**The Book Thief**

Presented by: Erica Odell

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* Markus Zusak was born in 1975 in Sydney, Australia.
* The Book Thief is just one of five books Zusak has written.
* The Book Thief originally came out in 2005 and was on the New York Times bestseller list for 375 weeks and remains there today. <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/markuszusak/about-the-author/>
* Inspiration for The Book Thief were the stories his parents would tell him while they were growing up in Germany. He also talks about why death is the narrator. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7B8ioiZz7M>

**Summary:**

The story follows Liesel through a time-period when death was a common utterance. That time being 1939 Nazi Germany. As the title suggests, she is a book thief. However, these books and words have a special place in her heat. With books and the people that mean the most to her, you watch Liesel make her own stand against the hatred and violence going on around her. Normally YA novels are written in first person however, Death is the narrator and he is telling you the story. I believe the story is told so much better this way. Not only do you get a piece of Liesel, but you get a piece of the people who she cares about. For example, you get a piece of Max, a Jewish fist fighter and the man who her family hid from the Nazis. Also, there is Rudy, Liesel’s best friend. You see him and his struggle with the war. You also get a piece of Hans Hubermann, Liesel’s foster father. His struggle with the moral issues of the war. Trying to be a good person as well protecting his family. With this viewpoint, you also see Death’s perspective. Normally when death or the grim reaper is thought of, a scary hooded figure appears. However, in this case death is more poetic and is often scared of humans and confused by them.

**Quote 1:**

*“…when the heap was reduced near the bottom, a small section of living material slipped from inside the ash. The material: half a red flag, two posters advertising a Jewish poet, three books, and a wooden sign with something written on it in Hebrew. Perhaps the fire didn’t burn long enough to fully reach the depth where they sat. Whatever the reason, they were huddled among the ashes, shaken. Survivors.” (119)*

I chose this quote because I believe this is Liesel’s first stand against what was happening. The fire was to burn anything Jewish related and she committed a criminal act and stole the book from the fire. I also believe these passages symbolizes the survivors of the Holocaust.

**Quote 2:**

*“The swapping of nightmares. The girl: ‘Tell me. What do you see when you dream like that?’ The Jew: ‘I see myself turning around, and waving goodbye.’ The girl: ‘I also have nightmares.’*

*The Jew: What do you see?’ The girl: ‘A train, and my dead brother.’ The Jew: ‘Your brother?’ The girl: ‘He died when I moved here, on the way.’ The girl and the Jew, together: ‘Ja – yes.’” (219)*

I chose this quote because it shows he start of the relationship between Liesel and Max. It also shows that no matter what race or ethnicity you are, we as humans all have pain, suffering and joy. In this case, they are empathetic towards one another because they are both haunted in their dreams. Liesel see her dead baby brother. Max sees his family he left behind so he could hide in the basement of the Hubermanns. He feel’s survivors guilt.

**Quote 3:**

*“There were certainly some rounds to be made that year, from Poland to Russia to Africa and back again. You might argue that I make the rounds no matter what year it is, but sometimes the human race likes to crank things up a little. They increase the production of bodies and their escaping souls. A few bombs usually do the trick. Or some gas chambers, or the chitchat of faraway guns. If none that finishes proceedings, it is at least strips people of their living arrangements, and I witness the homeless everywhere. They often come after me as I wander through the streets of molested cities. They beg me to take them with me, not realizing I’m too busy as it is. ‘Your time will come,’ I convince them, and I try not to look back. At times, I wish I could say something like, ‘Don’t you see I’ve already got enough on my plate?’ but I never do. I complain internally as I go about my work, and some years, the souls and bodies don’t add up; they multiply.” (308)*

I chose this quote because it shows Death’s confusion of the human race. At times, there can be so much wonder and love, but then there are times like this, when there is an abundant of hate and bloodshed. It’s these moments that haunt him. It’s these moments that haunt the world.

**Text Complexity:**

According to arbookfind the reading level is 5.1, which is a 5th grade reading level. However, the interest level rated at upper grades meaning 9-12. The Lexile number is 730L, which is about in the middle of the scale. I pretty much agree with these ratings. I could see a fifth grader understanding the vocabulary, maybe needing to look up a few words. What I see as potential difficulty would be the German words and phrases. Within the sentence or the next one it is defined, but it still could prove difficult for younger readers. There are also a few curse words. All in all I believe older teens would appreciate the story better.

**Exeter Qualities**:

Exeter Qualities 1 and 2: The plot is well structured, imaginative and exciting. Death tells the story and its keeps you interested by giving you snippets of the future and the going back to tell how it happened, so there is a slight jump in time frames.

Exeter Quality 5 and 8: The story is lively, varied, informative language that is grammatically correct. First the story is very lyrical and poetic. It also contains phrases and words of another language, that being German, without making unreadable because you don’t know the language.

Exeter Quality 6: Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world. This YA novel is an historical fiction about the WWII and Nazi Germany. It also shows the side that not all Germans agreed with Hitler’s philosophy.

**Why It should be Taught**:

The Book Thief should be taught because it shows the power of words, both spoken and written. Words brings and binds people together this is shown in Liesel’s relationship with her foster father Hans Hubermann and Max, the Jewish fist fighter. While Hans, taught Lisesl how to read, I believe Max taught her how to write and tell her own story.

I think this book also shows themes of identity, discrimination, and struggles with decisions. Two young characters are growing up and figuring out who they are in a world where hatred and discrimination is all around them. It’s in the air they breathe and the words they are taught. Hans Hubermann struggles with what is morally right and faces consequences that could tear him away from his family.

**A Couple Book Pairings**:

* The Boy in the Stripped Pajamas by John Boyne: I would suggest more for upper middle grade and teens. Same as The Book Thief.
* Number the Stars by Lois Lowry: I would suggest more for middle grade