

The Book Thief

Markus Zusak

About the Book

The Book Thief tells the story of Liesel Meminger, a nine-year old girl fostered by a family on Himmel Street, Molching, Germany in the late 1930s. Liesel's story includes her obsession with reading, her theft of books and the impact of the Second World War and anti-Jewish actions on the people of Himmel Street and is told to us by Death himself.

Discussion Questions

Please note that some of these questions may act as spoilers for the book.

1. discuss the use of Death as the narrator of this story. Why is he the narrator? Do you find him a benign or chilling figure? Why does Death feel a connection with Liesel?
2. how can you reconcile the contradictory politics of Alex Steiner (page 65)? Can you reconcile these? How common do you think these contradictions were?
3. what is the significance of the titles of the books that Liesel steals? Why does she steal her first book before she is able to read? Why does stealing specifically books become so important to Liesel?
4. Hans Hubermann is called a coward by his son for refusing to join the Nazi Party? Is this true? In what way does the Hubermann family demonstrate both bravery and cowardice?
5. in what ways are Liesel and Max similar? Discuss their shared and divergent experiences.
6. on page 216 we are told of Max's belief that the price of living was 'guilt and shame.' How true is this of Max? How true is it of other characters especially Liesel and Hans?
7. discuss the relationships between Liesel and those she encounters especially Rudy, Hans, Ilsa and Max.

8. while Liesel immediately finds friendship and love with Hans Hubermann it takes longer with Rosa. Discuss their relationship and how it develops through the story.
9. what is Death's relationship with those who are dying? What does he mean when he says 'I am haunted by humans?'