

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Behind the Bedroom Wall

by
Laura E. Williams

Book Information

Laura E. Williams, Behind the Bedroom Wall
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Korinna must decide whether to report her parents to her Hitler youth group when she discovers that they are hiding Jews in a secret space behind Korinna's bedroom wall.

Award: Benjamin Franklin Award/Nominee; Jane Addams Book Award/Honor Books

Topics: Countries/Regions, Germany; History, Holocaust; People, Jewish; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks

Main Characters

Eva Korinna's friend

Frau Rehme Korinna's mother

Herr Rehme Korinna's father

Korinna Rehme the main character, a thirteen-year-old girl growing up during World War II in Hitler's Germany and active in the local Nazi youth group

Rachel Krugmann Sophie's five-year-old daughter

Rita Damerau Korinna's best friend, whose brother is a member of the Gestapo

Sophie Krugmann the Jewish woman hiding with her daughter behind the wardrobe in Korinna's room

Vocabulary

danke "thank-you" in German

Fuhrer leader; refers to Adolf Hitler, the German Nazi dictator

Gestapo the secret state police of Nazi Germany

Schrank a wardrobe or piece of furniture used to hang clothes

Synopsis

Korinna and her friends are returning from a Nazi youth group meeting when they see the butcher being beaten and arrested by the Gestapo. He is accused of helping Jews. Korinna feels that despite the brutality she witnessed, Hitler's plan to rid Germany of Jews is the right way to make Germany great again.

When she accidentally discovers that her parents are hiding a Jewish mother and daughter behind her bedroom wall, Korinna is outraged and feels it is her duty to report the situation to the authorities. The Jewish woman asks her not to report her parents if she loves them. Faced with a huge dilemma, Korinna still feels that reporting them is the right thing to do.

A series of events cause Korinna to doubt her strong anti-Jewish beliefs. Rachel, the five-year-old Jewish girl, openly admires Korinna's blond hair and Korinna feels reluctantly drawn to the child. Then the Gestapo searches the house and hits Herr Rehme for trying to protect some personal photographs. Later Korinna is slapped by her Nazi group leader in front of the group for something she felt was minor. Her world is coming apart.

In the end, she is turned in to the authorities by her best friend and learns that the Gestapo is going to search her house again. When she tells her parents, she learns that the Jews behind the wall have moved on and that Korinna is to escape with her family after dark. Before they can escape, the Gestapo arrives to search. They find the room behind the wall, but Korinna has decorated it with items from her youth group and says it is a shrine to the National Socialist Party. Her heroic actions do not fully convince the Gestapo, but they leave long enough for the family to flee.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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Initial Understanding

How could Korinna believe that "getting rid of the Jews" was a good thing for Germany?

Hitler was re-writing the history books and telling lies about what was happening to the missing Jews. The young people were active in the Nazi youth organizations and being taught that Hitler was going to make Germany strong again. Korinna believed that the Jews were happier in a new place.

Initial Understanding

What lessons can we learn from this story?

Freedom is the most important thing in life. Without it a person has nothing. It is important to see people as people and not as stereotypes.

Literary Analysis

Why did the author tell the story from the perspective of a Nazi German girl who loved Hitler?

She wanted to show how children could get so involved in the youth groups that they reported to the group leaders anyone they thought was an enemy to the country. Hitler made many promises to the citizens who were living in a depression. He gave them hope and convinced them that everything he was doing, even if it seemed bad, was for the greater glory of Germany.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story is set during World War II in Germany. Germany has had a tumultuous history. Students can study of the changes and the reasons for them. For example, the Treaty of Versailles contained harsh restrictions that Germany had to agree to as conditions of its surrender at the end of World War I. A post-war depression opened the way for Hitler to take control of Germany. After World War II, Germany was divided into two states. The role of two Germanys in world politics was greatly reduced, but West Germany remained a major economic power. On November 9, 1989, the

Berlin Wall was opened and the two republics reunited officially on October 3, 1990.

Understanding Literary Features The main themes for *Behind the Bedroom Wall* are peer pressure and the importance of freedom. Sophie and Rachel had not done anything wrong, but were being hunted like criminals. Their only "crime" was being Jewish. They were hated for their religion. Unfortunately, there are many other examples in history where people were hated for their religion, race, creed, and/or color. Ask the students to describe other examples of discrimination and how they were handled. Some examples are the Civil Rights Movement in the Sixties, America's treatment of Native Americans, and the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. Korinna was active in her Nazi youth group. She enjoyed the meetings because they were fun and everyone was nice to her. The leaders taught the lies that Hitler wanted the people to believe. The young people were used to persecute Jews and those that helped or were sympathetic to them. Have the students discuss the power of peer pressure on their lives and/or how advertising affects what they ask their parents to buy. The television has a powerful effect on what the students believe and feel. Ask them what they would have done the same or differently if they had been Korinna or any youth during the time frame.

Understanding Characterization The story can be compared to *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which tells the story from the perspective of a Jewish girl in hiding. Or the movie *The Sound of Music* could be used to compare the methods of the Gestapo and Nazi followers in both stories. The main characters were not Jews, but people who would not embrace the Nazi philosophy and doctrine.

Understanding the Author's Craft The story was told as a narrative in the third-person. Ask the class to rewrite a section of the story from a different perspective and/or genre of their choice. For example, they could tell it in the first-person as Korinna writing in a diary. Or they could chose to tell it from another character's perspective and

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see how the story would change. Telling the story as Rita, or as Sophie could change the story completely.