

# THE BOOK THIEF

## By Markus Zusak

### Author Information

Markus Zusak, age 32, currently lives in Sydney, Australia. In his free time, he enjoys surfing and playing soccer.

When Marcus was growing up, he wanted to be a house painter like his father. He soon realized he had a talent for knocking things over, painting himself into corners and figured out painting bored him. When he was a teenager, he read a few novels that really brought him into their worlds. He decided he wanted to become a writer. He wrote his first book at age 16, but it took many years before he could get a publisher interested. He was glad he had so many rejections and failures. They made him realize that what he was writing just wasn't good enough – so he had to improve what he was doing.

When it comes to writing, Mr. Zusak has two routines. He said the first one is the non-lazy routine. He begins working at 7am and aims to finish by 11:30am. That usually sees him though until 12 or 12:30 (with a bit of time-wasting in between). Then he takes a long break and writes for a few more hours in the afternoon. The lazy routine usually starts at 10am and he usually writes longer in the afternoon. The only time these routines change is when he is starting a new book or ending one. He then chooses to work more at night.

Mr. Zusak grew up hearing stories about Nazi Germany, about the bombing of Munich and the Jews being marched through his mother's small German town. He always knew it was a story he wanted to tell.

He is an award-winning author of five books for young adults: *The Underdog*, *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*, *Getting the Girl*, *I am the Messenger*, and *The Book Thief*.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the effect of having Death serve as the narrator?
2. What is the significance of colors in the book?
3. Rosa is described as "her face was decorated with constant fury." (p. 33)
4. What made Rosa so angry?
5. How was Hans "worth a lot." ? (p. 34)
6. How would the story have been different if Liesel didn't keep having nightmares about her brother?
7. Why was Rosa a good woman for a crisis?
8. Who is your favorite character? Why?
9. In the book there are many, many instances of courage. If you can, choose which act (and by whom) best illustrates courage?
10. In the novel, words have the power to both destroy and save lives. Discuss.
11. How did the key come to be in Max's copy of MEIN KAMPF?
12. Do Max and Liesel end up together? (I think they did, because... "In her final visions, she saw her three children, her grandchildren, her husband, and the long list of lives that merged with hers. Among them, lit like lanterns, were Hans and Rosa Hubermann, her brother, and the boy whose hair remained the color of lemons forever." If Max hadn't already been mentioned (her husband?), she would have mentioned him as one of the lives lit like lanterns.)

## Activities

These activities are inspired by happenings in the books or repeated themes. Some of them would be programs where you might have a speaker come and talk but others are something that the students could actively participate in.

### Accordions -

Han's accordion figures prominently in the story, it's how he meet's Max's father, how he earns money once he can no longer get jobs painting and it is even present after his death. You might want to contact a musician who plays the accordion to speak about the instrument and even play pieces of a German origin.

### Altered Books –

Max paints over the pages of *Mein Kampf* in order to write his own story for Leisel. There are several books about altering books for artistic purposes. This program could also be expanded to scrapbooking, the production of 'zines, and journaling.

*Altered books workshop: 18 creative techniques for self-expression*

Bev Brazelton  
North Light c.2004  
1581805357

*The art of fabric books: innovative ways to use fabric in scrapbooks, altered books and more*

Jan Bode Smiley  
C&T, c. 2005  
1571202811

*Visual chronicles: the no-fear guide to creating art journals, creative manifestos & altered books*

Linda Woods and Karen Dinino  
North Lights, c. 2006  
1581807708

*Whatcha mean, what's zine?: the art of making zines and mini comics*

Mark Todd and Esther Pearl Watson  
Graphia/Houghton Mifflin, c. 2006  
0618563156

### Books –

Books are a focal point of Liesel's life. Students could begin a reader's journal or even a reader's biography where they reflect on the books that they've read and how they have had an effect on their life.

### Color –

Color is a reoccurring theme in Death's narration of the story. This would be a great time to study the color wheel, the meaning of different colors, even doing color analysis on what colors complement a person. In just the Lincoln City Library's catalog, there are 86 entries for color from *Color decoder: unlock your physical, spiritual and emotional potential* to *Science experiments with color*. Or you could talk about different cultures use of color i.e. in Japan, at a funeral, people wear white. The possibilities are endless...

