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The Devil's Arithmetic

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Teaching Unit

The Devil's Arithmetic

by Jane Yolen

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The Devil's Arithmetic

Introduction

The Devil's Arithmetic is a National Jewish Book Award winner and an *American Bookseller* Pick of the Lists. It is the story of how thirteen-year-old Hannah Stern comes to appreciate her Jewish Heritage and the importance of remembering a painful past.

The novel opens with Hannah grumbling her way through the traditions at her family's Passover Seder, which happens to coincide with Easter this year. Why must her family eat bitter herbs, while her Christian friends get to eat jellybeans? Why does her Grandpa Will become angry when he watches World War II footage on television? Why are all Jewish holidays about remembering? Hannah wants answers, and soon she will learn why her family spends so much time honoring a past most people would long to forget.

Students will be able to glean facts about the Holocaust from this historically accurate tale. All the while, they will identify with Hannah's struggle, first to understand her family, and then to save it.

All references come from the Puffin Books edition of *The Devil's Arithmetic*, published 1988.

The Devil's Arithmetic

Terms and Definitions

Allegory - a story that represents abstract ideas or moral qualities. An allegory has both a literal and a symbolic level of meaning. **Example:** *Gulliver's Travels*.

Antagonist - the person or force that is in conflict with, or opposes, the protagonist. **Example:** Nurse Ratched opposes McMurphy throughout *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

Conflict - the struggle that moves the action forward in a work of literature. There are three types of conflict, and most books include all three: *man versus man* (**Example:** a typical Western, in which the sheriff confronts the outlaws); *man versus nature* (**Example:** a story about someone surviving in a small boat on the ocean); *man versus himself* (**Example:** a character in a story fighting his or her own drug abuse).

Flat or Static character - a one-dimensional character who lacks diversity and complexity; a character who is either all good or all bad and does not change. Because the character behaves in just one way, he or she is easy to comprehend. **Example:** Sherlock Holmes seems to be calm, deliberative, and in complete charge, regardless of the situation.

Euphemism - substituting a milder word or phrase for one that might be offensive or harsh. **Examples:** "passed away" for "died"; "previously owned" for "used."

Irony - a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context. **Example:** The firehouse burned down.

- *Dramatic Irony* - the audience or reader knows more about a character's situation than the character does and knows that the character's understanding is incorrect. **Example:** In *Medea*, Creon asks, "What atrocities could she commit in one day?" The reader, however, knows Medea will destroy her family and Creon's by day's end.
- *Structural Irony* - the use of a naïve hero, whose incorrect perceptions differ from the reader's correct ones. **Example:** Huck Finn.
- *Verbal Irony* - a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm. **Example:** A large man whose nickname is "Tiny."

Metaphor - a comparison of two things that are basically dissimilar in which one is described in terms of the other. **Example:** The moon, a haunting lantern, shone through the clouds.

Onomatopoeia - a word whose sound (the way it is pronounced) imitates its meaning. **Examples:** "roar," "murmur," "tintinnabulation."

Protagonist - the central or main character in a story around whom the plot centers. **Examples:** Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*; David Copperfield in *David Copperfield*.

Round Characters - characters that have many sides; they have both faults and virtues and, therefore, are able to surprise the reader. They are like real people. **Example:** Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is arrogant, humble, proud, meek, angry, and submissive, and has many other qualities.

Simile - a comparison between two different things using either *like* or *as*. **Examples:** I am as hungry as a horse. The huge trees broke like twigs during the hurricane.

Tone - the atmosphere in a literary work or the attitude the author puts in a literary work. **Examples:** The gloom and representation of decay is the main tone of Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*; the tone of *Catch-22* is one of *sarcasm* and absurdity.

Verisimilitude - the use of realistic elements to make literature appear truthful or accurate. **Example:** The creature in *Frankenstein* meets and converses with a blind man.

Foreshadowing - the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come. Foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense. **Example:** Two small and seemingly inconsequential car accidents predict and hint at the upcoming, important wreck in *The Great Gatsby*.

Personification - a figure of speech in which an object, abstract idea, or animal is given human characteristics. **Examples:** The wall did its best to keep out the invaders.

“Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me.”
—Emily Dickinson

Symbol - an object, person, or place that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, usually an idea or concept; some concrete thing which represents an abstraction. **Example:** The sea could be symbolic for “the unknown.” Since the sea is something that is physical and can be seen by the reader, and also has elements that cannot be understood, it can be used symbolically to stand for the abstraction of “mystery,” “obscurity,” or “the unknown.”

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Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. define and cite examples from the text of the following literary terms:
 - allegory
 - euphemism
 - irony
 - metaphor
 - onomatopoeia
 - protagonist
 - simile
 - tone
 - verisimilitude
 - personification
2. discuss the significance of Hannah Stern becoming Aunt Eva's friend Chaya Abramowicz, as opposed to Hannah becoming anyone else in the story.
3. identify the roles humor, song, and prayer play in *The Devil's Arithmetic*.
4. compare and contrast Hannah before she is transported into the past with Hannah after she returns from her life as Chaya.
5. write detailed character sketches of Hannah, Aunt Eva, and Grandpa Will.
6. describe the significance of the number tattoos applied to prisoners in the concentration camps.
7. define the vocabulary words from each chapter of *The Devil's Arithmetic*.
8. identify and discuss the ways in which the Nazis gradually stripped the Jews of their power and individual identities, and attempted to dehumanize them.
9. discuss how Yolen combines fictional characters with historical fact to create *The Devil's Arithmetic*, and how this proves effective in lending verisimilitude.
10. identify and discuss the ways in which Hannah's character serves as a hero, not merely a protagonist in Yolen's novel.
11. define round/dynamic and flat/static character types, and identify them in the novel.

12. identify the major conflict (plot) in the novel, the participants (protagonist/antagonists) in the conflict, and the resolution of the conflict.
13. discuss Yolen's use of Yiddish and German, and what it adds to *The Devil's Arithmetic*.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Refer to passages from *The Devil's Arithmetic* to explain the significance of the tattoos applied to prisoners in the concentration camps. Why did the Nazis tattoo prisoners? How did the characters in the story react to it, and what meanings did they assign to the tattoos?
2. During the time Hannah Stern lives as Chaya Abramowicz, she learns lessons and undergoes many changes. Discuss the effects on Hannah of her having temporarily become someone else.
3. Why do you think author Jane Yolen describes characters and settings with such painstaking detail after Hannah becomes Chaya, as compared to her very limited descriptions in the first three chapters of *The Devil's Arithmetic*?
4. Dramatic irony applies when a character perceives a situation in a very limited way while the reader, perhaps through another character, sees the bigger picture. Discuss why the following passage from *The Devil's Arithmetic* is a prime example of dramatic irony.

“Please, Rabbi,” she pleaded, “we must *do* something. And quickly. I know where they are taking us. I am from the future. *Please.*”
Rabbi Boruch cleared his throat before speaking. “All children are from the future. I am from the past. And the past tells us what we must do in the future....So you must listen to me when I tell you that what we must do now is pray.” (Pg. 78)
5. A euphemism is the substitution of unpleasant words or phrases with more acceptable ones. From the text, identify and list the euphemisms the Nazis used to refer to the Jews and the extermination of the Jews. Why did the Nazis use euphemisms? Why did the Jews use them?
6. Describe the relationship between Hannah and her Aunt Eva and Grandpa Will. How do they relate to each other before Hannah goes back in time? How do they interact after her return? Do you think Aunt Eva understands what happened to Hannah?
7. A protagonist is merely the main character, the center of attention in a novel. The protagonist may be flat or round. A hero, on the other hand, is a round and dynamic character, learning from experience, developing new strengths, and recognizing new truths. Cite examples from the text that demonstrate the ways in which Hannah is a hero.

8. What does Yolen's use of Yiddish and German add to the novel? How would the novel have been different without it?
9. Identify the main conflict in *The Devil's Arithmetic*. Who participates in the conflict? Who is the protagonist, and who or what is the antagonist? How is the conflict resolved?
10. What is the significance of Hannah becoming Chaya, Aunt Eva's "dead friend," as opposed to her becoming one of the other villagers headed for the camps? (Pg. 7)
11. Discuss the roles that humor, singing, and praying play in *The Devil's Arithmetic*.
12. Flat characters are those that remain static or the same throughout the story, even though their circumstances may change. Identify the flat characters and explain by citing examples from the text what qualifies them as flat rather than round.

