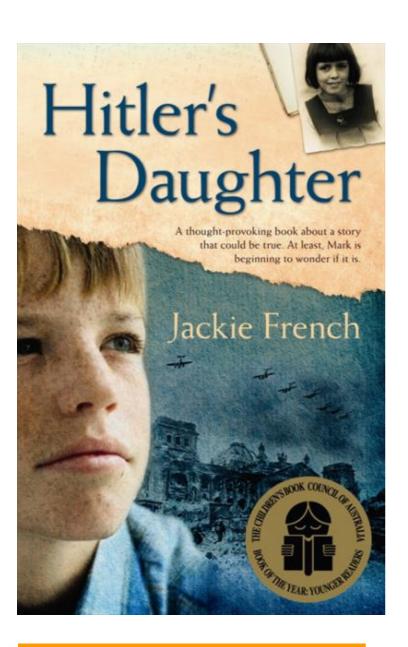


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Hitler's Daughter RRP 16.99

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Notes by: Neil Béchervaise updated by Jacqui Barton

Hitler's Daughter By Jackie French

Book Summary:

Did Hitler's daughter, Heidi, really exist? - What if she did?

The bombs were falling and the smoke rising from the concentration camps, but all Hitler's daughter knew was the world of lessons with Fraulein Gelber and the hedgehogs she rescued from the cold. Was it just a story or did Hitler's daughter really exist? And If you were Hitler's daughter, would all the horror that occurred be your fault, too? Do things that happened a long time ago still matter?

First published in 1999, Hitler's Daughter has sold over 100,000 copies in Australia alone. Hitler's Daughter has also won or been shortlisted for 23 awards, both in Australia and internationally, including winner of the 2000 Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year for Younger Readers. Hitler's Daughter has also been dramatised by the MonkeyBaa Theatre, and in 2007 won the Helpmann award for Best Presentation for Children and the Drovers Award for touring excellence.

Curriculum Topics

Language and Literacy SOSE

Themes

- World War II, Hitler's Germany and Nazism
- The Holocaust and Anti-Semitism
- Displaced People and Refugees
- Australia During and After World War II
- Moral Dilemmas
- Empathy
- Racism, prejudice and intolerance



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BOOK SUMMARY

Mark and his friends often make up stories while waiting for the bus before school. While waiting together for the bus one rainy morning, Mark's friend Anna begins telling her friends a story about a young girl named Heidi who lived during World War II. Heidi was Hitler's daughter, hidden away from almost everyone so that her identity would be kept a secret. Mark and his friends become quickly fascinated by Anna's story, which seems too detailed and realistic to be imagined. As Mark learns about Heidi's cloistered life, her strange relationship with her father, and her growing awareness of her father's plans for a supreme race, he becomes interested in learning more about Hitler and World War II. He wonders what he would have done in Heidi's place, with an evil father responsible for the deaths of millions. At the end of Anna's story, Heidi escaped from the rubble of bombed Berlin and eventually immigrated to Australia, keeping her identity a secret until she finally told her granddaughter many years later.

An Introductory Note

Jackie French's capacity to link questions from the past with questions about the present and future make her one of the more engaging writers in the Australian Young Adult Fiction field. Hitler's Daughter, however, adds another important element for her readers and their teachers. It offers a reflection on the process of narrative development. It challenges the reader to reflect on why stories are told, how they are developed and what purpose they achieve.

Sometimes teachers, as experienced readers, find more in the story than inexperienced readers thought was possible. It is simpler, however, to introduce readers to literary critical awareness with the novels of Jackie French. This is because Jackie, herself, provides the clues and the cues. Does she do it consciously? Sometimes? Does it matter if she does? Yes and no? Ultimately, Jackie French is a storyteller. What literary theorists do with her work is their problem. What teachers can do with her work, however, could help them to better understand how literature works.

The purpose of these notes is to help teachers with what students might learn as emerging readers from well written narratives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jackie French is a multiple award-winning author who deals with a very wide-range of topics. Of her books she says on her website that:

There were over 140 at last count, slightly more than we have varieties of apples. If something is worth doing you may as well go heart and soul and boot leather ... I write for kids and adults, fiction, history, gardening, pests control, chooks and some that must be a nightmare for book shops to work out what genre they are.



