

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Summer of My German Soldier

by  
Bette Greene

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### Book Information

Bette Greene, Summer of My German Soldier

Quiz Number: 391

Bantam Books, 1973

ISBN 0-553-27247-0; LCCN

199 Pages

Book Level: 5.2

Interest Level: MG

This extraordinary novel is about an unlikely friendship between a Jewish girl and a young German soldier during World War II.

**Award:** Golden Kite Award/Honor Book

**Topics:** Countries/Regions, Germany; Family Life, Growing Up; People, Jewish; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, Jewish Stars; Wars, World War II

### Main Characters

Charlene Madlee a reporter who befriends Patty

Edna Louise Jackson a "friend" of Patty's

Freddy Dowd a poor boy who Patty has been ordered to avoid

Frederick Anton Reiker a German prisoner of war whom Patty befriends

Grandma and Grandpa Pearl's parents, who care about Patty

Harry Bergen Patty's abusive father

John Pierce and Phil McFee FBI agents

Patty Bergen (Patricia Ann Bergen) a twelve-year-old Jewish girl, the main character

Pearl Bergen Patty's mother, who is more concerned about her weight than about Patty

Ruth Hughes the Bergen housekeeper, who loves Patty

Sharon Bergen Patty's younger sister, who is adored by their parents

Sheriff Cauldwell the sympathetic sheriff

Sister Parker a clerk in the Bergens' store

### Vocabulary

**curlicue** something fancifully curled or spiral

**filthy** disgustingly dirty; foul, obscene

**formidable** exciting fear or dread

**gaudy** ostentatious, tastelessly fine

**grotesque** bizarre

**nondenominational** not related to any particular church

**optimism** an inclination to anticipate the best possible outcome

**resiliency** elasticity

**saboteur** one who commits a destructive act designed to impede the armed forces

**spiritual** a type of religious song

**symmetry** correspondence in size, shape, and relative position of parts that are on opposite sides of a dividing line or median plane

### Synopsis

Some German prisoners of war have arrived in Jenkinsville, Arkansas. Like the rest of the town, Patty Bergen watches their arrival with interest. She also fantasizes about her parents loving her and wonders what she is doing wrong and what she will have to do to bring forth that love.

One Saturday Patty is at her father's store, and the prisoners come in to buy hats for working in the sun. Patty meets and talks to Frederick Anton Reiker (Anton), and likes him immediately. Later she sees him near the railroad tracks, and takes him to her hideout over the garage. His escape has unfortunately coincided with the capture of some German saboteurs, so everyone assumes he is allied with them. FBI agents show up in town and question everyone, including Patty.

One day Patty's father comes home and sees her sitting with Freddy, a boy with whom he has forbidden her to associate. He punishes her by beating her. Anton comes out of the garage to save her, but backs off when she screams at him to go away. Ruth, the housekeeper who loves Patty, has

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seen Anton, and questions Patty the next morning. Patty confesses. Ruth asks her to bring Anton to the house for breakfast. They are startled by a car in the driveway, and Anton realizes that he must leave for their sake. Before he goes, he tells Patty she is a person of value, and to prove it he gives her his most valued possession, a gold ring. She later shows the ring to Sister Parker, and when her father and the sheriff question her about it, she claims an old man gave it to her because she had given him some food.

The FBI agents show up again, but before they get a chance to talk to her she gives the ring to Ruth for safekeeping. Agent Pierce shows Patty the shirt she gave Anton and she learns that he is dead. She breaks down and tells her story and is taken into custody. She is sentenced to a reformatory, where Ruth is the only person who comes to visit her. Ruth gives her back the ring and assures her that she is not the person who is flawed; it is her parents who are. They will never return her love. With Ruth's help, she feels she may survive.

### Open-Ended Questions

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

#### Initial Understanding

Patty had a few outlets she used to escape the verbal and physical abuse of her parents. One was fantasizing about them loving her. What were some others?

*She visited her loving grandparents. She spent time alone in her hide-out. She talked with Ruth. She enjoyed reading.*

#### Literary Analysis

Why might Patty's parents have treated her the way they did?

*Her mother disliked Patty because she was so different from her. She didn't care about superficial things like clothing and hairstyles, and had more depth than her mother. She reminded her father of his mother. He was an insecure man, different from everyone else in town because he was Jewish, and jealous of his wife's family. He felt threatened by Patty's intelligence.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

The author implies that Patty is a bright girl surrounded by people who are less intelligent. Give some examples where this is shown.

*She is a good judge of character. She likes kind people like Ruth, Anton, Freddie, and Charlene Madlee, regardless of their social status. She knows what to say to the FBI men. She reads dictionaries to try to improve her vocabulary.*

#### Constructing Meaning

How would the abuse Patty received from her parents be treated if it occurred today?

*Patty would have more resources at her disposal--teachers and counselors at school and social services in the community. Neighbors and acquaintances would probably contact authorities after witnessing her father's beatings.*

### Teachable Skills

**Understanding Characterization** The story is told in first person from the perspective of a twelve-year-old Jewish girl. Ask the students to pick another character and tell some portion of the story from his or her point of view. Any part of the story would change substantially if it were told by Ruth, or Mr. Bergen, or even Sharon.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** The story takes place in a small town in the South during World War II. Have the students do research on German prisoners of war. Were any brought to

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the U.S.? Where were they housed? How were they treated?

**Making Predictions** The author ends the story on a hopeful note. Write an epilogue from Patty's point of view ten years later. What happened after she was released from the reformatory? What did she do after high school? Keep Patty's characteristics and the time period in which she grew up in mind.

**Recognizing Feelings** Patty says she feels like a good and worthy person after she has, of her own free will, broken faith with her father and her country (p. 104). Ask the students how they feel about this. Do they think she did the right thing? Ask them to think about what might cause them to willingly break faith with family and country. Would the nature of the "breaking faith" figure into their decision? How?