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Test

Multiple Choice

1. Hannah's Hebrew name is
 - A. Chaya.
 - B. Rivka.
 - C. Gitl.
 - D. Rachel.
 - E. Esther

2. Shadchan is the Yiddish word for a
 - A. merchant.
 - B. farmer.
 - C. fortune teller.
 - D. marriage broker.
 - E. tattooist

3. Which language is Yiddish a form of, spoken by many Jews in Eastern Europe?
 - A. Greek
 - B. German
 - C. Latin
 - D. English
 - E. Polish

4. Who is the family member with whom Hannah shares a special bond?
 - A. Grandma Belle
 - B. Grandpa Dan
 - C. Aunt Eva
 - D. Grandpa Will
 - E. Uncle Sam

5. The substitution of a pleasant word for an unpleasant word is called a(n)
 - A. metaphor.
 - B. euphemism.
 - C. simile.
 - D. conflict.
 - E. irony.

6. A Seder is a traditional part of the holiday of
- A. Bar Mitzvah.
 - B. Chanukah.
 - C. Easter.
 - D. Christmas.
 - E. Passover.
7. When she says, “Grandma lost both her parents to the Nazis before she and her brother managed to escape,” Hannah’s mother is referring to
- A. Pearl Harbor.
 - B. D–Day.
 - C. the Holocaust.
 - D. World War I.
 - E. the Korean War.
8. “Her stomach felt heavy, as if the argument lay there like unleavened bread.” This quote from the text is an example of
- A. a metaphor.
 - B. a simile.
 - C. foreshadowing.
 - D. irony.
 - E. a euphemism.
9. “The forest was now boiling with people...” is an example of a(n)
- A. simile.
 - B. metaphor.
 - C. irony.
 - D. euphemism.
 - E. foreshadowing.
10. The name Chaya means
- A. love.
 - B. life.
 - C. happiness.
 - D. hope.
 - E. faith.
11. In Yiddish, a fortune teller who entertains at weddings is called a
- A. shadchan.
 - B. Malach ha–mavis.
 - C. afikoman.
 - D. badchan.
 - E. blokova.

12. Hannah's little brother's name is
- A. Aaron.
 - B. Rueven.
 - C. Shmuel.
 - D. Avrom.
 - E. Noah.
13. Hannah and Rivka worked in the camp
- A. midden.
 - B. laundry.
 - C. kitchen.
 - D. hospital.
 - E. mikvah.
14. The female prisoner in charge of the newcomers is called the
- A. zugangi.
 - B. shabbos goy.
 - C. Angel of death.
 - D. blokova.
 - E. badchan.
15. Of the villagers who went to the labor camp with Chaya, who were the only two to survive the war?
- A. Gitl and Yitzchak
 - B. Rivka and Wolfe
 - C. Esther and Shifre
 - D. Shmuel and Fayge
 - E. Reuven and Rachel
16. The sign above the labor camp entrance means, in German,
- A. "All men are free."
 - B. "Work makes you free."
 - C. "God makes men free."
 - D. "All Jews must work."
 - E. "Trust in God."
17. In the text "as the scissors snip–snapped through her hair" and "landing with a soft thud–thud on the floor" snip–snapped and thud–thud are examples of
- A. dialogue.
 - B. simile.
 - C. metaphor.
 - D. onomatopoeia.
 - E. irony.

18. *The Devil's Arithmetic* is set in the present and what year?
- A. 1967
 - B. 1953
 - C. 1938
 - D. 1942
 - E. 1926

Matching

Match the following characters with their quotes.

- A. Rabbi Boruch
 - B. the blokova
 - C. Grandpa Will
 - D. Commandant Breuer
19. _____ "Schnell. Schnell. Scum. There is work to do, much work."
20. _____ "A boy your age should be with his mother...so I shall be sure you go to her."
21. _____ "See my children...we are in God's hands. We are not afraid of work."
22. _____ "Give them this....I'll give them this!"

Essays

Answer any two.

1. Round characters are said to be dynamic; they change and grow. Flat characters are said to be static; they remain the same no matter what. Identify two characters of each type from *The Devil's Arithmetic* and cite examples from the text to support your description of them.
2. List the ways in which the Nazis attempt to dehumanize the villagers. Is the process a gradual one? What is the ultimate goal of the Nazis?
3. Discuss the historically documented facts about the Holocaust that Yolen uses in *The Devil's Arithmetic*. How many Jews died during the Holocaust? How did the Nazis transport them from their villages to the death camps? What were the Jews subjected to upon their arrival at the camps?
4. Explain the major conflict (the plot) in the novel. Next, list the participants (characters) in the conflict. Identify the protagonist (the main character) and the antagonist (the one who fights against the protagonist). Finally, tell how the conflict is resolved.

The Devil's Arithmetic

Answer Key

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| 1. | A | 7. | C | 13. | C | 19. | B |
| 2. | D | 8. | B | 14. | D | 20. | D |
| 3. | B | 9. | B | 15. | A | 21. | A |
| 4. | C | 10. | B | 16. | B | 22. | C |
| 5. | B | 11. | D | 17. | D | | |
| 6. | E | 12. | A | 18. | D | | |

The Devil's Arithmetic

Study Guide Teacher's Copy

Chapter One

Vocabulary

Haggadah—text read at Seder service

Nazis—members of German Fascist party 1933-1944

Passover—Jewish holiday commemorating liberation from Egypt

Seder—feast and service on the first two nights of Passover

Yiddish—Jewish German

unleavened—flat, without yeast

1. The novel opens with what event, and why is it important to Hannah's family?

The Devil's Arithmetic begins with a family preparing to celebrate Passover. Passover is the Jewish holiday commemorating Jewish liberation from Egypt. It is a holiday of remembrance, important to Hannah's family because they are Jews and they lost many loved ones to the Nazis.

2. Explain why Hannah does not want to attend Grandpa Will's Seder.

Hannah does not want to go to the Seder because she has already eaten an Easter dinner at her best friend's house. In addition, she fears she and her brother Aaron will be the only children at the feast, and she will be bored.

3. Why does Hannah's mother insist she go to the Seder?

Hannah's mother reminds Hannah that her grandparents are expecting the whole family. She also reminds Hannah that the holiday is not about food, but about remembrance. She tells her that, though Grandpa Will and Aunt Eva survived the Nazis, the rest of their family did not.

4. Describe how Aaron behaves in the car on the way to Grandpa Will's apartment. What triggers his behavior and why?

In the car, Aaron complains loudly that he is sick and about to vomit. Aaron is nervous because he must recite The Four Questions from the Haggadah; he is afraid he will make a mistake.

5. What does Hannah do to help her brother cope with his anxiety, and what effect does it have on Aaron?

Hannah reassures Aaron that he does not have to rely on his memory to answer The Four Questions; he may read straight from the book. Then she tells Aaron a gruesome story, which fascinates him. The story distracts him until they arrive at the apartment house.

6. List at least five things readers find out about Hannah in this chapter.

- *Hannah has a friend named Rosemary.*
- *Hannah is Jewish.*
- *Hannah is thirteen.*
- *Hannah has a little brother.*
- *Hannah has braces.*
- *Hannah has brown hair.*
- *Hannah enjoys telling stories.*
- *Hannah is named after a dead friend of Aunt Eva's.*
- *Hannah has both relatives who survived and relatives who died during the Holocaust.*

7. In what ways is Hannah a typical older sister to Aaron?

Hannah playfully teases her little brother one minute, and quickly becomes irritated by him the next. When Aaron becomes upset, she comforts him by telling him a story and holding his hand. Then, she suddenly wants to argue with him over who gets to press the elevator buttons. Hannah is at times maternal and at other times competitive, a typical older sister.

Chapter Two

Vocabulary

bris—circumcision

concentration camp—prisoner of war camp

guttural—harsh

Malach ha—mavis—Angel of death

steerage—cheapest passenger rooms on a ship

yahrzeit—prayer ceremony marking anniversary of someone's death

1. Why does Hannah's return to the living room go unnoticed?

Hannah's family is gathered around the television watching a program about the Holocaust.

