

Context
<p>Marcus 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 was particularly inspired by a story his mother told him, which involved a boy giving bread to a starving Jew who was being marched to a concentration camp. A Nazi soldier noticed and whipped both the boy and the Jew. He describes his book as follows: “I always saw the book as a kind of love story, with Liesel at its centre. There’s her love for Hans, Rosa, Rudy, for life itself, and, of course, for books and stories. Each is a different kind of love – and each adds to the person she is, and becomes.”</p>
<p>Adolf Hitler: (20th April 1889 – 30th April 1945) was an Austrian-born German politician who was the dictator of Germany from 1933 to 1945. During his dictatorship from 1933 to 1945, he initiated World War 2 in Europe by invading Poland on 1 September 1939.</p>
<p>Kristallnacht: from the 9th to 10th November 1938, in an incident known as ‘Kristallnacht’, Nazis in Germany set fire to synagogues, vandalised Jewish homes, schools and businesses and killed close to 100 Jewish people. In the aftermath of Kristallnacht, also called the ‘Night of Broken Glass’, 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to Nazi concentration camps. The extent of the violence shocked the rest of the world. Kristallnacht marked the end of any sort of public Jewish activity and culture; after this, Jewish people increased their efforts to leave Germany as they anticipated this was only the start of more persecution to come.</p>
<p>The Holocaust: the genocide of European Jews during World War 2. Between 1941 and 1945, Nazi Germany and its collaborators systematically murdered some six million Jews across German-occupied Europe, around two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population. The murders were carried out in pogroms and mass shootings; by a policy of extermination through labour in concentration camps; and in the gas chambers of death camps.</p>
<p>Book burning: the Nazi book burnings were a campaign conducted by the German Student Union to burn books in Nazi Germany and Austria in the 1930s. The books targeted for burning were those viewed as being rebellious or as representing ideologies opposed to Nazism.</p>
<p>Hitler Youth: a youth group begun by the Nazis in the 1920s; it was intended to create future leaders and soldiers for the country and to instil Nazi beliefs and principles in German children. The group was only for boys initially, but girls were allowed to join in the 1930s. In 1936, he Hitler Youth became compulsory for children over the age of 10. At the annual Nazi party rally in 1935, Hitler stated “He alone who owns the youth gains the future.”</p>
<p>Mein Kampf: Hitler’s autobiographical manifesto, published in 1925. The work describes the process by which Hitler became anti-Semitic and outlines his political ideology and future plans for Germany (translated as ‘My Struggle’). He writes about his youth; the First World War, and the ‘betrayal’ of Germany’s collapse in 1918; his racist ideology; the need for Germans to seek living space (<i>lebensraum</i>) in the East; and the need for Germans to become a master race.</p>

Themes	
<p>The power of words: words and stories hold tremendous value and power in the novel e.g. Liesel grows to understand the power of words, the importance of reading, and the power words can have in changing the minds of others (both for the better and for the worse). There are various book thieves in the novel: Liesel, Max, Death and even Hitler. Words build relationships and offer comfort: Liesel and Hans develop their deep bond through reading. The greatest gift Max gives Liesel in the novel is words in the form of the ‘The Word Shaker’. In it, he suggests that words are the most powerful force there is, indicated by the fact that Hitler uses words to take over the world. His story dramatises the way Liesel has used words to create a refuge for herself in the midst of Nazism, and how Max was able to find shelter in her words too. Liesel uses words to calm her neighbours during the air raids by reading to them, and she gives Frau Holtzapfel some comfort with her private readings to her.</p>	<p>Duality: characters often have two faces, or sides. It is possible to have inner thoughts that do not link to the façade we use to face the world. Zusak suggests in the oppressive political climate of Nazi Germany, many people have to act in secret ways and are forced to hide who they really are. Rudy paints himself black to emulate Jesse Owens - outwardly, he appears to be an ideal Aryan, so much so that the Nazis try to recruit him; inside, he idolises an African-American, which directly contradicts Nazi ideology. Max does the reverse of this when he travels to Molching: he poses as a non-Jewish German, calmly reading ‘Mein Kampf’, while on the inside he is a terrified Jew who finds the book abhorrent. Also, ‘The Word Shaker’ bears the cover of ‘Mein Kampf’, but the pages within are a story of resistance against Hitler’s evil. The Hubermanns lead double lives. They pretend to be law-abiding citizens but they harbour a dangerous secret. Hans explains that Liesel can feel as she likes in the house, but in public she must behave in a certain way.</p>
<p>The kindness and cruelty of human nature: Zusak explores how humans are capable of good and evil, of love and hatred, of the greatest kindnesses and the greatest cruelties. On a smaller level, Ilsa Hermann invites Liesel into her library and Rudy gives a teddy bear to a dying pilot. This is juxtaposed with Viktor Chemmel’s and Franz Deutcher’s treatment of Rudy. More dramatically, the Hubermanns commit a great act of kindness in hiding and caring for Max. They keep him alive at great risk to themselves treat him with love and respect. Given the hatred and violence against Jews at the time, Max finds such kindness to be extraordinary. In contrast, the Jews marched through Molching and the references to Dachau remind the reader of the terrible genocide being enacted by the Nazis. Death observes the horror of war, reminding us of Hitler’s relentlessness and describing moments of horrific destruction committed by the Allies and the Nazis alike.</p>	<p>Bravery and cowardice: there are many different kinds of bravery and cowardice in the novel. Zusak asks whether in Hitler's Germany, it was possible to stand up to the horror of the Nazis and their regime. The Hubermanns’ bravery and humanity is shown in the way they hide Max (just as they take in and provide a refuge for Liesel at the start). Hans shows bravery when he defends a Jewish man being marched through Molching. Liesel’s courage is shown throughout the novel – she survives her own personal loss and grief; she overcomes different challenges; she defends others in different ways. Max leaves the Hubermanns when he realises their lives are endangered. Rudy’s courage manifests itself in different ways: he challenges authority and defends those more vulnerable than himself.</p>

