

Teachers Notes
(Primary and Middle Years)
by Michelle Praver
Hana's Suitcase

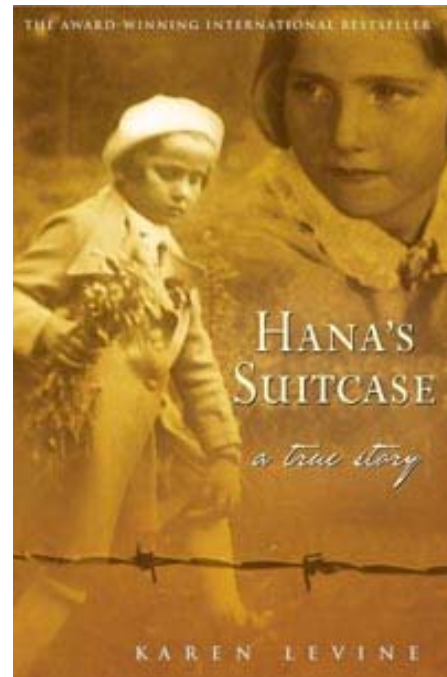
Karen Levine

ISBN 9781741141672

Recommended for ages 9 -16

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INTRODUCTION

The narrative in this book is simple and clear, making it accessible to students from years 5 and 6. Because of the nature of the subject matter and its possibilities for thematic discussion of tolerance, hatred, war etc., it could be used equally successfully in middle and upper high school as a springboard for classroom discussion of these eternally current issues.

PLOT SUMMARY

This compelling story attempts to piece together the life of Hana Brady who was murdered in Auschwitz concentration camp in 1944, aged 13, having spent 2 years in Theresienstadt concentration camp. Born in the Czechoslovakian city of Nove Mesto, Hana's carefree childhood is cut short when Hitler is elected to power. At first, the laws restricting Jews are a nuisance but not unbearable, but as the months roll on, Hana and her brother George find that they can no longer go to the movies, play in the park, skate on the lake or go to school. Her friends, though faithful at first, become afraid to associate with her and she finds herself isolated and lonely. When forced to wear a yellow Star of David in public, Hana, dreading the humiliation, decides to remain at home. The gaiety and joy of life disappear yet she and her brother maintain their spirit by remembering earlier happy times and recording their frustrations in a time capsule which they bury.

Shortly after this, Hana's mother is taken to Ravensbruck women's concentration camp in Germany. She never sees her again. Within months, their father Karel is also taken from them, leaving Hana and George alone in the world. Although a non-Jewish uncle takes them in, it is not long before they, too, are transported to Terezin (Theresienstadt). Hana is murdered two years later on her arrival at Auschwitz.

Half way around the world from the devastation of Europe and 50 years later, Fumiko Ishioka, museum curator of the Tokyo Holocaust Centre, inspired by the testimonies of Holocaust survivors she met at a conference in Israel, becomes determined to teach Japanese children of the plight of millions of Jewish children in World War 2.

From Auschwitz she acquires a few artefacts: a child's sock, a shoe, a child's sweater, a can of Zyklon B poisonous gas and Hana's suitcase, the first items for her Holocaust exhibit.

In her role as curator dedicated to furthering tolerance in the world, and as leader of the volunteer children's group 'Small Wings,' Fumiko explores many avenues in her search for information regarding the owner of the precious suitcase, now a feature item in her museum display. A trip to Poland and Czechoslovakia reveals little until a breakthrough occurs at the museum of Theresienstadt, where Fumiko is delighted to learn that Hana's older brother, George, is alive and living in Canada. Her letters to George result in his eventual trip to Japan and to the writing of this moving story - a testimony to the life of Hana and other children like her, and a product of the determination of Fumiko.