2. What is Grandpa Will's reaction to war footage on television, and how does his reaction make Hannah feel?

Grandpa Will is screaming and waving his fist at the images he sees on the screen. Hannah feels embarrassed and uncomfortable. She does not understand why Grandpa Will has "these strange fits." (Pg. 9)

3. What incident does Grandpa Will's behavior cause Hannah to recall?

Hannah remembers when, at her brother's bris party, she used a ballpoint pen to make a replica of her grandpa's tattoo on her arm. She showed it to Grandpa Will thinking that it might please him. It had the opposite effect, however, and caused him to scream repeatedly in Yiddish Malach—ha—mavis.

4. Who is Grandpa Dan, and how is he different from Grandpa Will?

Grandpa Dan is Hannah's maternal grandfather. He was born in America and was not in the camps during World War II. He is more easygoing and predictable than Grandpa Will.

5. What is the moment Hannah most enjoys at these holiday gatherings, and why?

Hannah most enjoys the moment when Aunt Eva lights the holiday candles. It reminds Hannah of when she was younger because Aunt Eva seems extraordinary and magical.

Chapter Three

Vocabulary

afikoman—ceremonial matzoh

Chanukah—Hebrew for Hanukkah, Jewish festival of lights, December

cloying—sickening

droned—spoke with no inflection

goblet—wine glass

guffawed—laughed hard

kosher—prepared according to Jewish law

matzoh—cracker (unleavened bread)

yarmulke—beanie worn by male Jews

1. From what point of view did Jane Yolen write *The Devil's Arithmetic*?

The author wrote this book from the third person point of view.

2. In literary terms, tone refers to the methods by which writers reveal attitudes or feelings. How does Yolen set the tone for this chapter?

The author uses the narration to set the tone, with phrases such as “endless Seder dinner and the even more endless explanations” and “Her grandfather droned on and on... and he made sour lessons at every pause.” (Pg. 13) From this narration, the reader may infer that the dinner lacks excitement, and Hannah is bored.

3. What does the author reveal about Hannah in this chapter?

Yolen reveals that Hannah is restless and somewhat immature; she does not realize the significance of the Seder dinner.

4. What is the significance of Grandpa Will offering Hannah wine at the Seder?

For the first time Hannah feels as if she is being treated like an adult at the Seder. Even though the wine is watered down for her, it is still a step up from the grape juice given to the children.

5. What does Hannah's mother say during the Seder that upsets Grandpa Will?

Lily says that hiding the afikoman is all part of the game and that the game is to uncover the hidden order in the universe. She says Seder means order. This upsets Grandpa Will, who asks, “Do you think there was order back in the camps?” (Pg. 17)

6. Where does Aaron hide the afikoman, and why does this make Hannah laugh?

Aaron hides the afikoman in a laundry basket in the bathroom. Hannah laughs because Aaron is so pleased with his subterfuge.

7. Why does Grandpa Will select Hannah to open the door for the prophet Elijah, and why is this ironic?

Grandpa Will selects Hannah to open the door because he wants to reward her for pouring all her wine into Elijah's cup. This is ironic because Hannah did not want her wine, and she was merely trying to get rid of it. It was not an act of unsolicited generosity, but an act of immaturity.

8. What type of figurative language is the following quote? "A bird pelted the air with a strange, lilting song." (Pg. 20)

This quote from the text is an example of both a metaphor and personification.

9. What happens when Hannah opens the apartment door?

When Hannah opens the door, she sees a moonlit field and a man marching toward her.

Chapter Four

Vocabulary

cascaded—fell gently

Chelm—a village which, according to Jewish folklore, was inhabited by foolish souls

conspiratorial—secretive

elaborate—complicated

ornate—fancy

Sabbath—holy day (Jewish Sabbath is Saturday)

shadchan—marriage broker

shtetl—small Jewish community

simultaneously—at the same time

solemn—serious

Torah—Jewish holy laws

wry—twisted

1. How does Hannah react to finding herself in another place?

At first, Hannah thinks Grandpa Will has played a trick on her. Then she thinks it is the wine giving her daydreams. When she turns from the door to see that she is in a different house with different people, she is stunned.

2. How is the new place in which Hannah finds herself different from her grandpa's apartment?

Instead of an elegant table set for a feast, there is a plain table with a wooden bowl and two silver candlesticks. Strings of onions hang from the ceiling. There is a woman baking bread and a man coming in from the fields.

3. In what language does the woman speak to Hannah? Does Hannah understand her?

The woman speaks to Hannah in Yiddish. Surprisingly, Hannah does understand her despite Hannah never having learned the language.

4. By what name does the woman address Hannah, and why is it familiar to Hannah?

The woman calls Hannah Chaya. This is familiar to Hannah because Chaya is Hannah's Hebrew name; it was given to her to honor Aunt Eva's dead friend.

5. What is the woman's name and what does her conversation reveal about Chaya?

The woman's name is Gitl. Gitl reveals that a fever killed Chaya's parents and left Chaya very ill.

6. Why does Hannah hug Shmuel, even though she knows he is not her uncle?

Hannah gets caught up in Shmuel's joy; he is getting married the next day.

7. Describe the relationship between Shmuel, Gitl, and Chaya.

Shmuel and Gitl are siblings. Gitl is unmarried and lives with Shmuel. They are warm, loving, and respectful of each other and Chaya, who is their niece.

8. How does Hannah know she is not Chaya?

Hannah knows she is not Chaya because she only remembers being Hannah. She remembers her brother Aaron and her school in New Rochelle. She does not remember anything Shmuel and Gitl discuss.

9. Why does Hannah hesitate when Shmuel holds out his hand to her?

Hannah is afraid that by "accepting the reality of the dream" she will lose the memories of her actual past. (Pg. 27)

10. In this chapter, Yolen writes that Shmuel's smile reminds Hannah of Aaron's smile. This may remind readers of a passage in Chapter Three, in which Aaron smiles up at Hannah. What is the literary term for this technique of hinting at things to come?

This technique is called foreshadowing.

Chapter Five

Vocabulary

efficiency—adeptness

expansively—widely

mused—wondered

pilpul—debate

schnorrers—beggars

slovens—dirty people

tentatively—hesitantly

yeshiva bocher—college student

1. Why does Hannah go to open the front door first thing in the morning?

Hannah thinks perhaps she will open the door and be transported back home.

2. How does Shmuel respond to Hannah's denial that she is Chaya?

Shmuel attributes Hannah's initial confusion to her having been sick. When she persists in talking about New Rochelle in America, Shmuel thinks she is joking to ease his wedding day jitters.

3. What does Gitl serve for breakfast, and why does Hannah balk?

Gitl serves fresh milk, dark bread, and coffee. Hannah is very hungry and expected a big breakfast with doughnuts, cereal, and white bread toast. Moreover, she is shocked that the milk is unprocessed and has cream floating in it. She does not like the taste of it.

4. How does Hannah react to the knock at the door, and why?

Hannah jumps at the knock and wants to answer the door, but Gitl gets it first. Hannah thinks the knock might be some sort of signal that the strange dream in which she finds herself has ended.

5. How does the author describe Yitzchak, and how does the reader know that Yitzchak likes Gitl?

The author writes that Yitzchak has "shoulders as wide as the door itself, wiry red hair, and a bushy red beard." (Pg. 37)

The reader may infer that Yitzchak likes Gitl because he keeps his eyes on her while he responds to Shmuel.

6. By describing the setting and the people in such great detail in this chapter, what does Yolen convey to her readers? Explain how her descriptions contribute to an air of verisimilitude?

The author conveys that Shmuel is a farmer who lives in the country, miles away from the nearest village. The details about the breakfast, the wedding presents of chickens, and the horse and wagons help to establish that Hannah has indeed been transported to the past.

Yolen's detailed descriptions of setting and characters help readers to suspend their disbelief where Hannah's time travel is concerned.

Chapter Six

Vocabulary

Bar Mitzvah—ceremony marking adulthood for Jewish boys

Cossack—Russian soldier

goyish—nonJewish

mishigaas—craziness

plaits—braids

privy—bathroom

shmatte—rag

shul—synagogue

tante—aunt

timidity—shyness

1. What discovery horrifies Hannah?

Hannah discovers that the only bathroom is an outhouse with no light for nighttime visits.

2. What does Hannah have in common with Shmuel and Gitl?

Hannah is Jewish, and therefore understands many Jewish customs and traditions.