Characters

Death: the **narrator** of the story. Death also **controls** the narrative: he likes to skip around the story's timeline, revealing events to come and then apologising for giving parts of the story away. Death provides **humorous, informative, or dark asides**, but as the novel progresses and World War 2 accelerates, he also expresses **weariness and remorse** about having to collect so many souls. He is fascinated by humans and the colours of the world, but he **struggles to understand** how humans can be capable of ugliness as well as such beauty. He takes a particular interest in Liesel and her story, and he believes that Liesel's story is one of a handful of beautiful stories he possesses – perhaps her fascination with words and her understanding of their power **mirrors Death's feelings** about words too (also, just as Liesel takes books, Death takes souls). Although Death is all-seeing and all-knowing, he describes how he has to do the bidding of many different bosses – these humans like Hitler who exterminate and bring war to others. He is **exhausted by humanity's unwavering hunger for war**.

Liesel Meminger: the protagonist of the story. Liesel changes from an **angry, distrustful** character to one who deeply loves her family and friends. By the end of the novel, she has a **strong personal moral code**, and is not afraid to endanger herself to enforce it. The novel charts her growth from the age of nine to fifteen, but she is also described as an old woman at the end when Death comes to collect her soul. At the start of her story, Liesel is without words and cannot read. She understands that there is great power in words, however, and she hungers for them...and so she becomes the book thief.

Hans Hubermann: Liesel's foster father. In many ways, Liesel is the moral compass of the novel, but Hans is its heart. He is **generous, kind, and patient**. As a father figure to Liesel, he represents **self-sacrifice and the wisdom of experience**. His desire to teach Liesel to read is symbolic: unlike the Nazis who fear and burn books, Hans wants to give them to Liesel to open her view of the world. He is one of the few characters who directly challenges Hitler's regime. He is guided by his **conscience** and he suffers greatly when he feels he has acted in error. He cannot stand to see others in pain, and at times this sense of **empathy** causes him to put himself and his family in jeopardy. But his acts of kindness are rewarded at other times. By the end of the novel, Hans has made peace with his life and his fate, and accepts his death gracefully.

Rudy Steiner: Liesel's best friend. With his blond hair, blue eyes, and athletic and intellectual talents, Rudy is the physical embodiment of the 'perfect' Aryan specimen, but he has surprising **sensitivity and compassion**. He is in love with Liesel, but she isn't the only character he tries to protect: he has a strong sense of **injustice** and will always **defend the underdog**. Rudy embodies **life and vitality**: he loves soccer and winning races. He is **brave and courageous**, but also **mischievous**. He stands up for others. He is **rebellious**, refusing to join in completely with the Hitler Youth, and enjoying the thrill of stealing. Everything about him suggests youthful innocence about the world, until his father is drafted. Once that happens, his character undergoes a dramatic shift. He begins to recognise the effects that political events have on people who are seemingly not involved, and this makes him **angry**.

Max Vandenburg: the Hubermanns' **secret lodger**. When Max comes to hide in the Hubermanns' house, he is **cautious and withdrawn**. He is filled with **rage** towards Hitler, which motivates him to stay alive no matter what. Of all the characters, he most understands Liesel's experience: both have experienced **unimaginable loss**, both are **alone**, both are **fighters**, both seek **refuge** and both see words as a source of **solace and empowerment**. Max writes books for Liesel about all that she has done for him and about how her words and her tears are able to save him and give him strength. His book, 'The Word Shaker', describes how Liesel's words give him strength and have the ability to cut down forests of hatred.

Rosa Hubermann: Liesel's foster mother. Unlike her husband, Rosa is first presented as **cross, cold and impatient**. The story reveals through her treatment of Liesel and willingness to take in Max, however, that beneath her tough exterior she is, in fact, **kind and compassionate**. Still, to the outside world, she remains a cold and harsh woman. She is a **complicated** character, a paradox.

