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ENGL 112

Dr. Warner

*All the Light We Cannot See*- Book Talk

1. Author- Anthony Doerr

<http://anthonydoerr.com/biography/>

Doerr is a well accomplished author, having won the Pulitzer Prize for *All the Light We Cannot See.* Because of this book, he remained on the *New York Times*’ bestseller list for 134 weeks.

1. Summary

*All the Light We Cannot See* is a story that focuses on the humanity of people during a time that was not known for its humanity- WWII. Set in both France and Germany, Doerr helps us get to know a blind French girl, Marie-Laure, and a bright and talented German boy, Werner, who is recruited by the Nazis for his skill with radios. Their paths cross towards the end of the war, and their meeting effects both of their lives forever. It’s a story of humanity, with an underlying tone of danger and mystique because of a precious jewel Marie-Laure carries.

1. Quotes

“‘This is your parade uniform, this is your field uniform, this is your gym uniform… You will forgo comforts; you will live by duty alone. You will eat country and breathe nation.’ Do they understand? The boys shout that they do.” (137)

This excerpt is one of the first once Werner enters Nazi youth training. It gives a very strong idea of the kind of brain washing that happens. This is the first of many where an official specifically says that they’re on duty is nation. The quote important because it’s an example of what the men and boys were surrounded with 24/7. When someone is consistently told that all that matters is country, your duty is to your country, you listen to the people your country respects and that is that, it’s extremely easy to believe. Werner’s character thought he was doing what he was supposed to do, even though it didn’t sit right with him. This situation is extremely relatable to all kinds of people, which is what helps readers connect with Werner.

“‘Broadcasts from Paris. They’d say the opposite of everything Deutshlansender says. They’d say we were devils. That we were committing *atrocities.* Do you know what *atrocities* means?... Is it right,’ Jutta says, ‘to do something only because everyone else is doing it?’” (133)

This quote is the only one we get where a German says something in defiance of Germany. Jutta is the young mind of hope that we have in the book because Werner cares about her so much. Her defiance and outspokenness sticks with Werner throughout the story and she is the reason he has thoughts of doubt. Her defiance is also part of the reason he stops writing her; he knows that she makes him think about what is really right and wrong. Jutta is barely present in the book, but she is present in Werner’s mind. This makes her extremely important to the arc of the story.

“Carefully Marie-Laure opens her knapsack, breaks open the loaf hidden inside, and fishes with her fingers for the coil of paper. There. She counts to three and slips the piece of paper into her mouth. ‘Just tell me,’ the German calls, ‘if your father left anything with you or spoke about carrying something for the museum where he used to work. Then I will walk away. I won’t tell anyone about this place. God’s truth.’” (419)

This quote is a good representation of part of the book because it addresses two large parts of the story: 1. That Marie-Laure is part of the resistance efforts against the invasion of their city. 2. That there is a man specifically trying to find something that he knows she possesses. Von Rumpel is an antagonist in this story, representing the truth of the Nazis in WWII when they would find and steal extraordinary treasures. He has his own storyline, and this is the first time he and Marie-Laure interact. It is one of the tensest points of the story because we know that Marie-Laure has the diamond, and we also know that von Rumpel knows that Marie-Laure has the real diamond. The style of the story, bouncing back and forth between past, present, and future, makes this encounter extremely uneasy because it wasn’t expected.

1. This book would be good to teach in a classroom for multiple reasons. The first being that it is historical fiction and gives a thorough background of multiple characters and their thought processes and their actions during WWII in their respective places. The second being that the writing is extremely detailed, but not complicated. As I was reading, I could picture every single sentence I read, and this would be great to broaden students’ reading. And the third is that it’s a simple story about two people and how their paths crossing for less than a day can determine life or death. It makes you think about the people you are around and the decisions you decide to make, as well as how empathy and curiosity are such important things.

This book would best be taught to 11th or 12th graders because it is long, and that’s also around when they begin to learn about WWII. This story is definitely more impactful when you know at least a little bit of the historical context surrounding it.

*All the Light We Cannot See* mostly belongs in the “Books about Real-Life experiences” category (Chapter 4). The story was all about real-life and the decisions each character made. I also think, though, that this book fits into “Books about Courage and Survival.” Every character was faced with a situation that took courage at least once, if not multiple times, and it is absolutely a story of survival given what they all had to go through.

1. For *All the Light We Cannot See,* the Lexile range given is 1210L-1400L. The Lexile range uses sentence length and word commonality in order to decide the range it is given. ATOS gave the book a score of 6.2, and the Dale-Chall formula gives it a 6.9. ATOS’s 6.9 is the range I thought it was, which recommends the book to grade 9-12. Dale-Chall’s score, however, says the complexity would be alright for 7th-8th graders. I understand the quantitative scores, but its qualitative complexity is definitely suited for higher high school grades. The information they need to know, and their ability to follow a non-standard timeline is extremely important for fully understanding the book.

Because of the length of the book, student’s motivation to read it may not be high. Books that are 500 pages can look and be extremely overwhelming and daunting, but as long as it’s broken up into smaller parts, it can be a relatable story. Whether student’s had family involved in WWII like I did, or they have some type of disability, or they’ve been forced to do something everyone told them they had to do even though they knew it wasn’t right, a student can find some piece of themselves in it.