3. Why does Hannah refer to the dress, which Gitl says is “fit for a princess,” as a rag? (Pg. 42)

Hannah thinks the dress is old fashioned, childish, and ugly.

4. Why are there no clothes that belong to Chaya?

Chaya’s clothes had to be burned, along with her bedding; the doctors said they carried the disease that killed her parents and made her sick.

5. How is Hannah’s appearance different as Chaya? How is it the same?

Hannah no longer has her braces; her reflection appears old fashioned and unfamiliar to her. She still has a heart shaped face, brown hair, a crooked smile, and gray eyes.

6. Describe how Hannah memorizes the names of her new friends.

Hannah uses word association, which her Aunt Eva taught her, to connect the girls’ names to their distinguishing characteristics. Shifre has shifty eyes. Esther is round like an Easter egg. Yente has a yellowish complexion. Rachel is just Rachel, her second best friend.

7. When Hannah's new friends ask her about Lublin, where Chaya lived before her parents' deaths, how does Hannah respond? Why are the girls shocked?

Hannah responds by telling her friends about New Rochelle, which she refers to as Lublin. Hannah's descriptions of an eight-room house with toilets inside, going to school, and going shopping on the Sabbath shock the girls.

Chapter Seven

Vocabulary

badchan—entertainer/fortune teller
canopy—roof-like covering
clique—elite group
compression—reduction
klezmer—mobile band
mesmerized—hypnotized
uproariously—loudly

1. How can Hannah tell that the girls enjoy her stories?

The girls are attentive and silent. They are moved to tears by her telling of Yentl and Little Women. While they walk, the girls jostle for the place of honor beside Hannah.

2. How is Hannah's newfound popularity different from her social experience in New Rochelle?

In New Rochelle, Hannah is not popular; she only has three friends. She has even been ostracized by a clique of girls, who make fun of her.

3. What effect does the klezmer's music have on the villagers?

The villagers stop walking, strain to listen, and then quicken their collective pace in response to the music.

4. Who is Shmuel marrying, and in what way is their engagement atypical for the time?

Shmuel is marrying Fayge Boruch, daughter of Rabbi Boruch. Hannah's new friends explain to her that Fayge, in defiance of tradition, met Shmuel, and they fell in love. Traditionally, a girl marries the man her parents choose with the help of a marriage broker.

5. What is the job of the badchan?

The badchan makes up rhymes, sings songs, tells fortunes, and generally entertains the wedding guests.

6. How does the badchan impress Gitl?

Gitl thinks the badchan is very accurate when he calls Hannah an old girl in young girl disguise.

Chapter Eight

Vocabulary

dour–sullen

involuntary–not on purpose

lucid–clear thinking

nestled–grouped closely

riveted–firmly attached

synagogue–Jewish house of worship

undecipherable–impossible to understand

1. “The forest is now boiling with people...” is an example of what type of figurative language, and what does it mean? (Pg. 57)

This quote from the text is a metaphor. It means that there are many people and a lot of activity in the forest.

2. How is Fayge different from how Hannah expects her to be?

Because Fayge has piercing eyes, Hannah expects her to be fierce, but Fayge is almost shy and very gentle. Fayge is very beautiful, and Hannah expects her hands to be soft and supple. Instead, Fayge’s hands are large and strong with calluses on them.

3. What sight surprises the wedding party as it approaches the town? What unsettling term does the badchan use to describe the sight?

Black cars, army trucks, and men in black uniforms are in front of the synagogue. The badchan cries out that he sees the Malach ha-mavis, the Angel of death.

4. What revelation does Hannah have upon seeing the soldiers and learning that it is 1942?

Hannah comes to the realization that she is no longer Hannah; she is Chaya, and she is in Nazi-occupied Poland.

5. What does Hannah tell the rabbi, and why is he skeptical?

Hannah cries out that the soldiers are Nazis, and they will kill six million Jews. She tells Rabbi Boruch that they must turn the wagons around and run. The rabbi is skeptical about the number, even when Hannah clarifies that the deaths would not be limited to Poland. The rabbi says they have nowhere to run because God is everywhere, and there will always be Nazis.

6. What is the significance of Rabbi Boruch giving the signal for the wagons to move forward?

The rabbi is a spiritual leader. The villagers trust him. He is supposed to tend to their souls and see to their salvation. Ironically, he may be assuring their demise.

7. “They made a perfect circle in front of the synagogue doors, like a steel trap with gaping jaws ready to be sprung.” (Pg. 64)
What type of literary device does Yolen employ in the above quote from the text? What is the context, and what does it mean?

In this quote from the text, Yolen uses a simile. She is comparing the waiting Nazis to a steel trap ready to spring on the unsuspecting villagers moving into their reach.

Chapter Nine

Vocabulary

assent—agreement

adamantly—forcefully

billet—assign

conferred—consulted with

crematoria—building where corpses are burned

desecrate—destroy

Holocaust—Nazis’ attempt to exterminate the Jews during WW II

plaintive—mournful

undistinguishable—unclear

1. What do the Nazis want the villagers to do, and what explanation do they offer as to why? How do the Nazis get Shmuel to convince the villagers to get into the trucks?

The Nazis want the villagers to leave their belongings behind and climb into trucks. They tell them that all Jews are being resettled according to government policy. The Nazis use guns to convince Shmuel to persuade the villagers to do as they say.

2. What does Hannah say that angers Fayge, and how does Gitl smooth things out?

Hannah says the Nazis will stop Fayge's marriage to Shmuel. She says the Nazis will put them in camps and then kill them in gas ovens. When Fayge snaps at Hannah that her words will bring down the Angel of Death, Gitl dismisses Fayge's notion as nonsense. She reminds Fayge that Hannah is just a child who recently recovered from a near fatal illness.

3. With what fairy tale do Hannah's warnings share similarities, and who makes the comparison? How does this reinforce Gitl's words to Fayge about Hannah?

Rachel makes the comparison between Hannah's warnings of gas ovens and the story she told her new friends about Hansel and Gretel. Gitl is able to use this information to reassure Fayge that Hannah just likes to tell tall tales.

4. What explanation do the Nazis use to explain the absence of the villagers' families and friends and their belongings in Viosk?

The Nazi colonel tells Shmuel that all the people were sent for resettlement, and they have taken their belongings on ahead to share with those who come after them.

5. What does Gitl do to keep Hannah from speaking out again, and why?

Gitl covers Hannah's entire mouth with her hand and whispers for her to be still. Gitl knows the soldiers have guns, and she believes that if the villagers go quietly, the soldiers will not harm them.

6. The rabbi leads the villagers in prayer before boarding the trucks, and Gitl leads them in song once they are traveling. Why do the villagers pray and sing?

Perhaps the villagers are showing the rabbi that they are still following his lead. In general, prayer and song can have a calming effect. This is especially true if the prayers and songs are familiar to those involved. Moreover, people tend to feel safer when they belong to a group; being lead in prayer and song signifies belonging.

Chapter Ten

Vocabulary

alienates—pushes away
bissell—slightly
impudent—disrespectful
periphery—edges
profound—deep
protruding—sticking out
Shabbos goy—non-Jew who works on the Sabbath
shikse—non-Jewish girl
spontaneously—all at once
tremulous—shaky

1. What sight causes panic among the villagers headed for the trains, and why?

The villagers begin to panic when they see their families' belongings scattered along the train tracks. They panic because they begin to realize the Nazis were lying about resettlement.

2. Now that the villagers suspect the Nazis are lying, why do they continue to follow orders?

The soldiers surround the villagers. When the soldiers command the villagers to lie down on the ground, no one moves. The soldier then fires his gun at a man's feet. The villagers are afraid the Nazis will shoot them, so they do as they are told.

3. How does the author imply that some of the villagers tried to protest when the Nazis were stripping them of their papers and jewelry?

Yolen writes, "Several men were bleeding from their noses and Shmuel had a dark bruise starting at his temple." (Pg. 76) The physical descriptions allow the reader to infer that these men may have protested, to no avail.

4. Once all the villagers are forced into the two boxcars, how do they behave and with what result?

Once crammed into the boxcars, the villagers panic; they are afraid they will suffocate. They bang on the doors, and they scream and cry. When no one comes to open the doors, they stop.

5. Hannah pleads with the rabbi that they must do something quickly. She even reveals that she is from the future. How does the rabbi respond to her pleas?