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Jackie was the Australian Children's Laureate (2014-15) http://www.childrenslaureate.org.au/

Her website offers further detailed and fascinating insights into her life and work. http://www.jackiefrench.com.au

The Novel as History

Although it is set in a well-known period of European history, 'Hitler's Daughter' is a historical challenge for some readers. Hitler may still be an archetype of evil for adults but Pol Pot in Cambodia and Saddam Hussein in Iraq are more fiendish dictators for many younger Australian readers. As a result, Anna's story about Heidi may be more interesting for its impact on the children of the novel, who are told the story, than as history.

Setting

Once again, the setting for Hitler's Daughter is French's own 'territory', a farm valley somewhere in Australia. Her own home lies in the Araluen valley, on the edge of the southern tablelands in New South Wales. Between Canberra and the coast, it is bordered by national parks and rich in early Australian history. [see Valley of Gold]. It is her 'safe place', where rain, flooding streams, rural bus stops, shiny wet cows and wombats are a part of life. At the same time, it is her laboratory for life. A place where people can dream impossible dreams, contemplate possible

past events, mess up, succeed and, in this case, question the essential goodness and evil of everyday loving people, even their own parents. Perhaps too, it is a laboratory in which an author can play with how stories work, how they are different when written and spoken, and how readers develop critical sophistication as their awareness and experience evolves.

As rain continues to isolate the children of this novel in their crudely constructed bus shelter, it wets the cattle and prompts Mark to consider whether cows sneeze. It also causes the creek to rise, threatens flooding and highlights the tenuous control of the valley farmers over their lives. More importantly, it offers a platform from which spoken stories can be considered, developed and examined with contained audiences who, themselves, can affect the structure of the story.

Structure of the Novel

The story told in 'the game' seems to be controlled by Anna, the storyteller. It is also influenced and shaped by her audience – particularly Little Tracey. Potently, the story can be changed, rejected or even stopped (as it almost is by Ben) if it is not meeting the needs of its audience.

In a parallel story line, Mark becomes aware of the contemporary relevance, of evil, of responsibility for other people's sins or crimes, of how family members affect each other, and how adults don't seem to listen to kids.



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In the interweaving of Anna's story with Mark's story, we see the hand of the author controlling who speaks, when and how. Anna appears to tell the story but her voice always becomes Jackie's author voice because writing is really quite different from talking.

At another level, Jackie's selection of the bus stop kids, waiting for their little school bus, offers a powerful baseline from which to develop the complexity of her narrative. Anna's story of Hitler's daughter (rather than French's novel of Anna's story) seems to be driven, on one hand, by an unstated need to tell a story. It is initially offered as a rainy-day diversion. On the other hand, the story may have come from Anna's grandmother. Anna may have been told a story that is too terrible to believe and too awful to tell. Anna might be telling the story to test it in public, or to share it in a fictional way so she can cope with it better herself. Then again, Anna's grandmother might have been telling a fictional story too. On this third level, readers are challenged to consider the lines between fantasy, fiction and fact. Anna says that it's "Only a story. Just pretend. That's all". Jackie says that she hopes her readers might respond by saying, "Wow! Stories can show even more truth than history books".

As she has done before, Jackie French presents a set of loosely connected narrative elements that will challenge readers growing into their readership as they emerge from the naivety of their childhood.

Adults and Hard Questions

Mark's reflection on what he would feel, what he would do, if his father were truly evil, is a profound development from Anna's apparently uninvolved story in response to Little Tracey's request that they play 'the game' of storytelling.

He has recognised the evil in the world. It is right there on the news but no-one seems to care. No-one seems to be listening. He asks his parents questions but they seem to be too busy to listen. He is fobbed off because he is just a kid. Mrs Latter picks up his question but brings her own biases into the discussion. Mark is not yet ready to deal with statistical arguments. In fact he shouldn't need to. His questions are both simple and they are terrifyingly complicated. It is Jackie's skill as a writer that allows her to move us to the edge of these questions and then back to the Heidi narrative without noticing that the stories are gradually coming together

The narrative structure of 'Hitler's Daughter' appears relatively simple. We move between stories, accept different voices, viewpoints and times without much trouble. The emerging thematic structure is far more complex. As a result, the novel can generate lively classroom discussion about its fictional basis, its historical implications, the development of narrative, responsibility for others and, possibly most importantly, how to talk parents about big issues and real worries.



