

number of stars by lois lowry

Introduction to Number of Stars by Lois Lowry

Number of Stars is a profound historical novel written by acclaimed author Lois Lowry. First published in 1990, this poignant tale is set during World War II and explores themes of bravery, friendship, and the struggle against oppression. Through the eyes of a young girl named Annemarie Johansen, Lowry illustrates the harsh realities of war while highlighting the power of human spirit and resilience. The book has become a staple in educational curriculums, teaching younger generations about the Holocaust and the importance of standing up against tyranny.

Plot Summary

Number of Stars follows the story of Annemarie Johansen, a ten-year-old girl living in Copenhagen, Denmark, during the Nazi occupation. The narrative begins in 1943, a time when the Jewish population faces increasing persecution. Annemarie and her best friend, Ellen Rosen, navigate their daily lives amid fear and uncertainty.

As the situation for Jews in Denmark worsens, Ellen's family goes into hiding. When German soldiers come to search the Johansen home, Annemarie must act quickly to protect her friend. She tells the soldiers that Ellen is her sister, thus saving her from being captured. This act of bravery sets the stage for the pair's journey through danger, deception, and courage.

Throughout the story, Annemarie's family becomes involved in the Danish Resistance, working to help Jewish families escape to safety in Sweden. The narrative captures the tension and fear faced by those involved in the resistance, as well as the strong bonds of friendship that endure in the face of adversity.

Thematic Elements

Lowry's Number of Stars explores several key themes that resonate throughout the narrative. These themes include:

1. Courage and Sacrifice

The characters in Number of Stars exemplify courage in various forms. Annemarie, her family, and other members of the resistance show remarkable bravery as they risk their lives to protect their Jewish neighbors. This theme emphasizes the importance of standing up against injustice, even when faced with personal peril.

2. Friendship and Loyalty

The bond between Annemarie and Ellen serves as a central pillar of the story. Their friendship highlights the significance of loyalty and support in difficult times. Annemarie's willingness to protect Ellen showcases how true friends will go to great lengths for one another.

3. The Innocence of Childhood

Amidst the horrors of war, the story portrays the innocence of childhood. Annemarie and Ellen's experiences reflect how children can be affected by the world around them, yet they strive to hold onto their innocence. Lowry's portrayal of their friendship and playfulness serves as a counterbalance to the darker elements of the narrative.

4. The Impact of War

Number of Stars vividly illustrates the impact of war on individuals and communities. Through the lens of Annemarie's experiences, readers witness the fear, uncertainty, and loss that accompany conflict. The novel serves as a poignant reminder of the human cost of war and the importance of empathy and understanding.

Character Analysis

The characters in Number of Stars are intricately developed, each contributing to the novel's overarching themes.

1. Annemarie Johansen

Annemarie is a relatable and courageous protagonist. Throughout the story, she evolves from a naive child into a young girl who understands the complexities of bravery and sacrifice. Her character embodies resilience and determination, making her a role model for readers.

2. Ellen Rosen

Ellen is Annemarie's Jewish best friend, whose life is in constant danger due to the Nazi occupation. Her character represents the innocent victims of war and highlights the importance of friendship and solidarity. Ellen's vulnerability juxtaposes Annemarie's growing courage, emphasizing the stakes involved in their friendship.

3. Annemarie's Family

Annemarie's family members play crucial roles in the resistance movement. Her parents, particularly her mother, exemplify moral strength and commitment to doing what is right, even at great personal risk. Their actions are a testament to the collective effort required to combat tyranny.

4. The German Soldiers

The portrayal of the German soldiers in the novel serves to illustrate the cruelty of war. While some soldiers are depicted as ruthless, others are shown to be conflicted, adding depth to the narrative. This complexity serves to highlight the moral dilemmas faced by individuals during times of conflict.

Historical Context

Understanding the historical context of *Number of Stars* is essential to grasp the full impact of the story. The novel is set against the backdrop of World War II and the Holocaust, during which millions of Jews were persecuted and murdered by the Nazi regime.

The Holocaust

The Holocaust was a period of horrific genocide, where the Nazi government sought to exterminate the Jewish population in Europe. Denmark, while initially vulnerable, became known for its efforts to protect its Jewish citizens. In 1943, the Danish Resistance organized an operation to help Jews escape to neutral Sweden, saving around 7,200 lives.

The Role of Denmark

Denmark's response to the Nazi occupation was notable for its resistance and compassion. Many Danish citizens risked their lives to hide Jewish families, demonstrating a collective moral stance against oppression.

Frequently Asked Questions

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

The main theme of *'Number of Stars'* is the importance of bravery and friendship in the face of adversity, particularly during the horrors of World War II.

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

The main characters in 'Number of Stars' are Annemarie Johansen, her best friend Ellen Rosen, and Annemarie's family.

In what historical context is 'Number of Stars' set?

'Number of Stars' is set in Denmark during World War II, specifically during the Nazi occupation.

How does Annemarie demonstrate courage in the story?

Annemarie demonstrates courage by helping to protect her Jewish friend Ellen and taking risks to keep her safe from the Nazis.

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

Friendship is a central theme in 'Number of Stars', showcasing how Annemarie and Ellen's bond strengthens as they face danger together.

What does the title 'Number of Stars' symbolize?

The title 'Number of Stars' symbolizes hope and the idea that even in dark times, there are still moments of light and bravery.

How does Lois Lowry portray the impact of war on children in 'Number of Stars'?

Lois Lowry portrays the impact of war on children by highlighting their fears, innocence, and the ways they adapt and respond to the challenges they face.

What lessons can readers learn from 'Number of Stars'?

Readers can learn lessons about empathy, the importance of standing up against injustice, and the power of friendship and love.

Is 'Number of Stars' based on true events?

Yes, 'Number of Stars' is inspired by true events and the experiences of Danish citizens during the Holocaust.

What age group is 'Number of Stars' appropriate for?

'Number of Stars' is generally recommended for middle-grade readers, typically ages 9 to 12, but it can be appreciated by readers of all ages.

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