

Rachael-Joy Cowham
LIBR 260A
Assignment #3
11/1/10

Booktalk for *Number the Stars*

Lowry, L. (1989). *Number the stars*. New York, NY: Random House.

Soldiers are patrolling the town. Food is being rationed. Children are forbidden from running in the streets. It's the time of WWII, and a young girl named Annemarie is helping to secretly rebel against the Nazis with her family, and she does it knowing death could be lurking right behind the next door. Annemarie helps hide her friend Ellen from the Nazis by pretending they are sisters, but when Ellen's family decides to flee, Annemarie must discover a new kind of bravery within herself. When Annemarie's mother trusts her to deliver an important package to her uncle, she must do so swiftly. Will she make the delivery? Annemarie holds the fate of Ellen's family in her hands.

Book Discussion Group for *Number the Stars*

In collaboration with student volunteers, the children's librarian at your library has planned a book discussion group for *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry. Because this historical fiction novel deals with serious issues related to WWII and the unjust treatment of the Jewish people by the Nazis, parental consent has been requested prior to children participating in the booktalk. Registration is required, and the booktalk is limited to 10-15 6th graders who must read the book prior to participating in the discussion. Parents are invited to sit in during the discussion and activities, but it is preferred that they only observe.

This event has been publicized on library bulletin boards, on the library website, through word of mouth to parents who have expressed interest in book discussion programs, and at the local elementary school. The children's librarian has worked closely with elementary teachers to

design the book discussion group in such a way that it supplements current history curriculum. Fliers and announcements will include the booktalk that the librarian has written specifically for this event. The announcements are designed to reveal the sensitive nature of the program, but to also highlight the important educational benefits children will gain. Themes such as friendship, prejudice, death, family, and bravery will be explored, as well as many others. The format the program will follow is:

1. Introductions
2. Group discussion
3. Planned group activities
4. Conclusion and snack
5. Exploration of similar novels

Participant Introductions

To begin the discussion group, the children's librarian will introduce herself and the volunteers who will be assisting during the planned activities. The librarian will convey the seriousness of the book's theme to the group, and she will establish the rule that all comments are to be taken seriously. Parents will be reminded that they are observers, and to refrain from making comments during the discussion. Parents will be allowed to talk with children during the activity segment. The librarian will share her reactions to and feelings towards the book, and she will tell the group which character she most identified with. Next, the librarian will allow the children to do the same, one at a time. Once all the children have had the opportunity to share their initial reactions and which character they most identify with, the librarian will begin to lead the discussion.

Discussion Questions for *Number the Stars*

1. Consider the title, *Number the Stars*. What does the title mean to you and how do you think it relates to the story?
2. What do you think uncle Henrick meant when he said “It is easier to be brave if you don’t know everything.” (p. 76)
3. In what ways do you think Annemarie showed bravery?
4. Why do you think the Nazis were unsuccessful in changing the way the Danes thought about or treated the Jews?
5. Think about the excerpt from the letter written by the young resistance fighter who was captured by the Nazis (p. 137). Do you think we have succeeded in creating the kind of world he describes? Why or why not?

Planned Group Activities

Four activities directly related to the themes presented in the book have been designed specifically for this event. There will be two sessions. Each session will have two activities going on simultaneously, and children will rotate activities during each session to ensure everyone has an opportunity to experience each activity. Volunteers will help the librarian facilitate the activities. Children will be encouraged to participate in each activity, but they may opt out at any time.

1.) Using the Hebrew alphabet

- a. *Instructions:* Children will be given a brief lesson on how to use the Hebrew alphabet. A [YouTube](#) video will be used to help the children grasp the concept. Parents can assist with this activity. Using a printout of the Hebrew alphabet,

children will attempt to spell their names. Children have the option of making name bookmarks, desk name tags for school, or something more elaborate to take home to display on the refrigerator, wall, or bedroom door.

