

The Silver Sword Ian Serraillier

About the book

Ian Serraillier began to write *The Silver Sword* in 1951, a mere six years after the end of World War Two. It took five years to research and complete. Although the characters Serraillier brought to life were fictitious, the story was created from historical fact and the young heroes Ruth, Edek, Bronia and Jan were based on real children found in records compiled by the Red Cross. *The Silver Sword* is the story of four Polish siblings and their experience of the war and its aftermath. When their father, the head teacher of a Polish primary school, turned a portrait of Hitler to the wall, the Nazis found out and the family was thrown into a nightmare scenario. With the arrest of both parents Ruth, Edek and Bronia face great hardship and struggle to survive in the chaos of Nazi occupied Warsaw. Then they meet Jan, a streetwise boy whose most precious possession is a silver paperknife in the shape of a sword; a paperknife which once belonged to their father. With this silver sword as a talisman of hope the four young people set out on a journey from Poland to Switzerland in an attempt to meet up with their missing parents.

Discussion Questions

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

1. why did the Balicki family become targets of the Nazis?
2. which part of Joseph's escape was the most problematic and how did he overcome these difficulties?
3. why did it take Joseph three days to find the street where he used to live and what advice did Mrs Krause give him when he finally arrived there?
4. how does Jan become the final link between Joseph and his children?
5. how did the children avoid the Nazi storm troopers on the night their mother was arrested?
6. why do you think Ivan gave Ruth so much help?

7. is there anything in the story which surprises you? If yes, try to explain why you are surprised.
8. describe anything in the story which makes you especially sad or happy and explain why it affects you in this way.
9. what reasons might Jan have for being more patient with animals than with humans?
10. on their long journey, why did the children face as many obstacles after the war as they did during it?
11. what problems did Jan and Ruth have to overcome when they tried to settle back into community and family life? Why do you think they had more difficulties than Edek, even though he was ill, or Bronia?
12. if you were asked to write a character description on two important people in this book, other than members of the Balicki family, which people would you identify as the most crucial to the story and why were they so important?