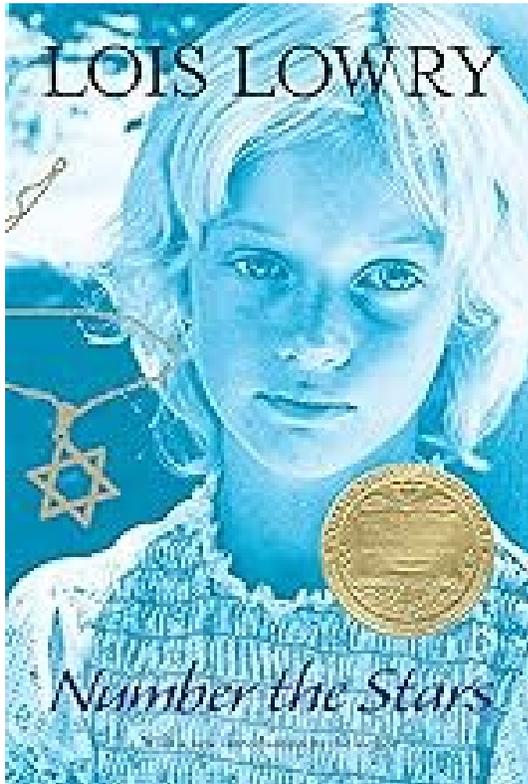


Number the Stars Literature Guide



Number the Stars by Lois Lowry is a historical fiction novel set in Nazi-occupied Copenhagen, Denmark, during World War II. The story follows a ten-year-old girl named Annemarie Johansen, who becomes entangled in the Danish Resistance's efforts to save Jewish families from Nazi persecution. Annemarie's best friend, Ellen Rosen, is Jewish, and when the Nazis begin rounding up Jewish families, Ellen moves in with the Johansens, posing as Annemarie's sister. The Johansen family bravely assists the Resistance by helping Ellen's family and other Jews escape to safety in Sweden. Throughout the story, Annemarie must summon courage and resourcefulness beyond her years as she navigates the dangerous realities of war. Themes of bravery, friendship, and sacrifice are woven into the narrative, highlighting the quiet heroism of ordinary people. Lowry's vivid storytelling and nuanced portrayal of childhood innocence amid grave danger make *Number the Stars* a compelling and thought-provoking read, illustrating the profound impact of human decency in the face of tyranny.

Grade Levels: 4-8

Essential Question:

How do ordinary people find the courage to stand up against injustice and protect others during times of fear and oppression?

Objectives:

- Students will identify and discuss hardships faced by Danish families endured during the Nazi occupation.
- Students will identify and articulate the themes of friendship, bravery, honesty, and resistance as exemplified by the characters in the story.

In this literature guide, you will find:

- Introduction
 - Essential Background Knowledge
 - Visuals
 - Thematic Questions
- Discussion Questions/Writing Prompts
- Vocabulary
- Project Ideas for During and After Reading
- Additional Thought-Provoking Questions

Introduction

Before engaging in the book study on *Number the Stars*, teachers will want to set the historical context of the Holocaust.

Essential background knowledge:

World War II, 1939-1945

Germany, the Nazis

Countries occupied by Nazi Germany during the war

Persecution of Jews and the Holocaust

Resistance efforts, particularly the [Danish resistance](#)

Basic geography of Europe -- proximity of Denmark to Germany and Denmark to Sweden

King Christian X

Visuals to share:

[Map of Europe - modern](#)

[Map of Europe - historical](#)

[Map of Denmark - Zoom in or out to see Copenhagen & Gilleleje, proximity to Sweden](#)

[Amalienborg Palace](#)

[Tivoli Gardens](#)





Map source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Thematic Questions:

These questions may be shared and discussed before the unit and returned to as the novel progresses. They are connected to the main **themes** of the novel and the section questions. They are also included as culminating prompts to consider once students have completed the book.

1. What does it mean to be a good friend? (Theme = **friendship**)
2. What does it mean to be brave? (Theme = **bravery**)
3. Is it ever ok to hide the truth? When might adults hide the truth from children? (Theme = **honesty**)
4. What is an upstander? How are upstanders and bystanders different? Why might someone put themselves or their family in danger? (Theme = **resistance**)

Discussion Questions/Writing Prompts:

Chapters 1-4: Copenhagen

1. Why do Annemarie and Ellen agree not to tell their mothers about the encounter with the German soldiers? How do Mama and Mrs. Rosen react when Kristi recounts their experience?
2. Annemarie remembers a story her father told her about King Christian, King of Denmark. What did the boy mean when he told the German soldier, "All of Denmark is his bodyguard?" What does Annemarie mean when she later tells her Papa, "Now I think that all of Denmark must be bodyguard for the Jews, as well." How does Annemarie feel later, when she is in bed?
3. Why do you think the Danes destroyed their own ships? Why did Papa think the king would be proud?
4. Why do Mama and Papa take Ellen in?