INVESTIGATING STORY LINE

ENGLISH/SOSE ACTIVITIES

- ◆ **Show bag**-This activity focuses on the centrality of the suitcase as representing Hana's life. Students are to select 4 or 5 objects that are significant in their own lives, for example: a shawl belonging to a grandmother, a prayer book, a stuffed toy, a favourite recipe etc. These are placed in a suitably decorated bag. Students then do an oral or written presentation telling the story of their lives as represented by the objects in their bag.
- ◆ Students choose one object which is significant in their life. Students are asked to imagine that the object can talk. Ask them to write down what it would say about them
- ◆ Students are asked to prepare a time capsule (use a shoe box) of their lives/the life of a contemporary hero/villain etc. to be dug up in 6 years time. Include 5 or 6 objects that are representative of their life, their

achievements, experiences etc., Students should write a piece that explains the significance of each of the objects included. Year 7 students can bury it in the school yard and dig it up before they graduate!

- ◆ A time capsule of Hana's life could also be prepared. From their knowledge of Hana, students could prepare a timeline of her life.
- ◆ Read the passage where Hana and George watch their father being taken from them on page 41. Write a diary entry in the voice of either of the children.
- ◆ The following is a poem written by a young child in Terezin (Theresienstadt) where Hana spent 2 years before being deported to Auschwitz:

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
 Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
 Against a white stone...

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished to
 Kiss the world goodbye

For seven weeks I've lived in here
Penned inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court
Only I never saw another butterfly

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
 In the ghetto
(Pavel Friedmann)

To help children understand the world of the children of Theresienstadt, ask the following questions about the poem:

Why don't butterflies visit the ghetto?

Why does the butterfly "wish to kiss the world goodbye"?

What does this tell us about life in the ghetto?

Why is the phrase "The last" repeated?

Note the child's focus on colour. Why do you think this is so?

What does the verb "Pinned" tell us about life in Theresienstadt?

THEMES

This book opens up many possibilities for thematic exploration. Aside from the obvious exploration of the Holocaust and specifically the study of how this terrible period in history impacted on children (see Resources and Further Reading, below) there is also the possibility of talking about the impact on children of other situations of conflict.

ENGLISH/SOSE ACTIVITIES – FOR OLDER READERS

Teachers should read out loud some accounts from the text of The Stolen Children (ed by Carmel Bird ISBN 0091836891) and talk about how the conflicts of adults impacts on Aboriginal children. Teachers should talk about both immediate and long-term effects on family relationships, identity, language, culture and on a sense of belonging etc.

Teachers can then draw students' attention to the accounts of Holocaust survivors in texts such as Child Survivors: adults living with Childhood Trauma (by Dr Paul Valent ISBN0855615524.) Compare the impact of suffering focusing again on family, identity, language, culture and sense of belonging.

◆ On the second page of the introduction, Levine makes the following statement, "In 1945, the war ended and the entire world learned the horrors of what had gone on in the concentration camps. Since then, people have been trying to understand more about what is known as the 'Holocaust'... How did it happen? How can we make sure it will never happen again?"

Research the concept of Holocaust Revisionism and revisionist historians such as David Irving. What do they contend? What is their purpose? How does their altering of history reflect on the above quote?

Contrast the above, with a quote from page 56. "The story of the Holocaust was new to many of the people who came to the Museum."

◆ Debate the following topic: That the world has learned nothing from the Holocaust.

This should be looked at also in light of more recent attempts at genocide.

◆ Levine explains how "teaching, learning, producing and performing" went on in concentration camps "despite the war, despite the drab, cramped surroundings, despite everything..." (page 30). Also pages 70-71 detail classes organized in Theresienstadt.

Research the underground cultural activities that were practised in the ghettos and camps. What does this say about the human spirit?

◆ On page 19, when Mr Rott the neighbour suggests to Hana's parents that perhaps they leave Czechoslovakia, all are "...taken aback. 'Are you crazy, Mr Rott?' one asked. 'This is our home. This is where we belong'."

Why did the Jews of Europe not see the signs that were so clear? What does this tell us about the human spirit and faith in the goodness of man? Is this faith misplaced?

Extension work: students should read Elie Wiesel's Night. In the opening few chapters this same lack of desire/ability to see the writing on the wall is evident. The Jews again do not accept what is blatantly clear. Why? Is mankind inherently naïve?

