



12th Grade Summer Reading and Questions (non-AP, girls formerly in 201 and 202)

The Book Thief by Mark Zusak

Night by Elie Weisel

We ask that students please have their own copies of the books, and not use the library, so that they can have a book to use (and annotate) in class.

Discussion Questions for The Book Thief

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." 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." 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 significance of this story?
8. Death says that Liesel was a girl "with a mountain to climb." 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." 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." Why is it difficult 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.

Discussion Questions for Night

1. Give examples of the ways Eliezer's relationship with his father is changing. What is prompting those changes?
2. What does Eliezer mean when he refers to his father as "his weak point"? Why has he come to view love as a weakness?
3. When the young boy is hanged, a prisoner asks, "Where is God now?" Eliezer thinks to himself, "He is hanging here on this gallows...." What does this statement mean? Is it a statement of despair? Anger? Or hope?
4. On Rosh Hashanah, Eliezer says, "I was alone—terribly alone in a world without God and without man. Without love or mercy. I had ceased to be anything but ashes...." Eliezer is describing himself at a religious service attended by ten thousand men.
5. Why does Eliezer direct his anger toward God rather than the Germans? What does his anger suggest about the depths of his faith?
6. How has the relationship between Eliezer and his father changed during their time at Auschwitz? What has each come to represent to the other?
7. What does Eliezer mean when he writes that he feels free after his father's death? Is he free of responsibility? Or is he free to go under, to drift into death?
8. Eliezer later states, "After my father's death, nothing could touch me anymore." What does he mean by these words? What do they suggest about his struggle to maintain his identity?
9. In the next to the last sentence in the book, Eliezer says that when he looks in a mirror after liberation, he sees a corpse gazing back at him. He ends the book by stating, "The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me." What does that sentence mean?