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Stories and the promise of the book cover

Publishers accept stories from authors because they believe that those stories will appeal to the intended audience. They then work with their authors, through editors, to ensure that writing styles are consistent, vocabulary is appropriate, illustrations are added if they are appropriate, and that the focus of the story remains clear for the intended reader. With good writers, the editor's job may be quite easy. Sometimes it is very difficult.

Publishers also pass these stories to publicists and designers to create a cover design that will attract and excite potential book buyers into buying the book. The cover of this re-released version offers a very different image from the original, so, some of the Student Activities look at discussing the cover, its intention and its impact.

Narrative and narrative construction

As an educational instrument, 'Hitler's Daughter' offers an interesting narrative, an apology for its lack of action and, most importantly, an accessible introduction to the world of narrative construction. Jackie French 'deconstructs' the process of storytelling to show how the author is only one part of a readership team. Stories don't come to life until they have a teller and a listener. Then the teller has to be sure to tell the story so that the listener becomes involved, and then stays involved. Simple stories might satisfy our needs for a story but when we become more involved, we want to know more about the characters. Mark's worries about his father and about evil show how the listener can move beyond the story. Readers develop even more complicated skills and Jackie French helps us to see the various levels a story can work on for different readers.

At its simplest level, Hitler's Daughter is a novel, a story about some kids who hear a story about another kid. The naïve Little Tracey is prepared to become completely engrossed and engaged in fantasy. Ben demands action and is prepared to accept a fictional story based on fact. The most sophisticated member of the audience, Mark is more demanding. He needs a story that is credible. He is prepared to become engaged at both emotional and intellectual levels but he is unwilling to 'suspend his disbelief'. In essence, he is emerging as a critical or discriminating reader.

In the context of storyteller and audience constructed by Jackie French as the novel's author, Anna seems to decide on appropriate narrative content and to determine the development of her stories. She seems to maintain a delicate balance in addressing both her own needs and the demands of her audience. But her audience wants different things and she seems as if she almost decides against trying to satisfy them all. It is French's decision to write Ben out of the novel (for the most part) which allows Anna to tell her story.

In a further complication, Anna says she is telling a story told by her grandmother, 'only once'



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before she died. That might be true — or it might be part of Anna's story. Maybe grandmother's story wasn't true either! The way Jackie has constructed the novel, however, is more important for the reader than for Anna's listeners. If we are to say "Wow!" then we have to be able to think about all the different possible ways that Jackie has brought the story to its ending.

Within all this complication, Heidi's story represents the basic narrative challenge. At this level, Mark is engaged with the enormity of Anna's story itself, with parents' love, racism, disability, hatred, suffering and basic morality. He has an emerging sense of himself as a separate person. He is related to his parents but he is also related to the wider world. Is the world his responsibility? If things go wrong, is he to blame? If they went wrong in the past, should he be saying "Sorry"? Jackie is asking her best readers to sift and separate their way through to Mark's level. To do this, they need to be able to develop the same critical distance that Mark repeatedly shows as he moves from "Sometimes pretending could feel real." to an acceptance that Anna, as both author and keeper of the story, "really thought about things." to a sense that they, as readers, must really think about things.

Jackie, herself, suggests that Hitler's Daughter challenges kids to think about :

- * what duty they owe their parents and family
- * what they can do when they realise that evil things are happening in the world
- * whether someone can be totally evil
- * whether evil can be done with good intentions
- * how much we should sacrifice to right the wrongs of the world.

Using events from far-off times and places, Jackie helps her readers to distance themselves from the power of these questions. Anna tells a story from her grandmother, maybe to test it out with a modern audience, maybe to test it on herself. In the same way, Jackie has told a story for us to test out on ourselves. To ask important questions from the protection of a fictional story.

Working with Fiction in the classroom

None of Jackie French's novels should be seen as a curriculum on its own, nor should they be considered or treated as textbooks. Instead, as I have noted elsewhere (eg notes on 'Valley of Gold'), they offer considerable opportunities for educators to explore the potential for developing integrated syllabus units around rich and accessible texts.