◆ When Hana and George's father is taken away, they are taken in by a non-Jewish uncle. Were all non-Jews willing to help Jews? Did non-Jews try to stop the Nazis? Research the concept of a righteous Gentile. What does this mean? Is someone who stands by and watches persecution, but takes no action, as guilty as the perpetrators?

Extension work: Read Simon Wiesenthal's The Sunflower. Debate the concept of forgiveness raised in the book

ENGLISH/BOSE ACTIVITIES – FOR ALL READERS

Teachers should share poems from the collection Music and Drum: Voices of War and Peace, Hope and Dreams (illustrated by Debra Lill, compiled by Laura Robb ISBN 0399220240) which deals with wartime experiences of young children. Discussion should focus on what impact war and conflict have on the world of children.

Teacher reads Peacetimes, a picture story book (by Catherine Scholes illustrated by Robert Ingpen ISBN 085572188x) out loud to students as a stimulus for discussion about why conflict ends in war and what the alternatives to war might be. Students discuss some of the key issues of why conflict results in war and whether war is avoidable or part of a human need to control others.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Levine tells the three concurrent stories of this book - those of Hana, Fumiko and George - in alternate chapters building tension and drama as she does so. When Hana's story ends with her death, Levine takes up George's story and continues using the alternate chapter pattern. Teachers should draw students' attention to this construction using some of the following prompts:

Look at the chapter headings. What do they tell you about the construction of this book?

How does this construction serve to build tension? What happens to the narrative when Hana's story ends?

How do the chapters work to convey three story lines over three continents and several decades?

Extension work: Can you think of another book which uses this technique to build tension? (Look at the many books of Brian Caswell.)

ENGLISH ACTIVITY – CREATIVE WRITING

Teacher distributes cards which outline the lives of various imaginary characters.

Students write stories based on the lives of the characters they received. Students then share their stories with a partner and after hearing both stories, must create a scenario where the two characters could meet or where one of the characters can impact on the life of the other. Together they write a third piece.

DISCUSSION – USE OF IMAGES

Another feature of structure in this book is the use of visuals which have been incorporated within the narrative. Clearly Levine wants readers to understand that this is a true story and to this end she provides photos and documentation of both Hana and Fumiko's story. Discuss how the photos work in creating this sense of a true story using some of the following prompts:

- ◆ What is the purpose of the pictures in this book?
- ◆ How do they add to the Hana/Fumiko story?
- ◆ What impact does this have on your ability to relate to the main character?
- ◆ Does it serve to convince readers that this view of Hana is definitive?(see section on faction, below)
- ◆ What do we learn from the pictures which cannot be learned from text alone?

Teachers should draw students' attention to the cover and highlight the fact that it is a collage of 2 different photos of Hana and a photo of barbed wire which attempt to capture her life. Develop a discussion of the cover using some of the following prompts:

- ◆ What purpose should a cover serve?
- ◆ What purpose does *this* cover serve?
- ◆ What information is conveyed in this cover?
- ◆ Does this cover mirror your reading of the character of Hana? If not, which other photos from the book would you have selected? Why?

ENGLISH/ART/SOSE ACTIVITY

Students should design a cover for a book about themselves.

A written piece explaining how the cover reflects the student's life or an oral presentation on their life should accompany this. A classroom noticeboard can then be dedicated to the 'covers' created.

This activity can be modified for the SOSE classroom by designing covers that reflect the lives of individuals studied in history class.

CONCEPT OF 'FACTION'

'Faction' is a neologism coined to describe book and film genres which blend fact with fiction.

Although based on a true story, this book does come close to being a work of faction in which known facts about Hana and her life are interwoven with Levine's imaginative description of Hana's emotional life, concerns, and thoughts. Explain the concept of faction to your students and, using some of the following prompts, explore the advantages and dangers of this genre.

- ◆ What purpose does faction serve?
- ◆ How can it add to our understanding of a character, or a period of history?
- ◆ If a writer imaginatively projects emotions, thoughts, feelings etc, can he claim the story to be true? Discuss this in light of the statement on the cover: 'a true story'
- ◆ Are there dangers in using this device? What might they be?
- ◆ Can you deduce anything about the nature of history revealed in first person accounts? To what extent can they be relied upon?