### Death –

Death says that our image of the grim reaper with a dark hood and scythe is incorrect. This would be a great opportunity to look at the different personifications of death or cultural perceptions of death. Neil Gaiman's comic series, *Sandman*, portrays Death as a young woman. You could even have your local undertaker come and talk about the preparation of the body, etc.

### Poetry –

Death's narrations verge on poetry. Students could be encouraged to write or share their own poetry. You could host an open mike night where students could read their poetry. Or students could share their favorite poems even if they were by someone else.

### Storytelling –

Much of the story in *The Book Thief* is told through stories – Han's experiences during the First World War, Max's boxing "career" before he went into hiding, Death's asides as he gives the reader a glimpse of how the war is keeping him extra busy in addition to his regular duties. Students could gather family stories and practice the art of storytelling, whether they are family stories or traditional ghost stories.

### Sports –

There is a lot of athletic activity in *The Book Thief*. Rudy is obsessed with Jesse Owens, both Leisel and Rudy play soccer and Max boxed in his past and dreams of battling the fuhrer.

### Boxing –

Nebraska has a boxing association. You could contact them to see if there is anyone in your area who could talk/demonstrate boxing.

#### Nebraska Athletic Commission

<http://www.athcomm.state.ne.us/amclubapp.html>

#### Nebraska Boxing Association

<http://www.usaboxing.org/730.htm>

### Running –

Nebraska has a strong running community and there is probably a runner in your community that would love to talk about running – or you could talk to your track coach. If you need help, you could call or email Ann Ringlein; she manages The Lincoln Running Company and is the assistant coach of the Nebraska Wesleyan University's cross country teams and I think she knows almost every runner in Nebraska. Her phone number is 474-4557 (work), 477-7335 (home) and her email is **rr05816@alltel.net**

### Soccer-

Soccer has become huge in the last few years. There may be a team or a coach in your community that could talk about soccer and its history. There is a Nebraska State Soccer Association; you could contact them for coaches in your area.

#### Nebraska State Soccer Association

<http://www.nebraskasoccer.org/>

### 1936 Olympics –

The 1936 Olympics has also been called the Nazi Olympics; Hitler planned on using the Olympics to further his fascist propaganda. There is an online version of an exhibition created by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC that was on display at the Museum from July 1996 - June 1997.

<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/olympics/>

### World War II –

If your community has any World War II veterans, they could come and talk about their experiences during the war. Even if they're not veterans, they could talk about the rationing system and how everyone pitched in to help with the war effort. Students could interview their grandparent or in some cases, great grandparents, to see what did they do during the war. It was a time in history that changed the United States; some argue that it pulled us out of the depression, it put women in the workforce and in the end, the United States emerged as a super power.

## Other Books By Markus Zusak

*Fighting Ruben Wolfe* c. 2000

*Getting the girl* c. 2003

*I am the messenger* c. 2005

## Companion Books

### Fiction

Adlington, L. J. *The diary of Pelly D.*

Bernstein, Sara Tuvel. *The seamstress : a memoir of survival.*

Bloor, Edward. *London calling.*

Boyne, John. *The boy in the striped pajamas : a fable.*

Bruchac, Joseph. *Code Talker : a novel about the Navajo Marines of World War Two.*

