given each book.

- _____ 1. *The Standover Man*
- _____ 2. *The Shoulder Shrug*
- _____ 3. *The Word Shaker*
- _____ 4. *Faust the Dog*
- _____ 5. *The Dream Carrier*
- _____ 6. *The Book Thief*
- _____ 7. *The Whistler*
- _____ 8. *The Mud Men*
- _____ 9. *The Last Human Stranger*
- _____ 10. *The Lighthouse*

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

- 1. Choose five of Liesel's books and provide the title, how she came to possess it, and a brief description of its contents.
- 2. Contrast Rosa and Hans Hubermann.
- 3. Compare Liesel and Max.
- 4. Discuss the author's use of figurative language and provide examples.
- 5. Analyze the narrator's asides and insertions.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY TEST

1. d
2. a
3. b
4. d
5. a
6. c
7. b
8. c
9. c
10. a
11. d
12. c
13. d
14. b
15. a

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

1. Hans Hubermann
2. Walter Kugler
3. Rudy Steiner
4. Liesel Meminger
5. Rosa Hubermann
6. Max Vandenburg
7. Ludwig Schmeikl
8. Hans Hubermann
9. Ilsa Hermann
10. Alex Steiner
11. Werner Meminger
12. Franz Deutscher
13. Death
14. Adolph Hitler
15. Rudy Steiner

Part II: Fact or Opinion (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true, F for false or O for opinion.

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

Part III: Chronology (20 points)

1. 9

2. 7
3. 3
4. 1
5. 4
6. 2
7. 10
8. 8
9. 5
10. 6

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

1. Rosa Hubermann
2. Ilsa Hermann
3. Liesel Meminger
4. Hans Hubermann
5. Max Vandenburg
6. Viktor Chemmel
7. Rudy Steiner
8. Frau Holtzapfel
9. Liesel Meminger
10. Hans Hubermann
11. Walter Kugler
12. Death
13. Hans Hubermann
14. Max Vandenburg
15. Rudy Steiner

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

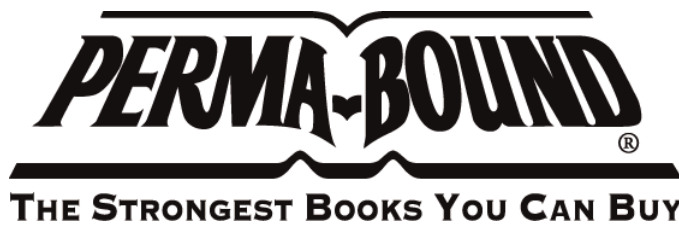
1. nine years old
2. Himmel Street
3. a deflated soccer ball
4. Sydney, Australia
5. Hans gave bread to a Jew, inviting suspicion.
6. fist fighting
7. after he dies
8. Tommy Müller
9. the crossword
10. ironing clothes for more affluent families

Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. given | 6. wrote |
| 2. stole | 7. stole |
| 3. given | 8. given |
| 4. given | 9. stole |
| 5. stole | 10. given |

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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