ENGLISH/SOSE ACTIVITIES

- ◆ The teacher distributes documents (letters, birth certificate, passport, baby health book, school reports, photos, articles etc) and asks students to write a biography/diary of the character. Three or four students should be given the same documents.
After they have written their individual pieces, students should be grouped with others who wrote about the same character. In these groups, students should share their imaginary life. Students will quickly see that imagining a life, although challenging and exciting, can result in infinite possibilities. Discuss the results in the light of the objectivity of history.

Extension activity: the series of history books called My Story could be used here. These books take a period in history and through the eyes of a real individual, who lived at the time, tell the story of the events in diary format. They are a wonderful example of fiction.

- ◆ The following books by contemporary Australian writers use the device of fiction. Classes could read these books in [Literature Circles](#) with a particular focus on how fiction works, its advantages and pitfalls:

Soldier Boy Anthony Hill

Young Digger Anthony Hill

Mrs Cook Marele Day

Alternately, students can be given some of the letters/documents from the back of Anthony Hill's books or the list of artefacts used in Day's book, and asked to write their own creative pieces based on their understanding of the character as gleaned from the documents. This activity can be followed by a literature circle discussion on the books.

Literature Circles

Literature Circles are an effective method of reading in the multi-level classroom and provide students with an avenue for sharing their thoughts with peers using minimal teacher direction.

Methodology

Teachers provide multiple copies of selected texts (no more than 5 of each title for the best results) and students choose to read a particular one based on personal preference after hearing a short introduction from the teacher. The students in each group (ie reading the same book) decide on the number of pages to be read that night and students share ideas about their reading the following day. In this way, books are completed in a condensed and limited time frame. Discussions are totally student directed.

On the completion of the reading, students do a brief presentation of their discussion to the class.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE HOLOCAUST

The World Must Know: the history of the Holocaust as told in the United States Holocaust memorial museum

By Michael Berenbaum

ISBN 0316091340

The Holocaust: the world and the Jews, 1933-1945

By Seymour Rossel

*The Holocaust (picture information book)

R.G. Grant

ISBN 0 7502 2083 X

NON-FICTION TITLES ABOUT CHILDREN IN THE HOLOCAUST

I Never Saw Another Butterfly: children's drawings and poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-1944

By Hana Volavkova

ISBN 0805210156

The Children We Remember

By Chana Byers Abells

ISBN 0064437779

The Diary of Anne Frank

By Anne Frank

*Witness: voices from the Holocaust

Anthology of recollections

ISBN 0732810269

BIOGRAPHIES OF CHILDREN WHO SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST

There Will be Tomorrow

By Guta Goldstein

ISBN1876733020

Hannah Goslar Remembers: a childhood friend of Anne frank

By Alison Leslie Gold

ISBN 0747540276

I am A Star: child of the holocaust

By Inge Auerbache

ISBN 0140364013

Child of the Holocaust

By Jack Kuper

ISBN 0708817262

Mischling, Second Degree: my childhood in Nazi Germany

By Ilse Koen

ISBN0140313567

WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Non-fiction

In Times of War: an anthology of war and peace in children's literature

Ed Carol Fox, Annemie Leysen, Irene Koenders

ISBN 1862054460

Children and War

Robin Cross

ISBN 0 7502 1223 3

*The Way of a Boy (Ernest was seven when he was interned on Java with his mother by the Japanese)

Ernest Hillen

ISBN 0 14 017975 5

Fiction

Two challenging picture story books:

*The Tie Man's Miracle: A Chanukah Tale (the Holocaust)

Steven Schnur

0688134637

*My Dog (civil war in former Yugoslavia)

John Heffernan

1876289120

Novels

*Number the Stars (Annemarie becomes involved in the Danish underground work to save her friend, Ellen, and other Danish Jews)

Lois Lowry

ISBN 0 00 673677 7

*And the Stars were Gold (A displaced Polish boy's journey across Europe in WWII)

Gale Hiçyılmaz

ISBN 1 85881 481 2

*Elli: coming of age in the Holocaust (an example of fiction)