Rabbi Boruch tells her that he is from the past, and the past tells people what they must do. Then he says that they should pray, because they are in God's hands.

6. Identify the use of onomatopoeia in the following text, and explain what purpose it serves.
“As the train clacketed along the tracks, Hannah thought how lucky she was to be near a pocket of fresh air.” (Pg. 79)

Clacketed is an example of onomatopoeia. It is a word designed to express the activity taking place, in this case a train traveling along rickety tracks.

7. What do the villagers begin to talk about on the train, and why is this ironic?

The villagers begin to talk about all the stories they have heard about Nazi soldiers slaughtering Jews in other places. This is ironic because if they had talked about these stories before the soldiers came for them, they may have been forewarned and escaped.

8. What role does humor play for the villagers on the train?

Humor helps to allay fears. For example, when Hannah asks Gitl how she can joke, Gitl responds, “If we do not laugh, we will cry... We Jews like to joke about death because what you laugh at and make familiar can no longer frighten you.” (Pg. 82)

9. Hannah has not cried since the ordeal with the Nazis began. What finally makes her weep?

A child dies in her mother's arms in the sweltering heat of the filthy boxcar.

Chapter Eleven

Vocabulary

achtung–German for “attention!”

amphitheater–rows of seats around an open space

barracks–military housing

discernible–obvious

embankment–slope

mikvah–Jewish ritual bath

prominent–noticeable

rucked–gathered

runnels–small streams

schnell–fast, quick

uninflected–monotone

vehemence–force, intensity

vulnerable–weak

zugangi–newcomers

1. What graphic simile does the author use to describe conditions in the boxcar?

*Yolen writes that it was “like an oven that smelled of human sweat and urine and feces.”
(Pg. 84)*

2. When are the dead bodies discovered, and how do the Nazis treat them?

The trains make two stops. At the first, the soldiers let the passengers in Hannah’s train out onto a gravel path. The soldiers remove three dead bodies, and they treat an old woman who is near death like a corpse. They throw the dead baby behind a watering trough.

3. What happens to the villagers on the fourth day in the boxcars?

The Nazis let the villagers out of the trains on the fourth day and take them to a camp.

4. What is written in German on the sign above the gate to the barracks? What does it mean?

The sign reads ARBEIT MACHT FREI, which means “work makes you free.”

5. How does the rabbi respond to what is written on the sign?

Rabbi Boruch says the villagers are still in God’s hands since they are not afraid of work.

6. According to the woman in the blue dress, what is the first lesson newcomers must learn?

The prisoner in the blue dress tells them they must not speak unless spoken to, and they must not call attention to themselves.

7. When the woman in the blue dress tells the prisoners to undress for the showers, Hannah is sure she and the other villagers are destined for the ovens. How does she come to terms with this foreknowledge, when the others refuse to listen to her?

Hannah realizes that the villagers still have hope and are taking one moment at a time. She decides to stop adding to their fear and misery and just keep her thoughts to herself.

8. What can the reader infer about Rachel from the conversation between Esther and Hannah?

The reader may infer that Rachel had difficulty breathing, perhaps asthma, and died on the train.

9. What is Hannah's new perspective on the showers? How does she feel now about the blue dress that Gitl made her wear on Shmuel's wedding day?

Despite the showers being ice cold, Rachel is relieved that water came out and not gas. After the showers, Rachel shivers and longs for the blue dress she once referred to as a rag.

10. Why does Hannah panic when the barber cuts her hair, and why is this significant?

As the barber shaves Hannah's head, she realizes that she can no longer remember her past. This is very symbolic of how the Jews, and other prisoners in the death camps, were shorn of their identities.

11. Why does Gitl make Hannah promise never to cry again?

Gitl wants to strengthen Hannah by helping her hold on to dignity.

Chapter Twelve

Vocabulary

affirmation—positive statement

dank—foul

dissipating—fading away

fetal—curled as if in the womb

garish—tacky

intervals—spaces of time

rote—memorized

rummaged—sorted through

unadorned—plain

1. What is peculiar about the prisoner who the newcomers think of as the woman in the blue dress?

The woman in the blue dress is missing two fingers on her right hand.

2. What does the name Chaya mean, and why is it important to the prisoner applying the tattoos?

Chaya means life. The tattooist had a daughter named Chaya. Hannah shares her name and is wearing her dress.

3. Describe the conditions of the newcomers' barracks.

The barracks have a long brick oven along one end and sleeping shelves, like triple bunk beds, at tight intervals on the sides. Bathrooms are outside. There are no blankets or pillows. It is dark and cold.

4. Despite the horror of their surroundings, what makes Gitl laugh? How does she justify it to Hannah?

In the dank barracks, all is serious and silent until Hannah's stomach rumbles. Gitl laughs. When Hannah asks how she can laugh at a time like this, Gitl says, "Without laughter, there is no hope. Without hope, there is no life." (Pgs. 101-102)

5. Allegory is the literary term for applying symbolism to a parallel situation to teach a lesson. What story does Gitl tell to the soldier, and what is the lesson?

Gitl tells him a story about a farmer who trained his horse to eat less and less. Just when the farmer got the horse to the point of learning to eat nothing at all, the horse died. Gitl is making the point that starvation leads to death, and dead people cannot work.

6. When the tattooist asks Hannah her name, he says he will give her a number in exchange. Later Hannah refers to herself by that number. What does Gitl tell her in response?

Gitl tells Hannah that she is a name, Chaya, not a number. She says that Hannah is her brother's child and life to Gitl. She tells her to remember that, no matter what they tell her in the camp.

Chapter Thirteen

Vocabulary

arbitrary—random

bellowing—making loud noises

elusive—hard to hold

emerging—coming out of

fervor—intensity

muster—gather together

preamble—words leading up to

raucous—wild

toting—adding

unwarranted—undeserved

1. What discovery almost causes Gitl and Hannah to miss their first meal at the camp?

Gitl discovers that little Tzipporah, Yitzchak's daughter, is dead.

2. How important are the bowls given to newcomers at their first meal?

Without the bowls, the prisoners cannot eat, drink, or wash. They are instructed to remember every dent in their bowls because there are no replacements.

3. What constitutes the first meal at the camp?

The first meal consists of a dipperful of watery potato soup and a small slab of dark bread.

4. What things does the officer tell the newcomers they will do, and why will they do them?

The officer tells them that they will work hard and refrain from talking back, complaining, and questioning; and they will not try to escape. He tells them they will do these things for the Fatherland, or they will die.

5. By the end of Chapter Thirteen, Hannah has some of her memory back. Describe what she remembers and what still eludes her.

Hannah remembers being in the forest. She remembers Chaya's family and friends. She does not remember her life as Hannah, except for glimpses here and there.

Chapter Fourteen

Vocabulary

midden—garbage dump

musselman—those who have given up

sanctuary—safe place

Sonderkommando—leader of prisoners responsible for burning corpses

valises—suitcases

1. What does Rivka mean when she says, “If you are alive now, this minute, it is enough.” (Pg. 112)

Rivka is talking about the overwhelming losses they each experience everyday. She calls it a brutal arithmetic. She says as long they are alive and can remember, then all those who have gone before them are still alive inside them. The only way to survive is to let that be enough, to make it their mission to stay alive, witness, and remember.

2. Who is Wolfe, and what does he do in the camp?

Wolfe is Rivka's brother, the only other survivor in her family. He is a Sonderkommando, responsible for taking corpses to the ovens.

3. What does Rivka teach the girls about their tattoos, and why?

Rivka teaches the girls to read the numbers as they would a name. Rivka tells them a J stands for Jew. She tells them to stay away from someone with a G in her tattoo; G stands for Greek, and they die quickly. She explains that someone with a low number has been at the camp a long time and knows how to survive. Rivka knows that memorizing their own tattoos and learning to read others is critical to the girls' survival.

4. Prisoners use the word “organize” as a euphemism for what activity?

Prisoners use the word “organize” to describe how they trade and steal to procure goods and favors.

5. Why is the garbage dump important to the prisoners? Explain.

Commandant Breuer is not supposed to allow children under fourteen inside the labor camp. When he inspects the camp, the children run and hide in the garbage dump. Therefore, the garbage dump becomes an unlikely sanctuary.

