

White Bird: A Wonder Story

Grandmother Sara tells her grandson about her life as a Jewish child living in WWII France. When the Jewish students at her school are to be sent to a concentration camp, she hides in the school and her classmate Julien rescues her. His family hides her in their barn and Sara and Julien fall in love, but when Julien is caught with Sara's notebook he is killed. This fast-paced, engaging graphic novel does not dwell on the violence and horror of the Holocaust but focuses instead on the characters who display bravery, strength of character, and hope. A useful addition to a literature circle on selflessness, global conflict, and the power of hope and resilience.

CURRICULUM FIT

Does the resource support BC curriculum?

Extensively

THIS PRODUCT SUPPORTS THE CORE COMPETENCIES OF THE BC CURRICULUM:

- Communication
- Creative Thinking
- Critical thinking
- Positive Personal and Cultural Identity
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility
- Social Responsibility

This graphic novel supports the English Language Arts and Social Studies curriculum in the middle grades. The ELA Big Idea "Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world" extends across grades 5-8 and can be explored extensively through this text. In addition, the Social Studies 6 Big Idea "Complex global problems require international cooperation to make

difficult choices for the future," and the content standard, "regional and international conflict," are both applicable to this graphic novel.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USAGE

This text is part of the Wonder collection of stories by R.J. Palacio and provides the backstory on one of the antagonists from Wonder. It would work well as a literature circle offering, perhaps in a themed literature circle collection about resilience, hope, selflessness, or global conflict. Short excerpts of the text could be taken to highlight specific conflicts/ideas e.g. treatment of people during wartime, etc). It could also be added as part of a classroom library or school library, and could be part of a special collection for WWII texts or graphic novels.

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Multiculturalism:

This story takes place in France during the Nazi occupation, and some of the characters in the text have express views that others are inferior because of their race, ethnicity, and ability.

Ability:

Julien is called "Torteau" by the other characters, including Sara. It means crab in French and is used derogatorily to refer to his physical ability after contracting polio during childhood. Other characters call him a cripple and vermin.

Belief System:

The Jewish characters are called Jews by the Nazis and the Nazi sympathizers. They are persecuted for their religious beliefs, regardless of whether or not they are practicing.

Socio Economic:

Julien is teased because his family is poor and his father works in the sewers. Other children make jokes about him smelling.

Violence:

Julien is beat up by Vincent, who also threatens to kill him. A marquisard is shot in front the children. Vincent is killed by a wolf. Julien is shot (along with others) by Nazis in a field. His family is never able to recover his body.

There are also several images depicting people being taken to internment camps, including Sara's mother, and it is mentioned that they are never seen again. There are visuals of German planes bombing villages and the forest.

Ethical:

All Jewish characters are rounded up and either exterminated or detained. The question of Nazi sympathizers and other bystanders being complicit is raised.

Safety:

Julien's family takes in Sara at great personal risk. Anyone harbouring a Jewish fugitive would be killed (as Julien eventually is).

Do the social considerations support, rather than detract from, student learning?

Extensively

SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS COMMENTS:

While there are visual depictions of death and injury, the novel is fast-paced and quickly moves on from the episodes of violence. There are characters who display incredible bravery and resilience throughout the novel, and these acts of bravery and hope are what define this story. The heavy subject matter of the Holocaust and WWII is balanced by the white bird who appears throughout the story to offer hope in many forms. At the end we are to believe it is Julien taking the form of the white bird.

GENERAL CONTENT

CONTENT

Is the resource engaging?

Extensively

Is the content current for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content accurate for the intended curriculum and grade?

Extensively

Is the content timely and important for student broad understandings?

Extensively

AUDIENCE:

Is the content appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

Does the resource provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking?

Extensively

Is the level of detail appropriate?

Extensively

Is the language use appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?

Extensively

The author makes reference to the separation of families at the American border at the end of the novel, creating a connection to current events and suggesting that we still have much to learn about humanity. This text invites the reader to reflect on not just the conflict, but the ability for hope to persist alongside such tragedy.

TECHNICAL DESIGN

Does the resource make effective use of the medium?

Extensively

Is the location of illustrations appropriate?

Extensively

Is the resource easy to use?

Extensively

Is the use of font, text size and presentation uniform?

Extensively

Are extraneous elements/illustrations kept to a minimum?

Extensively

This is a graphic novel with varying panel sizes. The panels change size based on emotion and complexity of events. The illustrator also uses dark and light tones to convey emotion and mood. Most pages have 4-6 panels per page and the dialogue is well-spaced. The font size of the text/dialogue is quite small, which some readers might find difficult.

PRINT NOVEL

Does the text show insight into the complexity of the human condition?

Extensively

Does the text broaden students' experiences and understanding?

Extensively

To what degree is this text stylistically rich?

Moderately

PLOT DESCRIPTION:

Sara recounts her life experiences in France during WWII to her grandson. She shares the story of growing up Jewish in France and watching her life begin to change with the Nazi occupation of her country. One day at school, all the Jewish children are rounded up to be sent to a concentration camp, but Sara hides in the school. Julien, a classmate, finds her and smuggles her home with him. She hides in the family barn and Julien's family takes care of her throughout the war at great personal risk. Julien and Sara begin to fall in love, and eventually Julien is caught with Sara's notebook and killed. Sara survives, is reunited with her father, but maintains a deep connection to Julien's family.

RELATED COMMENTS:

The visuals throughout the novel convey emotion, mood, and attitude of characters. We can see the physical and emotional evolution of both Sara and Julien as their relationship develops. Early on in the story, the increasing presence of Nazi flags creates a sense of disruption and foreboding. The colours used grow increasingly darker as Sara's world shrinks, and it becomes more colourful again as Julien and Sara connect.

GENRE:

Historical

LITERARY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Complex conflict
- Rich Characterization
- Well-developed themes

TYPE:

Graphic Novel

VISUAL HIGHLIGHTS:

Graphic Novel

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

READABILITY:

- At intended grade level(s)

Association of Jewish Libraries - Sydney Taylor Award. A New York Public Library Best Book of the Year. There is an extensive glossary of terms, suggested reading, and a comprehensive bibliography at the end of the novel.

Author/Publisher/Website

Palacio, R. J.

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Recommended Grades & Subjects/Courses

5-8

Evaluation/Record Entry Date

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Subject

English Language Arts

ID

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