Chambers, Aidan. *Postcards from no man's land.*

Chotjewitz, David. *Daniel half human : and the good Nazi.*

Disher, Garry. *The divine wind : a love story.*

Friedman, D. Dina. *Escaping into the night.*

Glatstein, Jacob, 1896-1971. *Emil and Karl.*

Greene, Bette. *Summer of my German soldier.*

Gwaltney, Doris. *Homefront.*

Hegi, Ursula. *Stones from the River.*

Hughes, Dean. *Soldier boys.*

Hunter, Bernice Thurman. *The girls they left behind.*

Isaacs, Anne. *Torn thread.*

Kadohata, Cynthia. *Weedflower.*

Klages, Ellen. *The green glass sea.*

Kositsky, Lynne. *The thought of high windows.*

Morpurgo, Michael. *The amazing story of Adolphus Tips.*

Napoli, Donna Jo. *Stones in water.*

- *Fire in the hills.*

Patneude, David. *Thin wood walls.*

Pausewang, Gudrun. *Traitor.*

Peck, Richard. *On the wings of heroes.*

Peet, Mal. *Tamar.*

Ruby, Lois. *Shanghai shadows.*

Salisbury, Graham. *Eyes of the emperor.*

- *House of the red fish.*

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I: a survivor's tale : my father bleeds history*. (graphic novel)  
• *Maus II: a survivor's tale: and here my troubles began*. (graphic novel)

Spinelli, Jerry. *Milkweed*.

Tunnell, Michael O. *Brothers in valor : a story of resistance*.

Watkins, Yoko Kawashima. *So far from the bamboo grove*.

Whelan, Gloria. *Burying the sun*.

Wolf, Joan M. *Someone named Eva*.

Wolff, Virginia Euwer. *Bat 6*.

Wulffson, Don L. *Soldier X*.

### Nonfiction

Altman, Linda Jacobs. *The Jewish victims of the Holocaust*.  
• *The Holocaust, Hitler, and Nazi Germany*.

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. *Hitler Youth: growing up in Hitler's shadow*.

Bradley, Catherine. *Hitler and the Third Reich*.

Dvorson, Alexa. *The Hitler Youth: marching toward madness*.

Forman, James D. *Nazism*.

Freeman, Charles. *The rise of the Nazis*.

Gottfried, Ted. *Martyrs to madness : the victims of the Holocaust*.  
• *Nazi Germany : the face of tyranny*.  
• *Children of the slaughter : young people of the Holocaust*.

Halleck, Elaine. *Living in Nazi Germany*.

Heyes, Eileen. *Children of the swastika*.

Keeley, Jennifer. *Life in the Hitler Youth*.

Lace, William W. *The Nazis*.

Rice, Earle. *The fall of the Third Reich : demise of the Nazi*.

Richardson, Nigel. *How and why: the Third reich*.

Sherrow, Victoria. *Smoke to flame : September 1935 - December 1938*.

Shuter, Jane. *Life and death in Hitler's Europe*.  
• *Resistance to the Nazis*.

Soumerai, Eve Nussbaum. *A voice from the Holocaust*.

Williamson, David. *The Third Reich*.

## WEBSITES

### Markus Zusak

<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/markuszusak/>

Information about the author and his works

### Reading Guide for *The Book Thief*

[http://www.bookbrowse.com/reading\\_guides/detail/index.cfm?book\\_number=1755](http://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides/detail/index.cfm?book_number=1755)

### A Study Guide for *The Book Thief*

<http://www.perthfestival.com.au/files/events/OB-TeachersNotes1.pdf>

18 pages of activities

### *The Book Thief*

<http://sherid.wordpress.com/2006/11/18/the-book-thief-by-marcus-zusak/>

A review; Links to an NPR broadcast and ABC News interview with Marcus Zusak

### Marcus Zusak

<http://www.teenreads.com/authors/au-zusak-marcus.asp>

A biography and interview

### Wikipedia: *The Book Thief*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Book\\_Thief](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Book_Thief)

Plot summary, characters, themes

### Markus Zusak talks about the writing of *The Book Thief*

<http://www.panmacmillan.com.au/resources/MZ-TheBookThief.pdf>

With notes for the reader from Marcus Zusak

### An interview with Marcus Zusak

<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6320417.html>

### Teaching Helps

<http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/childrens/grownups/features/bookthiefteachers.pdf>

### Teaching Guide for Students

<http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/childrens/grownups/features/bookthiefpupils.pdf>

### Random House, Inc.

<http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780375842207&view=tg>

Teaching guide and a conversation with Markus Zusak

The History Place: Holocaust Timeline

<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html>

Timeline of events with links to more information

The Holocaust: A Tragic Legacy

<http://library.thinkquest.org/12663/>

Survivors tell their stories; See a camp, and more

Jesse Owens: Track and Field Legend

<http://www.jesseowens.com/>

Biography, fast facts, achievements, photos, quotes