- b. *Materials:* Hebrew alphabet printouts from the Web; construction paper; scissors and glue sticks; markers, colored pencils, and/or crayons; projector screen to show video. Approximate cost \$10

2.) *Friendship Bracelets*

- a. *Instructions:* Children will make beaded friendship bracelets in groups of 3-4. A variety of beads of different shapes and colors will be scattered on the table. Children can make any design they like. The idea is to make the bracelet for someone else, a friend, who will wear it in honor of the friendship the two children share.
- b. *Materials:* beads; yarn; scissors. Approximate cost \$10

3.) *Locate Denmark and Sweden*

- a. *Instructions:* Using the world map mural on the wall, children will try to locate Denmark and Sweden to establish a sense of the journey the Denmark Jews had to make during their escape.
- b. *Materials:* no extra materials needed. Approximate cost \$0

4.) *Hide a Friend*

- a. *Instructions:* Participants will devise a plan to hide a friend who is trying to escape from danger. In groups of 2, participants will outline their plan and then have the opportunity to share it with the group.
- b. *Materials:* Paper and pencils. Approximate cost \$0

Conclusion of Discussion Group

To conclude the afternoon's activities, a traditional Jewish dessert will be offered for everyone to enjoy. Apple juice and water will also be provided. The librarian will share the history of the Jewish Apple Cake. Participants are encouraged to share any thoughts they have about the program at this time. Parents are welcome to share their thoughts as well. While participants are enjoying their treat, the librarian will book talk four different books that are also about WWII that the children might be interested in reading.

Booktalks for Additional Historical Fiction Novels

(Theme, WWII)

Adler, D. A. (2008). *Don't talk to me about the war*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

What is it with girls, anyways? They think they know everything. Well, in this story, Beth knows a lot about what's going on in the war because she reads the newspapers every day, and Tommy is only concerned about baseball. That is, until his mother becomes ill and he must find the strength to cope and help with chores around the house. How can a 13-year-old boy be expected to do the grocery shopping when he wants to play baseball with his friends? As Tommy and Beth build their friendship, Tommy comes to realize that there are more important things in life than baseball. Like the fact that Sarah, who fled from Germany, doesn't know if some of her family members are still alive, and whether his mother will ever be normal again.

Cheaney, J. B. (2005). *My friend the enemy*. New York, NY: Random House.

Two years after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hazel is still trying to figure out why her life has changed so much. People are different, they act different, some look different, and she can't explain why. One of her neighbors, Jed, has left home and joined the Marines to fight in the war. And even though Hazel's imagination still takes her places far away, like when she fantasizes about being a secret agent as she plays freely in her neighborhood, nothing could have prepared

her for what she discovers about Jed's parents. As Hazel forms a new and unexpected friendship, she soon realizes why some people have to fight so hard to survive.

Peck, Richard. (2007). *On the wings of heroes*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

For Davy Bowman, life during 1940 was perfect. He had his family, his friends, and lots of adventures to keep him busy like evening games of tag that his dad loved to join in on. Suddenly, WWII hits, changing Davy's life forever. His brother has left home to drop bombs on the enemy and Davy's days are now filled with air raid drills, scrap drives, ration cards, and shotgun encounters. And don't forget about the blue star kept in the window that let's everyone know someone in his family has gone to fight in the war. How will Davy adjust to this new circumstance? Will he hold on to humor? Or give in to despair? And what about his brother? There have been stories of soldiers not returning home.

Schmidt, G. (2001). *Mara's stories: Glimmers in the darkness*. New York, NY: Square Fish.

Jewish prisoners of concentration camps can do little to feed their souls the hope needed to survive the brutal conditions they are forced to endure. Mara is like the mother to all who are housed in her barrack. Each night, she speaks to God and asks Him to lend her a story to share with the children. As the children gather around, some sitting on her lap, others grasped by their own mothers, the cold, dirty barrack is transformed into a pleasant and tolerable place, if only for a moment. Mara's stories are filled with violinists, clever farmers, and forgiving Rabbis, and the characters she describes are like so many people they have all known before.

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