

Jewish Book Month Independent Reading List

November 2014 ~ Humanities 6

** indicates book is available in the PJA library*

Descriptions are a compilation of information taken from Amazon.com and personal recommendations.

HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

****Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank***

Discovered in the attic in which she spent the last years of her life, Anne Frank's remarkable diary has since become a world classic-a powerful reminder of the horrors of war and an eloquent testament to the human spirit. In 1942, with Nazis occupying Holland, a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl and her family fled their home in Amsterdam and went into hiding. In her diary, Anne Frank recorded vivid impressions of her experiences during this period.

****Anne Frank and Me by Cherie Bennett***

On a field trip to an Anne Frank exhibit with her class, the sound of gunfire transports Nicole Burns, an American teen, back in time to Occupied Paris where she finds herself the eldest daughter in a Jewish family, even though she herself is not Jewish. When Nicole eventually awakens from her Holocaust nightmare, which includes an imagined meeting with Anne Frank, she becomes a changed person.

****Beyond Courage by Doreen Rappaport***

In a stunning work of nonfiction for young people, award-winning author Doreen Rappaport presents 21 true stories of defiance and heroism in Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II. Rappaport took six years to research and write, including conducting extensive interviews with some of the survivors whose stories are told in this volume.

****Black Radishes by Susan Lynn Meyer***

Gustave, having been forced to move from Paris to the countryside after his parents decided it was not safe for Jews to live in the city during World War II, meets a Catholic girl named Nicole, whose family is part of the French Resistance. While the story starts a bit slowly, it takes an exciting dramatic twist when Gustave takes over her Resistance task when she is sick.

The Boy Who Dared by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

Helmuth Hübener was a German teenager executed for his resistance to the Nazis. In this gripping fictionalized biography, the author imagines Hübener's story as he sits in prison awaiting execution in 1942. The teen remembers how he started off an ardent Nazi follower and then began to question his patriotism, secretly listened to BBC radio broadcasts, and finally dared to write and distribute pamphlets calling for resistance.

Briar Rose by Jane Yolen

Yolen takes the story of Briar Rose (commonly known as Sleeping Beauty) and links it to the Holocaust--a far-from-obvious connection that she makes perfectly convincing. Rebecca Berlin, a young woman who has grown up hearing her grandmother Gemma tell an unusual and frightening version of the Sleeping Beauty legend, realizes when Gemma dies that the fairy tale offers one of the very few clues she has to her grandmother's past.

Daniel's Story by Carol Matas

After witnessing the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, Daniel is suddenly transported, at age fourteen, from his comfortable life in Frankfurt to a Polish ghetto, then to Auschwitz and Buchenwald--losing most of his family along the way. Daniel tells his story through the "pictures" he has; at first real photographs and then the images in his head. Matas creates a convincing fictional account, carefully based on survivors' accounts.

HOLOCAUST LITERATURE continued

****The Devil's Arithmetic by Jane Yolen***

During a Passover Seder, twelve year old Hannah is chosen to open the door to welcome the prophet Elijah. As she does so, she is transported to a village in Poland in the 1940s, where she is captured by the Nazis and taken to a death camp. She is befriended by a young girl named Rivka who teaches her how to fight the dehumanizing processes of the camp and hold onto her identity.

****The Entertainer and the Dybbuk by Sid Fleishman***

Motivated, as he explains in his afterword, to create a personal remembrance of the 1.5 million Jewish children killed in the Holocaust, Fleischman pairs Freddie, a struggling, ex-GI ventriloquist, with Avron, the ghost of one such victim, in a short, provocative tale that balances tears with laughter.

****Hana's Suitcase by Karen Levine***

This book tells the story of Hana Brady, a girl killed at Auschwitz, and how her suitcase came to be a part of the Tokyo Holocaust Education Resource Center. The book alternates between past and present, one chapter telling the story of Hana's childhood in the Czechoslovakian resort town of Nove Mesto, and the next relating the experiences of Fumiko Ishioka, a teacher dedicated to educating the children of Japan about the horrors of the Holocaust.

Hitler's Canary by Sandi Toksvig

In this novel based on the experiences of Toksvig's father, the Germans' 1940 invasion of Denmark sweeps a family into heartrending historical drama. Ten-year-old Bamse yearns to take a stand against the occupation like his daring older brother Orlando. Gradually, though, the whole family sways to Orlando's position--refusing, along with thousands of other Danes, to be "Hitler's canary" and "just sit in a cage and sing any tune he wants."

****The Island on Bird Street by Uri Orlev***

During World War II a Jewish boy is left on his own for months in a ruined house in the Warsaw Ghetto, where he must learn all the tricks of survival under constantly life-threatening conditions.

Memories of Anne Frank by Alison Leslie Gold

This moving story of Anne Frank's neighbor and friend, Hannah Elizabeth Pick-Goslar, recounts the tragedy of World War II through a young girl's eyes. Gold puts into words Hannah's reminiscences of her childhood in Amsterdam and fills in the gaps of what happened to Anne after her diary ended.

****Milkweed by Jerry Spinelli***

In Warsaw in 1939, a boy wanders the streets and survives by stealing what food he can. He knows nothing of his background: Is he a Jew? A Gypsy? Befriended by a band of orphaned Jewish boys, he begins to share their sleeping quarters. He understands very little of what is happening but makes poetic observations of the world around him which are powerfully moving and insightful.

