

Kommandant's Girl

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About the Book

Emma Bau has been married to Jacob for six weeks but the Jewish newlyweds are torn apart when Poland is invaded. Jacob is a member of the Resistance and he has to flee from Krakow, leaving his young wife behind. Emma must struggle to survive by taking on a new identity. As Anna Lipowski, a 'gentile orphan girl newly arrived from Gdansk' she finds herself in a unique position and is able to gather intelligence for the Jewish Resistance but in order to do this she is forced to make difficult choices which have serious consequences for her friends and family.

The book is not recommended for younger students but works well with AS A2 and Highers candidates as well as within general discussion groups at post 16.

Discussion Questions

Please note that some of the discussion points below may act as spoilers for the book's content.

1. why does Jacob tell Emma to burn her marriage certificate? Why does Emma disobey his instructions?
2. how does Emma/Anna's character develop throughout the story? Do you think she becomes stronger or weaker as she finds herself drawn into situations beyond her control?
3. how would you describe Emma/Anna's relationship with a) Krysia b) Marta c) Lukasz.
4. it is important for Emma/Anna to keep Lukasz safe. She aims to save the life of a child but what else is she preserving?
5. what do you think was the most difficult challenge for Emma/Anna? What choices did she have to make and do you think they were the right ones? Try to give reasons for your answer.

6. the story gives us a glimpse of life in occupied Poland during the Nazi era. What do we learn about the contrast between life in the Krakow Ghetto and the life of Polish people on the other side of the wall?
7. Emma/Anna kept secrets from both Jacob and Georg. Which secrets were the most difficult to keep and were there any occasions when it might have been easier to stop pretending?
8. do you think Emma should ever tell Jacob that her child is not his? Why?
9. think about two people who see Emma/Anna on a regular basis, either at work or when she contacts the Resistance. If these people had to describe her, what do you think they might say?
10. the book is a work of fiction. How helpful or unhelpful are novels when we try to understand events within the Holocaust?