6. What significance does Hannah give the tattoo on her own arm?

Hannah says J is for Jew; one is for her alone; nine is for the German word for no; seven is for each day of the week she stays alive; two is for Gitl and Shmuel; four is for her family; and one is because she is all alone in this place and time.

Chapter Fifteen

Vocabulary

blokova—prisoner in charge of newcomers

burnished—polished

cauldron—huge cooking pot

Kaddish—prayer for the dead

gaudy—garish, tacky

luminous—shining brightly

ominously—creating dread

pervasive—spread throughout

sonorous—rich in sound

1. About how many children are there in the camp? How do they know when to hide in the garbage dump? Describe what happens.

In the camp, there are about thirty children who cannot pass for fourteen. When the commandant comes, the adults alert the children by making loud clucking noises. The largest children carry the little ones. They strip on the way, so as not to have their clothes contaminated with the smell of the dump. After the commandant leaves, the adults give an all clear clucking signal.

2. Where is Hannah assigned to work, and what does her job entail?

Hannah is assigned to work in the camp kitchen. Her job is to haul water from the pump, serve the meals, scrub out the giant cauldron in which the soup is cooked, and scrub the kitchen walls and floors.

3. How does Hannah get a relatively good job, instead of hauling wood with the men?

Rivka organizes it. In other words, Rivka gives the blokova a gold ring in exchange for the blokova assigning Hannah to the kitchen with Rivka.

4. What effect does Rivka's kindness have on Hannah? What is the result?

Hannah attempts to express gratitude to Rivka; Rivka simply tells her to pass it on. Thus, Hannah tries to pass it on by giving Yitzchak's son Reuven the softest part of her bread. Gitl, however, tells Hannah she cannot help the children by starving herself. Gitl then proceeds to feed Reuven her own bread and her soup, as well.

5. Chosen for processing is a euphemism for what, and why did the Nazis use such terms?

Chosen for processing is a euphemism for chosen for death in the gas chamber and cremation in the ovens. The Nazis used euphemisms to cover their tracks. As Yolen writes, "Because what is not recorded cannot be blamed." (Pgs. 128-129)

6. How and why does Gitl organize a blue scarf for Hannah?

Gitl steals a blue scarf from the sorting shed, where she works. Gitl gives it to Hannah to replace the blue ribbons the blokova stole from her when they first arrived at the camp. The scarf also serves as a birthday present for Chaya.

7. What becomes of Fayge's father, Rabbi Boruch?

Gitl has learned that Fayge's father was chosen the previous day, while he was in the hospital.

Chapter Sixteen

Vocabulary

Gottenyu—Dear God! (an expression of shock and horror)

shucked—removed

variations—versions

vast—huge

1. What are the rules? Explain how Hannah feels about them.

The rules are a set of guidelines that help the prisoners stay alive. They include not standing next to a Greek, not using the word death, not complaining about the blokova, not getting sick or tripping, and not working too slowly. Hannah thinks the rules are insanity, but she knows their lives are insane. She is grateful for the guidelines in a world of chaos.

2. Why is the blokova, the woman in the blue dress, missing two fingers?

The Nazis chopped off a finger on the blokova's right hand each time she lost control of her group of newcomers.

3. Why do the Nazis choose Reuven, and what change in camp procedure coincides with his death?

Reuven is chosen for processing because he does not make it to the dump during an inspection by the commandant. On the evening of his death, a shipment of newcomers is sent straight for processing, rather than being housed.

4. Why did Hannah refer to herself and the other prisoners as monsters?

*Hannah feels responsible for Reuven's death. Yolen writes, "We are all monsters," Hannah said, 'because we are letting it happen.' (Pg. 141)
Hannah feels as if they should be fighting every step of the way.*

5. What does Rivka mean when she says, "We are all heroes here"? (Pg. 142)

Rivka means that they are heroes for surviving every day. It is easier to give up and die than it is to live under such brutal condition. Yet, they live.

Chapter Seventeen

Vocabulary

hysterical—out of control

portents—signs

staccato—abrupt, harsh

1. What does Gitl tell Hannah about a plan?

Gitl tells Hannah that there is an escape plan in the works involving Gitl, Shmuel, and Yitzchak. She does not tell her the exact plan because Hannah might slip and reveal it to others. Gitl tells Hannah she will know when the time comes.

2. How do events unfold regarding the plan?

One night Gitl whispers to Hannah that it is time, and she instructs Hannah to follow her. Gitl shoves shoes into Hannah's hands, and she and Hannah sneak out the barracks door. Someone has bribed a guard to make sure the door remains unlocked. Once outside, Gitl tells Hannah that they will meet the others behind the midden. A dog barks, causing Hannah to drop the shoes in order to stifle a scream. Then there is shouting. Gitl knows the plan is ruined, so she drags Hannah back to the barracks. The blokova awakens and calls from her room. Gitl explains the noise by saying she dropped her bowl on the way to the privy.

3. After she is safely on her sleep shelf, what thought causes Hannah to panic? How does Gitl comfort her?

Hannah remembers that she dropped the shoes outside the door. She is afraid when the shoes are discovered, she will be as well. Gitl comforts Hannah by telling her the shoes belonged to the blokova, and it is she who will be discovered.

Chapter Eighteen

Vocabulary

babushka—kerchief tied under the neck

clarity—clear thinking

defiantly—with resistance

irony—unexpectedness

Liebchen—term of endearment

parody—imitation

superimposed—placed on top of

volley—rounds of gunfire

1. What does Commandant Breuer mean when he says newcomers processed at once are part of the Final Solution to the Jewish Problem?

Commandant Breuer refers to the extermination of the Jews, which he knows to be the ultimate goal of the Nazis.

2. Why are the prisoners still assembled after roll call?

The prisoners remain assembled to watch the execution of the six men who attempted to escape the night before.

3. Besides the six men, who else is shot and why?

Shmuel's fiancée Fayge is also shot after she flings herself at his feet.

4. Who are the Kommandos and what do they do?

The Kommandos are the ten male prisoners responsible for taking corpses to the ovens.

5. What does Yolen want the reader to infer about the blokova when she writes, "It [her hand] was wrapped in a broad bandage, the white stained with fresh blood"? (Pg. 154)

The author is implying that the blokova has lost another finger because of the escape attempt.

6. Hannah has not told a story since the day of Shmuel's wedding. What motivates Hannah to tell Rivka, Esther, and Shifre a story about the future?

Hannah remembers some of her life before she began living as Chaya, and she sees the big picture. She wants to comfort them by assuring them that Jews will survive. Moreover, she wants whoever survives to carry that message into the future.

7. Why does Hannah trade places with Rivka, when she knows this means certain death?

Hanna has a moment of clarity in which she realizes that she, or someone with whom she shares memories, has lived before and will live again in the future. Rivka, on the other hand, has only now. Yolen writes that Hannah says, "Run for your life, Rivka. Run for your future. Run. Run. Run. And remember." (Pg. 159)

Chapter Nineteen

Vocabulary

L'chaim—Yiddish toast, To life!
resolved—cleared

1. Does Hannah die in the camp? What happens to Chaya? Explain.

Hannah returns across time and space to her Grandpa Will's apartment and the Seder traditions. Chaya, however, dies in the camp, having traded places with Rivka.

2. The character of Hannah develops and changes. She learned from her experiences; thus, she is different at the end of the novel than she is at the beginning. What is the literary term for this type of character?

The literary term for this type of character is round and dynamic.

3. What two things does Hannah realize when she looks at Aunt Eva's tattoo?

Hannah realizes that Aunt Eva had been ten-year-old Rivka in the camp. Then it dawns on her that Grandpa Will is Rivka's brother Wolfe.

4. Ultimately, what lesson does Hannah learn from becoming Aunt Eva's friend Chaya?

Hannah learns why remembrance is so important to her family. Now she understands their suffering because she experienced some of it. She knows they remember the past, so the past does not repeat itself.

Epilogue

Vocabulary

partisans—civilians who fight the enemy

rations—small allotment of food

salvaging—saving

1. Who, besides Rivka and Wolfe, survives the war?

Yitzchak, Gitl, and Leye and her baby survive the war.

2. What eventually happens to Gitl and Yitzchak?

Gitl and Yitzchak relocate to Israel. Neither of them ever marries. Yitzchak becomes a politician. Gitl begins a rescue mission for children of the Holocaust. It later becomes a successful adoption agency, named after her niece Chaya, life. Gitl and Yitzchak remain close friends until their deaths.