The activities which follow have been designed to use 'Hitler's daughter as a:

• way of presenting information in an entertaining way,



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- starting place for research into history,
- way of helping us understand how stories are constructed, and as a
- means of learning how to enter discussion with adults about difficult problems.

The activities vary in difficulty and there are far too many to be used at a single reading. Instead, it is expected that they will form the basis for revisiting the stories over an extended period. Most importantly, they clearly show that a single book, or even a single event, can be seen as the opportunity for a broad range of learning experiences among readers with a wide range of personal experience and ability.

Student Activities

Storytelling – the game:

Before the story game can start, the audience must agree on a story. Are stories about real events, like a pet dying or friends breaking up more interesting than stories about unreal events? Discuss some of the things that make interesting stories for your group. Write some possible story ideas and test them with a group of your friends. What sorts of things make stories interesting for your group? Is it difficult to find stories that everyone wants to read or hear?

Small group discussion – cover stories:

Book covers help us to choose a book to read. Select several books you have not read and try to tell from the cover what you think they will be about. Which of the books looks the most interesting? Looking at the front cover of Hitler's Daughter, discuss what you think this book will be about. Write down what the group decides. Compare your ideas when you have finished the book. How useful was the cover in helping you to predict the story?

Note making - prediction:

The back cover talks about: Bombs, concentration camps, Hitler's daughter, Fräulein Gelber, rescued hedgehogs, visiting Duffi, and father's bunker in Berlin. Do these things fit together with your ideas from the front cover? How are they different and how are they the same? Make a note of the differences. What do the colours of the cover suggest about the story? Who are Mark and Anna, do you think? Work as a group to write a paragraph about what you think the story will be about.

Storytelling – truth, fiction and 'faction':

Think about what you know about dinosaurs. Do we know what colour they were? What noises



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did they make? Why are they extinct? Tracey asks for a story about a baby dinosaur called Billie. If Anna told this story, could it be true? Consider why some people like to watch films about dinosaurs.

Narrative reflection – fact and evidence:

Mark has an early problem with Anna's story because Hitler's did not have a daughter. Do stories about real people need to be true. Discuss ways of telling a true story when we can't know all the facts. Make a list of some of the ways we can find out whether a story is true or not.

Drawing and photography - setting:

Hitler's Daughter has two main settings, the bus stop at the bend beside Harrison's cow paddock and Heidi's home at Berchtesgaden. Imagine that you have been chosen to make a film of Hitler's Daughter with people from your class to play the characters. Work as a team of 'location scouts' to choose a real place where you could film the bus stop. If you live in the city, could you film your location from angles that don't show the paddocks. Draw the bus stop location or take a photograph of it. Draw a map of the bus stop and use crosses to mark where the children sit or stand. Draw circles on the map to show where the camera would be placed to view the children. If you are using a city location, how will you film the cows? Use lines to show where the camera would point to film your 'shots'.

Word study - Languages:

Fräulein means Miss in German, Frau is the same as Mrs. How old do you think Fräulein Gelber should be in your film. Draw a picture of Fräulein Gelber with Heidi and her father. Can you find any other German words in the story. Make a list of these words and their English meanings.

Narrative reflection - omission:

Anna's story is based on at least one real person but he does not seem to be very close to his daughter or to Fräulein Gelber. Suggest why Jackie French does not give very much detail about him through her story-telling character, Anna.

Drawing and photography - film casting:

The film Sound of Music shows us images of the area near where Heidi lived. Find a photograph or draw what you think Heidi should look like for your film. Write notes about how she should walk and how she should speak. If you were casting a film version of Hitler's Daughter, which of your friends and relations would you cast to play each of the parts? Make a list of the particular looks or talents they have for their roles. Collect photos of your cast and make a poster to advertise the film.



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Play-writing – morality and hunger:

Imagine that you are writing a play to be performed for other people your age who have not read this book. Write a scene between Heidi, Fräulein Gelber and Frau Leib where they talk about stealing food and the reasons for food rationing.

