

# Number the Stars

by Lois Lowry

Annemarie Johansen has gotten used to seeing Nazi soldiers on every street corner in Copenhagen, but one terrible night, everything changes. Her best friend, Ellen Rosen, comes to stay with her family, soldiers come in the night and search the house, and then she, Mama, Ellen, and her little sister Kristi go to stay with Annemarie's fisherman uncle, where Annemarie learns the true meaning of courage.

## THEMES

history, family, friendship, war, the Holocaust, responsibility, courage

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## I. PRE-TEACHING

### A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:

stocky, lanky, plodding, contempt, obstinate, sabotage, solemn, dawdled, rationing, haughtily, swastika, distracted, curfew, sophisticated, glowering, disdainfully, carousel, synagogue, clenched, tentatively, mourning, massive, wispy, applied, specter, deftly, dismayed, hearse, gnarled, recurring, staccato, condescending, typhus, latticed, brusque, taut, sleek, caustic, strident, din, deprivation, integrity, cocaine, permeated, idealistic

### B. Before beginning the story, discuss the following questions with the class:

1. What happened to the Jews in Europe during World War II? How did some escape?
2. Where is Scandinavia? What countries are part of it?
3. Why did small countries like Denmark surrender to the Nazis?
4. What does it mean to be brave? Are brave people special, or are they ordinary people like you and me?

## II. PRESENTATION

### A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with chapters 1 - 5: What do the soldiers ask Annemarie and Ellen when they stop them? How do their mothers react when they hear what happened? Why didn't the Danes resist the Nazis? What country is still free? How did Lise die? What has Peter come to tell them? Why has Ellen come to stay with them? What happens in the night? What makes the soldiers suspect Ellen is not Annemarie's sister? How does Papa convince them she is?
2. Advance to chapters 6 - 12: What confuses Annemarie about Papa's conversation with Uncle Henrik? What do Uncle Henrik and Mama talk about that night? Why does Annemarie think this is strange? What does Uncle Henrik say when she asks him about it? What makes the Nazi officer suspicious about the casket? How does Mama stop him from opening it? What is in the casket? Where are the Jewish people going? Where does Annemarie find her mother that morning?
3. Complete the story with chapters 13 - 17: What happened to Mama that night? What does Annemarie find

on the steps? What must she do? What do the soldiers say to her when they stop her? What happens when they find the packet? What does Uncle Henrik tell her that night? How do the Danish people celebrate the end of the war? What has happened to Peter? How had Lise really died? Where has Annemarie hidden Ellen's locket? What does she decide to do with it?

### B. For Discussion:

1. Trace the ways lying is part of the story, from Annemarie and Ellen agreeing not to tell their parents about the soldiers, to the lies Uncle Henrik and Mama tell Annemarie, to the lies she tells the soldiers when they stop her on the way to Uncle Henrik's boat. Why were these lies necessary?
2. As Annemarie wonders if she would give her life to protect the king, she's "glad to be an ordinary person who would never be called upon for courage." How does this foreshadow what will happen to her later? How does Annemarie demonstrate her courage?
3. When they share the lie about Aunt Birte, why does Annemarie feel she and her mother have become equals?
4. Where in the story is the title mentioned? Why do you think the author chose this title for the book?
5. In the Afterword, what does the author say about why she decided to write this story? Which parts are true? Which are fiction? In what ways does the letter she quotes fit the theme of the story?

## III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

#### A. Language Arts:

1. Kristi was fond of fairy tales, especially those by their countryman, Hans Christian Andersen. Have students read these tales and learn to tell them. They might write a play based on one of Andersen's tales.
2. As Annemarie waits in the barn for her uncle, she notices the sounds, smells, sights, and textures of the old structure. Have students listen to this scene and then

write a description of an old building, using details that appeal to the senses.

3. Annemarie uses the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” to help her get through the woods to her uncle’s boat. Have students learn to tell this story. In what ways might this serve as a metaphor for the Nazi occupation?
4. Have students read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and discuss how and why Jews had to be hidden.

## B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select background music that is appropriate to some of the scenes. They might find the song from *Hans Christian Andersen* where Danny Kaye sings “Beautiful, Beautiful Copenhagen,” they might use carousel music when Kristi talks about Tivoli Gardens, and sea chanteys for the fishing village when Uncle Henrick keeps his boat.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. They could use a map of the Scandinavian countries as a background, pinpoint Denmark, use swastikas to mark the Nazi occupation, show the ships waiting to smuggle Jews to Sweden, add a necklace with a Star of David.
3. Have students make paper dolls from magazine pictures and make up stories to go with these dolls, possibly with a group of younger children participating.

## C. Social Studies:

1. Have students learn about Denmark’s history and the history of Sweden and Norway. How did these masses of land come to be different countries? What do they have in common?
2. Have students learn about the Nazi occupation of countries like Denmark during World War II. Which countries surrendered? Which fought to remain free? Why did the Nazis not occupy Sweden like they did Denmark?
3. Have students learn about the relocation and extermination of the Jewish people in Europe during World War II. Why did Hitler order this? How many people were affected? How were others able to escape?
4. Have students learn about the Jewish holidays, their history and how they are celebrated.

5. The psalm Peter reads mentions the “scattered sons of Israel.” Have students discuss the ways the Jewish people were scattered, then find out why, after the Holocaust, the state of Israel was established. Another group might learn why the Arab world has such difficulty accepting Israel.

## D. Science and Math:

1. Have students find out why winters in Scandinavia are so long.
2. Mama keeps the soldiers from opening the coffin by telling them Aunt Birte died of typhus. Have students find out about this disease. Why was the soldier afraid of it?
3. As Annemarie looks up at the sky, she’s amazed by the number of stars. Have students learn more about the stars. How many have been identified and given names? How do the constellations help us recognize them? How many more stars might there be that we can’t see?
4. The Nazis used dogs to sniff out the hidden people. Have students learn about a dog’s sense of smell. How are dogs used today in the fight against terrorism?
5. Scientists in Sweden worked out that cocaine would dull the dogs’ sense of smell temporarily. Have students learn more about the properties of this drug. How does it dull the sense of smell? How does it act on the brain?

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