Chapters 5-8: Travel to and arrival in Gilleleje

1. Why does Papa lie to the soldiers? What could have happened if the truth was discovered?
2. Why is Annemarie suspicious of her father's phone call to Uncle Henrik?
3. What is Annemarie starting to realize in chapter 6, after she listens to her father's conversation with Uncle Henrik and hears his references to "good weather for fishing" and "a carton of cigarettes," and in chapter 8, when she hears her Uncle Henrik's comments about "Great Aunt Birte"?

Chapters 9-12: Annemarie learns the truth

1. Chapter 9 is the turning point in the novel. In the following dialogue, Annemarie confronts her Uncle Henrik and begins to uncover the truth about her family's involvement in the resistance. Ask students to explain the following quotes, as their understanding of events also becomes more clear.

When talking to Uncle Henrik in the Barn:

Uncle Henrik: "But it is much easier to be brave if you do not know everything. And so your mama does not know everything. Neither do I. We know only what we need to know."

Uncle Henrik: "Your mama lied to you, and so did I. We did so to help you to be brave, because we love you."

During the funeral:

Narration: "Annemarie had listened and said nothing. So now, I too, am lying, she thought, and to my very best friend. I could tell Ellen that it isn't true, that there is no Great-aunt Birte. I could take her aside and whisper the secret to her so that she wouldn't have to feel sad. But she didn't. She understood that she was protecting Ellen the way her mother had protected her."

Narration (When Mama realizes that Annemarie understands): "They looked at each other for a long time and said nothing. In that moment, with that look, they became equals."

In chapter 10, Annemarie continues to have realizations:

When Annemarie lies to the German officer about Great-aunt Birte: "Now she knew for certain what Uncle Henrik had meant when he had talked to her in the barn. To be brave came more easily if you knew nothing." Explain what has changed for Annemarie now that she knows the truth.

Was Annemarie right to lie? What about the adults? What are the risks? Why would Mama and Uncle Henrik put themselves, and Annemarie and Kirsti, in danger?

Chapters 13-17: Annemarie's bravery

1. Why does Mama not tell Annemarie what is in the packet that Mr. Rosen dropped?
2. When stopped by the soldiers near the harbor, Annemarie remembered her mother's advice, "If anyone stops you, you must pretend to be nothing more than a silly little girl." What does Annemarie say and how does she act? How is it different from when she was stopped by soldiers when running home from school?
3. Why does Annemarie not believe she was brave? How does Uncle Henrik define bravery?
4. What happened to the Rosen's apartment, and those of other Jewish families, after they escaped to Sweden? How does Mama explain it to Annemarie?
5. How does Annemarie show bravery when she asks to "know it all" about Lise's death?

Peter faces terrible consequences for his participation in the resistance. So did Lise. Depending on the maturity of your students, consider a discussion of the possible consequences of resistance -- even if it is morally right.

Vocabulary:

Chapter	Word (page #)	Simple Definition
1	stocky (1)	sturdy and thick
	lanky (1)	tall and thin
	rucksack (1)	small backpack
	plodding (2)	walking heavily or slowly
	prodded (3)	poked at
	obstinate (4)	stubborn, not likely to obey
	hoodlums (5)	troublemakers
	scurried (5)	ran away quickly
	trudged (6)	walked slowly and with effort
	scold (6)	to speak to someone angrily for something they did wrong
2	sabotage (8)	to deliberately damage or destroy
	impassive (10)	blank
	solemn (13)	serious
	intricate (14)	complex or complicated, often small details
	trousseau (14)	set of household sheets, napkins, tablecloths, etc., prepared for a bride before her wedding