Key terminology	Definition
Foreshadowing	Where the author gives the reader hints or signs about the future. It suggests what is to come through imagery, language, and/or symbolism. It does not directly give away the outcome, but rather, suggests it e.g. <i>"Hans Hubermann was not granted membership in the Nazi Party. Not yet, anyway."</i>
Frame narrative	A story in which another story is enclosed or embedded as a 'tale within the tale'. Death is telling other people's stories – Liesel, Max, the German people etc. – within his own e.g. Death says <i>"Which in turn brings me to the subject I am telling you about tonight, or today, or whatever the hour and colour. It's the story of one of those perpetual survivors – an expert at being left behind."</i>
Metaphor	A type of image when one thing is compared to another thing to help the reader to understand an aspect of the original thing more clearly e.g. <i>"When it crashed, three deep gashes were made in the earth. Its wings were now sawn-off arms. No more flapping. Not for this metallic little bird."</i>
Motif	An object, image, symbol or idea that is repeated throughout a literary work. Motifs help to explain bigger ideas or themes e.g. <i>reading and writing books and the act of stealing</i> appear as recurring motifs. Both of these actions are a way of taking back some control over a world that is largely beyond the characters' control.
Narrative perspective	Zusak uses Death as an omniscient narrator (a voice who sees and knows everything that happens) who switches between first person and a closed third person point of view, describing all the main characters' thoughts and emotions as well as his own. He mostly describes events in Molching during the years of World War 2, though occasionally he flashes forward to relay different characters' fates, and gives a wider perspective about the effects of war beyond Molching. First person narrative perspective: in this point of view, a character (typically the protagonist, but not always) is telling the story. Pronouns such as 'I' and 'we' are used. Third person narrative perspective: in this point of view, an external narrator is telling the story. Pronouns such as 'he', 'she', 'it' and 'they' are used. If the narrator is omniscient, they can be anywhere, at any time, and inside the minds of all the characters. Protagonist: The central character – often the narrator in 1 st person narratives.
Personification	A type of image where a human quality is attached to a thing or idea e.g. <i>It" felt as though the whole globe was dressed in snow. Like it had pulled it on, the way you pull on a sweater. Next to the train line, footprints were sunken to their shins. Trees wore blankets of ice."</i>
Simile	A type of image that writers use to compare one thing with another, using 'like' or 'as' e.g. <i>"...but when I picked him up originally, the boy's spirit was soft and cold, like ice cream. He started melting in my arms."</i>
Tense	A grammatical device used to indicate whether a sentence (or verb) is an action in the past, the present or the future. The novel uses different tenses at different points e.g. <i>"I've seen more eclipses than I care to remember"</i> and <i>"She dropped the book. She knelt. The book thief howled."</i>

HT1 'The Book Thief' - Vocabulary List

Prologue	Definition	In a sentence	Synonyms
Inevitable	Certain to happen; unavoidable.	Hitler's desire for power made war in Europe inevitable.	Unavoidable Inescapable
Omniscient	To know and see everything.	Christians believe in the limitless, everlasting and omniscient power of God.	All knowing Boundless
Sardonic	To mock something in a very grim, dark or cynical way.	She watched the events unfold with a sardonic smile.	Mocking Scornful
Witness	A person who sees an event, typically a crime or accident, take place.	The police are appealing for witnesses of the accident to come forward.	Observer Onlooker
Part One	Definition	In a sentence	Synonyms
Admonish	To warn or reprimand someone firmly.	My mother admonished me for not completing my homework.	Scold Rebuke
Affable	Friendly, good natured or easy to talk to.	My sister is an affable character.	Amiable Cordial
Authoritarian	Favouring or enforcing strict obedience to authority at the expense of personal freedom.	She raised her children in an authoritarian way.	Strict Tyrannical
Remnant	A small remaining quantity of something.	The trees are remnants of the huge woods that once covered this area.	Remains Trace
Part Two	Definition	In a sentence	Synonyms
Fervent	Having or displaying a passionate intensity.	The family were fervent football supporters.	Passionate Avid
Perpetual	Never ending or changing.	The country was in a perpetual state of war.	Continuous Eternal
Precarious	Not securely in position; dangerously likely to fall or collapse.	She was in a precarious situation.	Dangerous Perilous
Trepidation	A feeling of fear or agitation about something that may happen.	She waited in fear and trepidation about what lay on the other side of the door.	Fear Dread
Part Three	Definition	In a sentence	Synonyms
Despondent	In low spirits from loss of hope or courage.	The team grew more despondent after each defeat.	Disheartened Dispirited
Discriminatory	Making a distinction between people based on their differences such as ethnicity, gender, age or disability.	It is against the law for workplaces to have discriminatory practices in place.	Unjust Unfair

Emaciated	Abnormally thin or weak.	The children were extremely emaciated from the lack of food provided at the orphanage.	Thin Gaunt
Unwavering	Steady or resolute; determined.	Her eyes fixed on him with an unwavering stare; she was ready.	Steady Firm
Part Four	Definition	In a sentence	Synonyms
Fretful	Feeling or expressing distress or irritation.	The baby cried with a fretful whimper.	Distressed Anxious
Ideology	A system of ideas and ideals.	The ideology of democracy is demonstrated in the United Kingdom.	Beliefs Principles
Incomprehensible	Not able to be understood.	His writing was incomprehensible.	Indecipherable Incoherent
Paternal	Of or relating to a father.	He showed his paternal side.	Fatherly Parental