Library research – dialects and languages:

Frau Leib speaks a dialect that is difficult for Heidi to understand. Use the library to research the difference between an accent, a dialect and a language. How many different languages are spoken in your group? How many more are spoken among your parents and friends outside of school? Can you discover examples of accents and dialects? Although language, dialect and accent suggest that people come from different backgrounds, Frau Leib talks so much that Heidi can work out what she means. Discuss ways that telling stories and sharing ideas help us to understand the things we have in common.

Narrative reflection – emotional involvement:

Mark is very upset by Anna's story because he imagines how he would feel if his father was Hitler. How important is it to become involved in the story? Who are you most involved with in Hitler's Daughter?

Music:

Ask your relatives if they have any recordings of old songs from the time of the war. How did people dress when these songs were popular. How different was it to go to school in those times? Make up posters of dress and popular activities that show the times of the songs.

Play-writing – news-selection:

Most stories of war are about people and events that are far away. When Mark's father leaves the radio on after the weather forecast, Mark hears news that sounds just like the stories of the 1930s war. The news might be from Afghanistan, Iraq or Kashmir. It may be from an African or South American country but, for Mark, it is like the news that might have been heard by Heidi or Fräulein Gelber. Write the script for a television news broadcast about war in a place you know well. Consider what the news broadcaster says, what images will be shown and which people will also speak. If your script was broadcast, could viewers tell that this was not a real event?

Whole group discussion - history and fiction:

When Ben hears Hitler's name, he immediately thinks about the famous battles, planes and places. His knowledge comes from a history project he did at school. Because Ben links war with



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action, he is very disappointed with Anna's story. Discuss what we can learn about war from Anna's story that Ben cannot learn from his history project.

Small group discussion – characterisation:

As Anna's war story continues, food becomes scarce and rationing becomes common in Austria. Discuss how Jackie French uses this to show us the very big difference between Heidi, Frau Leib and the people who come from the cities to buy food? Find out about food and clothes rationing in Australia at that time. Suggest why countries might use food rationing

Action planning – food rationing:

Imagine that food supplies to our shops and supermarkets were stopped for more than a month. Where would people in large cities find food? Suggest some ways to reduce the problem.

Crisis and emergency planning – food relief:

Working in groups, write action plans to solve the food crisis. How could your plans be changed for Anna, Mark and Little Tracey if the creek keeps rising to flood the road to Scrubby Creek? Change your plan to help starving people in another country.

Map reading:

Austria has been the scene for many wars during its history. This might be partly because there is a pass through its mountains into Italy. Use your atlas to find the Brenner pass and then use the internet to look up the town that Heidi lives near. If you have internet access, it will help to start at http://www.germany-tourism.de/e/6308.html. Make notes about the history of the town. Discuss whether knowing more about this town changes your enjoyment of the story.

Story-writing – fiction from facts:

Anna says she is telling a story that her grandmother once told her. Think of a story that you have been told by a relative and write down the names of the people in the story, the location (setting) of the story and the main reason you think the story was told to you. Now write the story for a group of your friends.

Story-telling – Facts and stories:

If Anna's story was the truth, could she have told it as a true story to her audience? Discuss how you think Mark, Ben and Tracey would have reacted if Anna said Heidi was really her Grandmother.



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Research and discussion - the construction of history:

Ben is upset that Anna's story has no bombs and planes and battles. Imagine that you were asked to do a project on the Second world war. Visit your library to discover whether your history project would be very different from Ben's. Work with your teacher to discuss how this has happened.

Research and discussion: The authority of truth -

We usually believe our parents, our teachers, our text books, the newspapers and television or radio news. Discuss ways to decide when we can believe the news? Can we ever be sure we are not being told the truth? In another book, Jackie French says that "None of the stories happened but they might have happened'. How can we understand history if we are not sure the stories are true?

Library research – Aryan race:

In Anna's story, we discover the Nazis are killing disabled people and Jews. We know that Heidi has a limp and a birthmark on her face and we know that Hitler wrote a book describing "the Jewish problem". Suggest why we are sometimes afraid of people who are different from ourselves Is this a useful way for us to act with each other? Working as a whole group, discuss what you have learnt about racism from Anna's story and from your research.

