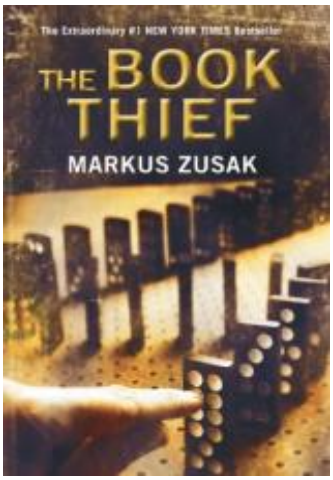
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The Book Thief

by Markus Zusak



About the Book

Markus Zusak?s extraordinary #1 *New York Times* bestseller is the unforgettable story about the ability of books to feed the soul.

Liesel Meminger is only nine years old when she is taken to live with the Hubermanns, a foster family, on Himmel Street in Molching, Germany, in the late 1930s. She arrives with few possessions, but among them is The Grave Digger?s Handbook, a book that she stole from her brother?s burial place. During the years that Liesel lives with the Hubermanns, Hitler becomes more powerful, life on Himmel Street becomes more fearful, and Liesel becomes a fullfledged book thief. She rescues books from Nazi book-burnings and steals from the library of the mayor. Liesel is illiterate when she steals her fi rst book, but Hans Hubermann uses her prized books to teach her to read. This is a story of courage, friendship, love, survival, death, and grief. This is Liesel?s life on Himmel Street, told from Death?s point of view.

Coming from Twentieth Century Fox, the award winning book will be released as a movie on November 15, 2013 and stars Geoffrey Rush, Emily Watson, Sophie Nélisse.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the symbolism of Death as the omniscient narrator of the novel. What are Death?s feelings for each victim? Describe Death?s attempt to resist Liesel. Death states, ?I?m always finding humans at their best and worst. I see their ugly and their beauty, and I wonder how the same thing can be both.? (p. 491) What is ugly and beautiful about Liesel, Rosa and Hans Hubermann, Max Vandenburg, Rudy Steiner, and Mrs. Hermann? Why is Death haunted by humans?

2. What is ironic about Liesel?s obsession with stealing books? Discuss other uses of irony in the novel.

3. The Grave Digger?s Handbook is the first book Liesel steals. Why did she take the book? What is significant about the titles of the books she steals? Discuss why she hides The Grave Digger?s Handbook under her mattress. Describe Hans Hubermann?s reaction when he discovers the book. What does the act of book thievery teach Liesel about life and death? Explain Rudy?s reaction when he discovers that Liesel is a book thief. How does stealing books from the mayor?s house lead to a friendship with the mayor?s wife? Explain how Liesel?s own attempt to write a book saves her life.

4. Liesel believes that Hans Hubermann?s eyes show kindness, and from the beginning she feels closer to him than to Rosa Hubermann. How does Hans gain Liesel?s love and trust? Debate whether Liesel is a substitute for Hans?s children, who have strayed from the family. Why is it so difficult for Rosa to demonstrate the same warmth toward Liesel? Discuss how Liesel?s relationship with Rosa changes by the end of the novel.

5. Abandonment is a central theme in the novel. The reader knows that Liesel feels abandoned by her mother and by the death of her brother. How does she equate love with abandonment? At what point does she understand why she was abandoned by her mother? Who else abandons Liesel in the novel? Debate whether she was abandoned by circumstance or by the heart.

6. Guilt is another recurring theme in the novel. Hans Hubermann?s life was spared in France during World War I, and Erik Vandenburg?s life was taken. Explain why Hans feels guilty about Erik?s death. Guilt is a powerful emotion that may cause a person to become unhappy and despondent. Discuss how Hans channels his guilt into helping others. Explain Max Vandenburg?s thought, ?Living was living. The price was guilt and shame.? (p. 208) Why does he feel guilt and shame?

7. Compare and contrast the lives of Liesel and Max Vandenburg. How does Max?s life give Liesel purpose? At what point do Liesel and Max become friends? Max gives Liesel a story called ?The Standover Man? for her birthday. What is the signifi cance of this story?

8. Death says that Liesel was a girl ?with a mountain to climb.? (p. 86) What is her mountain? Who are her climbing partners? What is her greatest obstacle? At what point does she reach the summit of her mountain? Describe her descent. What does she discover at the foot of her mountain?

9. Hans Junior, a Nazi soldier, calls his dad a coward because he doesn?t belong to the Nazi Party. He feels that you are either for Hitler or against him. How does it take courage to oppose Hitler? There isn?t one coward in the Hubermann household. Discuss how they demonstrate courage throughout the novel.

10. Describe Liesel?s friendship with Rudy. How does their friendship change and grow throughout the novel? Death says that Rudy doesn?t offer his friendship ?for free.? (p. 51) What does Rudy want from Liesel? Discuss Death?s statement, ?The only thing worse than a boy who hates you [is] a boy who loves you.? (p. 52) Why is it diffi cult for Liesel to love Rudy? Discuss why Liesel tells Mr. Steiner that she kissed Rudy?s dead body.

11. How does Zusak use the literary device of foreshadowing to pull the reader into the story?

12. Liesel Meminger lived to be an old woman. Death says that he would like to tell the book thief about beauty and brutality, but those are things that she had lived. How does her life represent beauty in the wake of brutality? Discuss

how Zusak?s poetic writing style enhances the beauty of Liesel?s story.

Author Bio

Markus Zusak is the award-winning, #1 bestselling author of six novels --- THE BOOK THIEF, I AM THE MESSENGER, BRIDGE OF CLAY, THE UNDERDOG, FIGHTING RUBEN WOLFE and GETTING THE GIRL --- and a memoir, THREE WILD DOGS (and the truth). He lives in Sydney, Australia, with his wife, their two children, and the last dog standing in a once-thriving household of animals.

Critical Praise

"Zusak doesn't sugercoat anything, but he makes his ostensibly gloomy subject bearable the same way Kurt Vonnegut did in SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE: with grim, darkly consoling humor."
?*Time*

"Zusak's novel is a major achievement."
?*People*

?Exquisitely written. . . . A tour de force to be not just read but inhabited.?

?*The Horn Book Magazine,* Starred

?An EXTRAORDINARY narrative.?

?*School Library Journal*, starred review

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Publication Date: March 14, 2006
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Hardcover: 560 pages
Publisher: Knopf Books for Young Readers
ISBN-10: 0375831002
ISBN-13: 9780375831003