****Stones in Water by Donna Jo Napoli***

Sneaking into the cinema to see an American Western during World War II has grave consequences for Roberto, a Venetian middle-school student who is trapped by German soldiers and transported by train out of Italy as cheap forced labor. Based on true events, this is a story of survival from the worst kind of nightmare.

****Tropical Secrets: Holocaust Refugees in Cuba by Margartia Engle***

see under Immigrant Stories

****Whirlwind by Carol Matas***

see under Immigrant Stories

IMMIGRANT STORIES

****Brooklyn Bridge by Karen Hesse***

Fourteen-year-old Joseph Michtom's life takes a dramatic turn when, in 1903 Brooklyn, his parents turn their apartment into a factory for making teddy bears. The novel portrays the joys and heartaches in the lives of Russian-Jewish immigrants at the turn of the 20th century. Alternating with this story line is a parallel narrative devoted to abandoned children who forge a life for themselves under the shelter of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Bread Givers by Anzia Yezierska and Alice Kessler

This masterwork of American immigrant literature is set in the 1920s on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and tells the story of Sara Smolinsky, the youngest daughter of an Orthodox rabbi, who rebels against her father's rigid conception of Jewish womanhood.

****Tropical Secrets: Holocaust Refugees in Cuba by Margartia Engle***

Daniel, 13, is a German Jewish refugee whose ship is finally allowed entry in Cuba. He meets Paloma, 12, who discovers that her father is getting rich selling visas to refugees and then selling refugees to the Cuban authorities. Together they help hide a Jewish woman and her Christian husband who is suspected of being a Nazi spy. Using a free verse (poetry) style to tell the story, these two young people speak in alternating personal narratives about their intriguing experiences.

****Whirlwind by Carol Matas (note: also available in the PJA library as an ebook)***

Benjamin Friedman, a fifteen-year-old Jewish boy, fears for his life in Nazi Germany. Fortunately, his family is able to escape Hitler, arriving in Seattle in the summer of 1941. The teen tries to settle into his new life but faces bullying because he is German. He is afraid for John, his Japanese-American classmate, and tries to convince his friend and his own family that America is not safe and that they must flee to Canada only to find that John's family is taken to an internment camp.

OTHER TOPICS OF JEWISH INTEREST

****Confessions of a Closet Catholic by Sarah Darer Littman***

Justine Silver's best friend has given up chocolate for Lent, so Jussy decides to give up being Jewish. Jussy's bedroom closet becomes her confessional where she pours out her sins to her teddy bear and takes Communion using grape juice and matzo. But when her beloved grandmother, Bubbe, suffers a stroke, Jussy worries that her religious exploration is responsible and must finally come to terms with who she is and where she fits in.

****The Return by Sonia Levitin***

Levitin's book is a heartrending account of Operation Moses, the airlift of Ethiopian Jews into Israel, as seen through the eyes of twelve year old Desta. Her family belongs to a small community of Jews in dire poverty, isolated in the mountains and terrorized by Ethiopia's communist regime. A dream foretells the arrival of other Jews promising freedom in Israel and Desta and her family are chosen to travel to the Sudan, where they will be flown to Israel.

****The Zig-Zag Kid by David Grossman***

Israeli writer Grossman offers an imaginative new tale whereby the rebellious son of a Jerusalem detective is whisked away by a friendly kidnapper just prior to his Bar Mitzvah.

MATURE/ADVANCED READING

****Annexed by Sharon Dogar*** (note: also available in the PJA library as an ebook)

This novel is written from the viewpoint of Peter van Pels, who is nearly 16 in 1942 when he and his parents join the Franks in hiding in their Amsterdam attic. Dogar "reimagines" what happened between the families who lived in the secret annex immortalized in Anne Frank's diary.

****The Book Thief by Markus Zusak***

At age nine, Liesel Meminger is taken to live in Molching, Germany, with a foster family. The child arrives having just stolen her first book—although she has not yet learned how to read. Across the ensuing years of the late 1930s and into the 1940s, Liesel collects more stolen books as well as a peculiar set of friends: the boy Rudy, the Jewish refugee Max, the mayor's reclusive wife, and especially her foster parents. This WWII story features a unique narrator and captivating poetry-infused prose.

****The Boy in the Striped Pajamas by John Boyne***

Through the eyes of Bruno, a naive nine year old German boy raised by strict parents, the author describes the family's sudden move from Berlin to a place called Out-With in Poland. There a high wire fence surrounds a huge dirt area of low huts and large square buildings. From his bedroom window, Bruno can see hundreds of people wearing striped pajamas and caps. Uncertain of what his father actually does for a living, the boy is eager to discover the secret of the people on the other side.

Incantation by Alice Hoffman

Growing up in Spain around 1500 in the village where her family has lived for 500 years, Estrella, 16, knows that there are secrets in her home. As books are burned in the streets, and Jews from the nearby ghetto are murdered, she confronts the reality that she is a Marrano, part of a community of underground Jews who attend a special "church."

Real Time by Pnina Moed Kass

A suicide bomb attack on a crowded Jerusalem bus is the focus of Kass' tense, terrifying novel told from the viewpoints of the passengers and their families and friends.

****The Summer Everything Changed by Ruth Lercher Bornstein***

Told through diary entries, the author beautifully conveys the struggles of an adolescent Jewish girl growing up in a small town in Wisconsin with the complex backdrop of World War II and anti-Semitism. As a daughter of immigrants trying to fit in, the main character finds truth and meaning in the most unexpected places.