Story-writing:

If Anna's grandmother migrated from Germany after the war, she would probably have often left many of her friends and relatives behind. If she really was Hitler's daughter, she could not have told anyone. Discuss how you make friends in a new place. Write a story about being lonely and how you overcome the feeling.

Small and whole group discussion – speaking with adults:

Jackie French suggests that there is truth and lies but there is also 'not asking'. Mark asks his parents lots of questions but no-one seems to listen to kids. Consider how discussing the events in a story can be useful for speaking with adults. How can news and television stories. Working in small groups and then sharing your findings, suggest useful ways for getting answers to difficult questions from adults.

Research and discussion: history and the family -

Some older people still remember the war with Hitler. Speak with older family members and friends about their memories of war. Find out about the times before television and



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supermarkets. Discuss how your findings match with the story that Anna tells.

Small and whole group discussion – judging book quality:

Anna says that her story was "Just pretend." but Mark feels that he has to apologise because her story has really affected him. Discuss the importance of being involved in the story and then suggest how it is possible to judge the quality of a story if you are emotionally involved with it.

Whole group discussion – fiction and history:

In this novel, Jackie French has built a story about a girl telling a story that was told to her by her grandmother about a character who was real with a daughter who might be fictional. Working with your teacher, discuss the ways in which stories are constructed from characters involved in a story-line or plot with a setting. Use the results of your discussions to decide how a story is different from history.

General discussion activities

- Jackie French has now written a number of books about historical events. Sometimes she plays with possible historical stories like Hitler's Daughter. Discuss the ways in which facts can be used to make fiction and how fiction can help us to better understand the way history is written.
- Changing the spelling of our names can make it hard for us to find our relatives. People trying to find out about family history [genealogy] sometimes have to look at alternative spelling to locate ancestors. Find out whether the spelling of your family's names has ever changed. Can you discover the reasons for these changes? If you have internet access, you might be able to trace some of your family history from sites such as:

http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/genelist.html. There are many more internet sites that may be useful for you.

History is about telling the truth of another time and, often, of another place. But whose truth are we hearing? Anna says she is telling a story. Next, she lets Tracey name the central character. Later she lets Tracey decide that she became a teacher. Then she says she has told a story from her grandmother. Can we believe any part of the story as history? How do we decide?



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Literature Circles Questions

Use the questions and the activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading Hitler's Daughter by Jackie French.

- 1. When and where does Anna tell her story about Heidi?
- 2. What about her appearance sets Heidi apart?
- 3. As he hears Anna's story about Heidi, Mark has many questions for his parents and his teacher about Hitler and the Holocaust. What information does he learn through these conversations?
- 4. Why does Heidi have to call Hitler "Duffi"?
- 5. Why do you think Fraulein Gelbert seems uncomfortable talking to Heidi about the Jews?
- 6. One night Mark dreams that he is listening to Hitler give a speech in his town as the raid causes a flood. In the dream, Hitler screams, "You are all Hitler's children!" What do you think this dream means? What does this dream show about Mark's response to Anna's story?
- 7. How do you think you would feel if you discovered that someone in your family had committed an awful crime? How would your relationship change? Would you ever be able to forgive that person?
- 8. Heidi lives a very isolated life without any contact with other children and very little knowledge of the world outside her home. How do you think this kind of upbringing would affect a person?
- 9. After Anna starts her story about Heidi, she acts hesitant to continue. Why do you think this is?
- 10. When Heidi leaves her first home with Fraulein Gelber, she is tempted to leave behind all the dolls that her father had given her "the pretty perfect dolls." Why?
- 11. Why does everybody in Heidi's life seem to think she is a "lucky girl"?
- 12. How does Fraulein Gelber change as the story progresses? Were you surprised when she left Heidi alone in the bunker?

https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/hitlers-daughter-discussion-guide/



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Junior and Young Adult Fiction recommendation – WWII and the Holocaust

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Boyne, John The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas David Fickling Books, 2006.

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[See also Teachers' Notes by Neil Béchervaise

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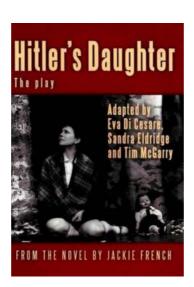
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