The Devil's Arithmetic

Study Guide Student Copy

Chapter One

Vocabulary

Haggadah—text read at Seder service

Nazis—members of German Fascist party 1933-1944

Passover—Jewish holiday commemorating liberation from Egypt

Seder—feast and service on the first two nights of Passover

Yiddish–Jewish German

unleavened—flat, without yeast

1. The novel opens with what event, and why is it important to Hannah's family?
2. Explain why Hannah does not want to attend Grandpa Will's Seder.
3. Why does Hannah's mother insist she go to the Seder?
4. Describe how Aaron behaves in the car on the way to Grandpa Will's apartment. What triggers his behavior and why?

- 5 What does Hannah do to help her brother cope with his anxiety, and what effect does it have on Aaron?
6. List at least five things readers find out about Hannah in this chapter.
7. In what ways is Hannah a typical older sister to Aaron?

Chapter Two

Vocabulary

bris—circumcision

concentration camp—prisoner of war camp

guttural—harsh

Malach ha—mavis—Angel of death

steerage—cheapest passenger rooms on a ship

yahrzeit—prayer ceremony marking anniversary of someone's death

1. Why does Hannah's return to the living room go unnoticed?
2. What is Grandpa Will's reaction to war footage on television, and how does his reaction make Hannah feel?
3. What incident does Grandpa Will's behavior cause Hannah to recall?
4. Who is Grandpa Dan, and how is he different from Grandpa Will?
5. What is the moment Hannah most enjoys at these holiday gatherings, and why?

Chapter Three

Vocabulary

afikoman—ceremonial matzoh

Chanukah—Hebrew for Hanukkah, Jewish festival of lights, December

cloying—sickening

droned—spoke with no inflection

goblet—wine glass

guffawed—laughed hard

kosher—prepared according to Jewish law

matzoh—cracker (unleavened bread)

yarmulke—beanie worn by male Jews

1. From what point of view did Jane Yolen write *The Devil's Arithmetic*?
2. In literary terms, tone refers to the methods by which writers reveal attitudes or feelings. How does Yolen set the tone for this chapter?
3. What does the author reveal about Hannah in this chapter?
4. What is the significance of Grandpa Will offering Hannah wine at the Seder?
5. What does Hannah's mother say during the Seder that upsets Grandpa Will?

6. Where does Aaron hide the afikoman, and why does this make Hannah laugh?
7. Why does Grandpa Will select Hannah to open the door for the prophet Elijah, and why is this ironic?
8. What type of figurative language is the following quote? “A bird pelted the air with a strange, lilting song.” (Pg. 20)
9. What happens when Hannah opens the apartment door?

Chapter Four

Vocabulary

cascaded—fell gently

Chelm—a village which, according to Jewish folklore, was inhabited by foolish souls

conspiratorial—secretive

elaborate—complicated

ornate—fancy

Sabbath—holy day (Jewish Sabbath is Saturday)

shadchan—marriage broker

shtetl—small Jewish community

simultaneously—at the same time

solemn—serious

Torah—Jewish holy laws

wry—twisted

1. How does Hannah react to finding herself in another place?
2. How is the new place in which Hannah finds herself different from her grandpa's apartment?
3. In what language does the woman speak to Hannah? Does Hannah understand her?
4. By what name does the woman address Hannah, and why is it familiar to Hannah?
5. What is the woman's name and what does her conversation reveal about Chaya?

6. Why does Hannah hug Shmuel, even though she knows he is not her uncle?
7. Describe the relationship between Shmuel, Gitl, and Chaya.
8. How does Hannah know she is not Chaya?
9. Why does Hannah hesitate when Shmuel holds out his hand to her?
10. In this chapter, Yolen writes that Shmuel's smile reminds Hannah of Aaron's smile. This may remind readers of a passage in Chapter Three, in which Aaron smiles up at Hannah. What is the literary term for this technique of hinting at things to come?

Chapter Five

Vocabulary

efficiency—adeptness

expansively—widely

mused—wondered

pilpul—debate

schnorrers—beggars

slovens—dirty people

tentatively—hesitantly

yeshiva bocher—college student

1. Why does Hannah go to open the front door first thing in the morning?
2. How does Shmuel respond to Hannah's denial that she is Chaya?
3. What does Gitl serve for breakfast, and why does Hannah balk?
4. How does Hannah react to the knock at the door, and why?
5. How does the author describe Yitzchak, and how does the reader know that Yitzchak likes Gitl?
6. By describing the setting and the people in such great detail in this chapter, what does Yolen convey to her readers? Explain how her descriptions contribute to an air of verisimilitude?

Chapter Six

Vocabulary

Bar Mitzvah—ceremony marking adulthood for Jewish boys

Cossack—Russian soldier

goyish—nonJewish

mishigaas—craziness

plaits—braids

privy—bathroom

shmatte—rag

shul—synagogue

tante—aunt

timidity—shyness

1. What discovery horrifies Hannah?
2. What does Hannah have in common with Shmuel and Gitl?
3. Why does Hannah refer to the dress, which Gitl says is “fit for a princess,” as a rag? (Pg. 42)
4. Why are there no clothes that belong to Chaya?
5. How is Hannah’s appearance different as Chaya? How is it the same?
6. Describe how Hannah memorizes the names of her new friends.
7. When Hannah’s new friends ask her about Lublin, where Chaya lived before her parents’ deaths, how does Hannah respond? Why are the girls shocked?

Chapter Seven

Vocabulary

badchan—entertainer/fortune teller

canopy—roof-like covering

clique—elite group

compression—reduction

klezmer—mobile band

mesmerized—hypnotized

uproariously—loudly

1. How can Hannah tell that the girls enjoy her stories?
2. How is Hannah's newfound popularity different from her social experience in New Rochelle?
3. What effect does the klezmer's music have on the villagers?
4. Who is Shmuel marrying, and in what way is their engagement atypical for the time?
5. What is the job of the badchan?
6. How does the badchan impress Gitl?

Chapter Eight

Vocabulary

dour–sullen

involuntary–not on purpose

lucid–clear thinking

nestled–grouped closely

riveted–firmly attached

synagogue–Jewish house of worship

undecipherable–impossible to understand

1. “The forest is now boiling with people...” is an example of what type of figurative language, and what does it mean? (Pg. 57)
2. How is Fayge different from how Hannah expects her to be?
3. What sight surprises the wedding party as it approaches the town? What unsettling term does the badchan use to describe the sight?
4. What revelation does Hannah have upon seeing the soldiers and learning that it is 1942?
5. What does Hannah tell the rabbi, and why is he skeptical?
6. What is the significance of Rabbi Boruch giving the signal for the wagons to move forward?
7. “They made a perfect circle in front of the synagogue doors, like a steel trap with gaping jaws ready to be sprung.” (Pg. 64)
What type of literary device does Yolen employ in the above quote from the text? What is the context, and what does it mean?

Chapter Nine

Vocabulary

assent–agreement

adamantly–forcefully

billet–assign

conferred–consulted with

crematoria–building where corpses are burned

desecrate–destroy

Holocaust–Nazis’ attempt to exterminate the Jews during WW II

plaintive–mournful

undistinguishable–unclear

1. What do the Nazis want the villagers to do, and what explanation do they offer as to why? How do the Nazis get Shmuel to convince the villagers to get into the trucks?
2. What does Hannah say that angers Fayge, and how does Gitl smooth things out?
3. With what fairy tale do Hannah’s warnings share similarities, and who makes the comparison? How does this reinforce Gitl’s words to Fayge about Hannah?
4. What explanation do the Nazis use to explain the absence of the villagers’ families and friends and their belongings in Viosk?
5. What does Gitl do to keep Hannah from speaking out again, and why?
6. The rabbi leads the villagers in prayer before boarding the trucks, and Gitl leads them in song once they are traveling. Why do the villagers pray and sing?

Chapter Ten

Vocabulary

alienates—pushes away
bissell—slightly
impudent—disrespectful
periphery—edges
profound—deep
protruding—sticking out
Shabbos goy—non-Jew who works on the Sabbath
shikse—non-Jewish girl
spontaneously—all at once
tremulous—shaky

1. What sight causes panic among the villagers headed for the trains, and why?
2. Now that the villagers suspect the Nazis are lying, why do they continue to follow orders?
3. How does the author imply that some of the villagers tried to protest when the Nazis were stripping them of their papers and jewelry?
4. Once all the villagers are forced into the two boxcars, how do they behave and with what result?
5. Hannah pleads with the rabbi that they must do something quickly. She even reveals that she is from the future. How does the rabbi respond to her pleas?