3	dawdled (18) scampered (18) rationed (18) haughtily (19) swastika (21) torment (24)	moved slowly, wasted time ran and jumped about limited by the government to save resources -- during a war items such as food, gasoline, or electricity are often rationed acting as if you are better than someone else symbol of the Nazis and Germany during WWII extreme physical or mental pain
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4	exasperated (28) disdainfully (29) submerged (32) synagogue (35)	frustrated looking down on someone, acting as if they are less than you under water place of worship for Jews
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5	intoned (39) contentedly (43) abruptly (43) holstered (44) imprinted (49) Star of David (49)	spoke happily suddenly and unexpectedly in a carrying case marked or stamped on the surface a symbol of Jewish identity and religion
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6	tentatively (50) seldom (52) reluctantly (52)	with hesitation, uncertainty rarely, not often with hesitation, not wanting to
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7	gnarled (60) flower-sprigged (64) appliqued (65)	full of knots decorated with flowers a cutout decoration attached to a larger piece of material
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8	relocate (68) ruefully (69) specter (69) timidly (70) mock dismay (71)	to move from one place to another sadly image of danger shyly pretending to be upset
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9	poised (74) deftly (75) frothy (75) determined (76) urgency (81)	(verb) sitting in a balanced way, ready to act with skill foamy strong-minded pressure, stress
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10	recurring (83) staccato (83) condescending (84) staggered (85) extinguished (86)	repeating short; clipped putting down; sneering moved unsteadily put out, as a fire with water
11	distribute (88) encased (89)	hand out completely covered
12	dim/dimness (99)	dark/darkness
13	faltered (101) sprawling (102) hobbled (102) stricken (104)	walked unsteadily, stumbled spread out limped troubled
14	latticed (106) vivid (107) brusque (110) herring (111) prolong (111) suspense (111) tantalize (111) taut (112)	crossed with, in a pattern intense, bright quick or abrupt a type of fish make last longer, to lengthen excitement or worry about what is to come tease tight
15	withering (116) insolently (116) contempt (116) snarled (117) strident (118) din (118) quavering (118)	dismissive rudely dislike growled harsh loud noise trembling
16	warily (120) resistance (123) concealed (124) confronting (124)	with caution opposition hidden threatening
17	chatterbox (129) devastating (129) executed (129)	someone who talks a lot very upsetting killed

bleak (129)	dreary
grief (130)	great sadness

Afterword	deprivation (133)	scarcity
	compassion (135)	kindness
	permeated (136)	soaked

Project Ideas for During and After Reading:

1. Create four charts, one per theme/essential question. As students read, ask them to look for examples of friendship, bravery, honesty (or dishonesty) and resistance. As an alternative, groups of students can each explore one theme/question. To go deeper, ask students to compare Annemarie's experiences and actions with those of the adults -- Mama, Papa, Mr. & Mrs. Rosen, Peter, Lise, Uncle Henrik.
2. Have students research the Danish Resistance and or other WWII resistance groups. Depending on the grade level of students, it may be appropriate to research resistance movements in US History such as abolition. Ask students to identify similarities and differences and how each movement relates to the themes/essential questions in *Number the Stars*.
3. Ask students why they think the author titled the chapters as she did. Ask students to choose one or more titles and write a paragraph explaining the title's significance.
4. Have students choose one of the essential questions and answer it in two or three paragraphs, citing evidence from *Number the Stars*. Teachers may also ask students to include examples from other points in history and/or make connections to their own experiences.

Additional Thought-provoking Questions:

1. How does Annemarie's understanding of courage evolve throughout the novel? Provide specific examples of moments when she demonstrates courage, despite her fears.
2. What role does the concept of family play in the story? How does Annemarie's relationship with her family influence her decisions and actions during the war?
3. In what ways does the novel depict the impact of Nazi occupation on daily life in Denmark? How do the Johansen family and their friends adapt to these changes?

4. Describe the significance of the Star of David in the story. Why does Ellen have to hide her necklace, and how does this moment highlight the danger faced by Jewish people during the war?
5. Discuss the character of Kirsti. How does her perspective on the war differ from Annemarie's, and how does her innocence contrast with the more mature understanding that Annemarie develops?
6. How do the Johansen family's actions reflect the themes of resistance and bravery? Compare their efforts to those of the Danish Resistance fighters in the story.
7. The novel features several instances of deception and lying for a noble cause. What moral dilemmas do the characters face when they have to make difficult decisions in order to protect others?
8. How does Lowry use the setting of Copenhagen and the Danish countryside to build tension in the narrative? Describe the various locations where the story takes place and their significance to the plot.
9. What is the role of Mrs. Johansen in the story, and how does her behavior contrast with that of her daughter Annemarie? How does she demonstrate strength, and how does her role as a protector affect her children?
10. At the end of the novel, Annemarie reflects on the events she has experienced. How does her view of heroism and the nature of the war differ from the beginning of the book? What do you think she learns about the power of small acts of bravery?