Livia Bitton-Jackson

0586062580

*Let the Celebrations Begin

Margaret Wild

ISBN 1862910235

*The Miracle Tree (56pp, illustrated. Three people divided for twenty years by the devastation of the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki)

Christobel Mattingley

ISBN 0 7336 229 0

*Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes (Famous story of one girl's struggle with the effects of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima)

Eleanor Coerr

ISBN 0340266074

*No Gun for Asmir / Asmir in Vienna (Asmir becomes a refugee when war comes to Sarajevo in the 1990s – an example of fiction)

Christobel Mattingley

ISBN 0140367292 / 0140380353

*Andi's War (A young girl's family is broken apart during the Greek civil war)

Billi Rosen

ISBN 057115340

*Year of Impossible Goodbyes (Having fought with the resistance against the Japanese occupation of Korea in WWII, Sookan's family then seek freedom in the dangerous escape to South Korea during the Korean War)

Sook Nyui Choi

ISBN 0 440 40759 1

*Secrets in the Fire (Young girl living in war-torn Mozambique with the danger of land-mines)

Henning Mankell

ISBN 1 86508 181 7

*Parvana and *Parvana's Journey (Young girl living in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, and then as an internally displaced refugee)

Deborah Ellis

ISBN 1 86508 694 0 & 1 86508 999 0

*Little Brother (Searching for family under the Khmer Rouge)

Allan Baillie

ISBN 0140341994

THE STOLEN CHILDREN

Picture books, suitable for younger readers, about the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

*Down the Hole

Edna Tantjingu Williams & Eileen Wani Wingfield

ISBN 1 86465 024 9

*And I Always Been Moving! The Early Life of Jessie Lennon

Jessie Lennon

ISBN 0 646 27195 4

Junior and Young Adult fiction

*My Place for Young Readers

Sally Morgan

*Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence

Doris Pilkington

WEBSITES

Tokyo Holocaust Centre - dealing with the actual exhibit of Hana's suitcase

www.ne.jp/asahi/holocaust/tokyo/new_page_161.htm

Yad Vashem - Israel's Holocaust memorial museum

www.yad-vashem.org.il/

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

www.ushmm.org/

Jewish Holocaust Museum and Research Centre, Melbourne

www.arts.monash.edu.au/affiliates/hlc/

(13-15 Selwyn St. Elsternwick 95281985)

The Sydney Jewish Museum

www.sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au

(148 Darlinghurst Rd.

Darlinghurst)

FILMS

The Wave. Set in an American high school, this movie explores the story of a teacher who wants his students to understand the power of propaganda and how Hitler was able to turn an entire nation against the Jews.

Shoah: an oral history. This film is a 5 part detailed history which interviews polish peasants, train drivers, survivors. The account is compelling.

120 mins

Schindler's List. The story of Oscar Schindler and his attempt to save Jews

Steven Spielberg

187mins

The Diary of Anne Frank

George Stevens

163 minutes

B&W

20th Century Fox

LIBRARIES

Makor Jewish Community Library has copies of all of most of the items in the bibliographies above. Go to their web site: www.vicnet.net.au/~jlibrary

Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre, Victorian Department of Education and Training, has copies of the asterisked items in the bibliographies above and resource lists on the topics of war, refugees and

human rights:

www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/lmerc .

Language and Multicultural Resource Centre, South Australian Department of Education.

www.lmrc.sa.edu.au .

ABOUT THE WRITERS

KAREN LEVINE

Karen Levine is a Canadian radio journalist. Inspired by an article she read, she made a radio documentary of 'Hana's Suitcase'. The response was so great, she then wrote the book. She hopes that children 'will learn from the story that history matters, and that despite the most unspeakable evil, good people and good deeds can make a difference'.

MICHELLE PRAWER

Michelle Praver is a librarian specializing in Young Adult literature at Leibler Yavneh College in Melbourne. She is also Head of English and teaches English to middle and senior level students. Michelle reviews Young Adult fiction for the journal Viewpoint. She is the mother of 7 delightful children who are all keen readers.