6. Identify the use of onomatopoeia in the following text, and explain what purpose it serves.
“As the train clacketed along the tracks, Hannah thought how lucky she was to be near a pocket of fresh air.” (Pg. 79)
7. What do the villagers begin to talk about on the train, and why is this ironic?
8. What role does humor play for the villagers on the train?
9. Hannah has not cried since the ordeal with the Nazis began. What finally makes her weep?

Chapter Eleven

Vocabulary

achtung—German for “attention!”

amphitheater—rows of seats around an open space

barracks—military housing

discernible—obvious

embankment—slope

mikvah—Jewish ritual bath

prominent—noticeable

rucked—gathered

runnels—small streams

schnell—fast, quick

uninflected—monotone

vehemence—force, intensity

vulnerable—weak

zugangi—newcomers

1. What graphic simile does the author use to describe conditions in the boxcar?
2. When are the dead bodies discovered, and how do the Nazis treat them?
3. What happens to the villagers on the fourth day in the boxcars?
4. What is written in German on the sign above the gate to the barracks? What does it mean?
5. How does the rabbi respond to what is written on the sign?

6. According to the woman in the blue dress, what is the first lesson newcomers must learn?
7. When the woman in the blue dress tells the prisoners to undress for the showers, Hannah is sure she and the other villagers are destined for the ovens. How does she come to terms with this foreknowledge, when the others refuse to listen to her?
8. What can the reader infer about Rachel from the conversation between Esther and Hannah?
9. What is Hannah's new perspective on the showers? How does she feel now about the blue dress that Gitl made her wear on Shmuel's wedding day?
10. Why does Hannah panic when the barber cuts her hair, and why is this significant?
11. Why does Gitl make Hannah promise never to cry again?

Chapter Twelve

Vocabulary

affirmation—positive statement

dank—foul

dissipating—fading away

fetal—curled as if in the womb

garish—tacky

intervals—spaces of time

rote—memorized

rummaged—sorted through

unadorned—plain

1. What is peculiar about the prisoner who the newcomers think of as the woman in the blue dress?
2. What does the name Chaya mean, and why is it important to the prisoner applying the tattoos?
3. Describe the conditions of the newcomers' barracks.
4. Despite the horror of their surroundings, what makes Gitl laugh? How does she justify it to Hannah?
5. Allegory is the literary term for applying symbolism to a parallel situation to teach a lesson. What story does Gitl tell to the soldier, and what is the lesson?
6. When the tattooist asks Hannah her name, he says he will give her a number in exchange. Later Hannah refers to herself by that number. What does Gitl tell her in response?

Chapter Thirteen

Vocabulary

arbitrary—random

bellowing—making loud noises

elusive—hard to hold

emerging—coming out of

fervor—intensity

muster—gather together

preamble—words leading up to

raucous—wild

toting—adding

unwarranted—undeserved

1. What discovery almost causes Gitl and Hannah to miss their first meal at the camp?
2. How important are the bowls given to newcomers at their first meal?
3. What constitutes the first meal at the camp?
4. What things does the officer tell the newcomers they will do, and why will they do them?
5. By the end of Chapter Thirteen, Hannah has some of her memory back. Describe what she remembers and what still eludes her.

Chapter Fourteen

Vocabulary

midden—garbage dump

musselman—those who have given up

sanctuary—safe place

Sonderkommando—leader of prisoners responsible for burning corpses

valises—suitcases

1. What does Rivka mean when she says, “If you are alive now, this minute, it is enough.” (Pg. 112)
2. Who is Wolfe, and what does he do in the camp?
3. What does Rivka teach the girls about their tattoos, and why?
4. Prisoners use the word “organize” as a euphemism for what activity?
5. Why is the garbage dump important to the prisoners? Explain.
6. What significance does Hannah give the tattoo on her own arm?

Chapter Fifteen

Vocabulary

blokova—prisoner in charge of newcomers

burnished—polished

cauldron—huge cooking pot

Kaddish—prayer for the dead

gaudy—garish, tacky

luminous—shining brightly

ominously—creating dread

pervasive—spread throughout

sonorous—rich in sound

1. About how many children are there in the camp? How do they know when to hide in the garbage dump? Describe what happens.
2. Where is Hannah assigned to work, and what does her job entail?
3. How does Hannah get a relatively good job, instead of hauling wood with the men?
4. What effect does Rivka's kindness have on Hannah? What is the result?
5. Chosen for processing is a euphemism for what, and why did the Nazis use such terms?
6. How and why does Gitl organize a blue scarf for Hannah?
7. What becomes of Fayge's father, Rabbi Boruch?

Chapter Sixteen

Vocabulary

Gottenyu—Dear God! (an expression of shock and horror)

shucked—removed

variations—versions

vast—huge

1. What are the rules? Explain how Hannah feels about them.

2. Why is the blokova, the woman in the blue dress, missing two fingers?

3. Why do the Nazis choose Reuven, and what change in camp procedure coincides with his death?

4. Why did Hannah refer to herself and the other prisoners as monsters?

5. What does Rivka mean when she says, “We are all heroes here”? (Pg. 142)

Chapter Seventeen

Vocabulary

hysterical—out of control

portents—signs

staccato—abrupt, harsh

1. What does Gitl tell Hannah about a plan?
2. How do events unfold regarding the plan?
3. After she is safely on her sleep shelf, what thought causes Hannah to panic? How does Gitl comfort her?

Chapter Eighteen

Vocabulary

babushka—kerchief tied under the neck

clarity—clear thinking

defiantly—with resistance

irony—unexpectedness

Liebchen—term of endearment

parody—imitation

superimposed—placed on top of

volley—rounds of gunfire

1. What does Commandant Breuer mean when he says newcomers processed at once are part of the Final Solution to the Jewish Problem?
2. Why are the prisoners still assembled after roll call?
3. Besides the six men, who else is shot and why?
4. Who are the Kommandos and what do they do?
5. What does Yolen want the reader to infer about the blokova when she writes, “It [her hand] was wrapped in a broad bandage, the white stained with fresh blood”? (Pg. 154)
6. Hannah has not told a story since the day of Shmuel’s wedding. What motivates Hannah to tell Rivka, Esther, and Shifre a story about the future?
7. Why does Hannah trade places with Rivka, when she knows this means certain death?

Chapter Nineteen

Vocabulary

L'chaim—Yiddish toast, To life!

resolved—cleared

1. Does Hannah die in the camp? What happens to Chaya? Explain.
2. The character of Hannah develops and changes. She learned from her experiences; thus, she is different at the end of the novel than she is at the beginning. What is the literary term for this type of character?
3. What two things does Hannah realize when she looks at Aunt Eva's tattoo?
4. Ultimately, what lesson does Hannah learn from becoming Aunt Eva's friend Chaya?

Epilogue

Vocabulary

partisans—civilians who fight the enemy

rations—small allotment of food

salvaging—saving

1. Who, besides Rivka and Wolfe, survives the war?

2. What eventually happens to Gitl and Yitzchak?

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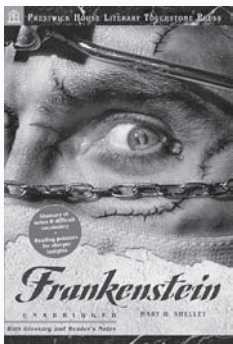
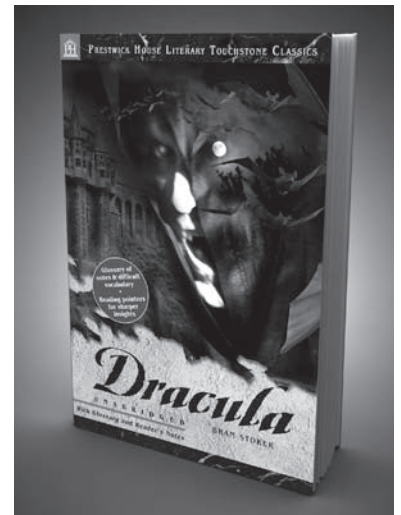
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