

# Forced Journey

The Saga of Werner Berlinger



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Discussion and Activity Guide

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## **FORCED JOURNEY: THE SAGA OF WERNER BERLINGER DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITY GUIDE**

This guide poses questions for students' reflection, research and discussion. It is aimed at developing:

1. Historical awareness: Students' awareness of the history of Germany and the United States (New York City) at the outset of WWII;
2. Analytical language/literacy skills: Students' awareness of the author's language choices and its effect on the impact of the story;
3. Memory, analysis and synthesis skills: Students' research skills on topics related to the novel; and
4. Analysis and commitment to values: Students' self-reflection and application of the story and its themes to their own lives.

Themes:

- Prejudice and discrimination, World War II, the Holocaust, the refugee experience, survival, resourcefulness (HISTORY)
- Writing techniques: Development of plot, characters, setting, theme, etc. (WRITING/MEDIA LITERACY)
- Determining fact versus opinion (CRITICAL THINKING)
- Developing research skills (RESEARCH)
- Determining one's own values (VALUES)

There are a variety of discussion questions ranging from those that focus on the student's emotions to questions on history or on the writer's intention. From among these, please choose those which fit your students' interests and abilities. The activities are also varied in the amount of research skills that are required. Tailor them to your class's resources and time.

## FOREWORD (Page vii)

1. Many books don't have a Foreword, but this one does. Explain what you think the word "Foreword" means. The first syllable "fore" is a clue.
  2. *Forced Journey* is fiction, but the Foreword was written by someone who had an experience that is similar to the one portrayed in the book. Why are first-person accounts important when we read a story that's historical *fiction*?
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## OPENING (Pages 1-2)

1. In these two pages, the author has plucked something that occurs later in the story, and puts it at the very start of the book. Why do you think she did this?
2. What is the setting - the time and place - of this story? What country are the characters in and what year is it?
3. In the Opening (pages 1-2), we learn about a major event that happened in September, 1939, that had major consequences in world history. What was the event?
4. What sort of person is Gunther? Is he a likeable person? Why or why not?
5. What do we learn about Werner? Why do you think he's secretive? What is his goal? Do you think he'll achieve his goal?

### **ACTIVITY**

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

What does the word "Nazi" mean - who were the Nazis? Why did they become powerful? Are there groups of people who still hold beliefs similar to the Nazis?

## CHAPTER 1 (Pages 3-5)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In this chapter, Werner is living in an orphanage. What is the worst punishment in Werner's orphanage? Is this punishment fair - why or why not?
2. Sometimes, Werner plays checkers with the other orphans, and he usually wins. What does that tell you about Werner's abilities? He seems to have many friends - why do you think that is?
3. What do we learn about Germany's ruler, Adolf Hitler, in this chapter? He seems to pick out certain groups of people to treat badly. We call that behavior "discrimination"? Does discrimination occur today in some countries? Does it happen in our country? How do you think we should respond to discrimination?
4. Even though Frau Schutz, the orphanage matron, punishes children when they steal food, Werner doesn't think she is a bad person. Have you ever tried to understand why an adult - like a teacher or parent - behaves in a certain way, even when you don't like it? Do you think books or stories can help us understand how people behave? Describe an example.
5. At the orphanage, Werner sleeps on a cot in a row of cots in a long narrow room. He keeps his few treasures in a small wooden box under his bed. Among them are a pencil, a notebook and a picture of his mother, who has died. How do we know how much he cares about his mother?
6. As he runs home, Werner is happy for himself but sad for the other boys in the orphanage. We call this experience "mixed feelings." Can you recall times when you have had mixed feelings about an experience or a person - what were they?

### *ACTIVITY*

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. This chapter takes place in an "orphanage." Are there children today who live in orphanages? Are there other names for an "orphanage"? Where are orphanages located - in your city or town, in the United States, in other countries?

## CHAPTER 2 (Pages 7-8)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner remembers how he ended up in the orphanage: bullies were mean to him. After Werner was forced to write what the bullies told him to on the sidewalk, he walked home "hot with shame". Have you ever felt hot with shame? What other emotions do we sometimes feel in our body?
2. As Werner runs back to his house, he passes Jewish stores that are shut and boarded, with big yellow stars painted across the front. Why were the yellow stars painted on the buildings?
3. Werner is so upset by what happened that he wets his bed like a baby that night. His father doesn't say anything, but he helps Werner change the sheets. Werner notices that his father's face is gray and his shoulders were hunched. From the way his father is described, how do you think he is feeling?
4. When Werner's younger sister, Bettina, begins pestering him, Werner gets so mad that he slams his sister's doll on the floor. He chips its porcelain nose and cracks its head. What do you think about the way Werner acted? Have you been so upset that you mistreated other people?

### **ACTIVITY**

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. The *Hitler Jugend* was an organization of Nazi teen boys. Use your reference sources (online, encyclopedias and other books) to research the Hitler Jugend. In what ways were they different or the same as gangs today?

Do you know of stores or homes or churches that have been painted or damaged in this way?

2. Learn more about the Holocaust - how Nazi Germany persecuted and annihilated European Jews and others between 1933 and 1945. What was life-like for people, like Werner and his family, who lived under Nazi control? Are there ethnic or racial peoples who are being persecuted today? Who are they? And how does that affect their lives?

## CHAPTER 3 (Pages 9-15)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner is finally back home. His eyes “feasted on stuff he knew well.” Do you have stuff where you live that makes you feel at home? What’s missing in his home? And why is that important to the story?
2. Suddenly, Werner learns that his father had bought him a ticket for the *S.S. Hansa* and that the ship is leaving for the United States. That makes Werner angry. He thinks his father doesn’t want him at home. Do you think Werner is correct in his feelings about his dad?
3. Why is his father sending him off again? What might happen to Werner if he doesn’t go?
4. Werner begs his father to come also with Bettina. But his father says he can’t. What are his reasons?
5. Werner’s father gives him a wool jacket that belonged to his mother. What special significance might it have for Werner?
6. There is something else very important that Werner’s father tells him. What is it and why does it matter?
7. Werner’s father tells him to write and tell him all about the new country. Werner wants to know whether his father will come or not. How does his father respond? What might his father be thinking and why isn’t he more honest with Werner?

### ACTIVITY

1. *Now there was no reason to delay, but Werner’s feet felt rooted to the old carpet. He gazed at Bettina and Father, wanting to hold fast to everything he knew and loved. He had been home less than an hour and already he was leaving – with no idea when he might return or when he might see them again.*  
Do these words put you in Werner’s place? What emotion or emotions do you think the author is trying to show here? Write a paragraph about something in your life that brings up strong feelings without saying directly what the emotion is.

## CHAPTER 4 (Pages 17-19)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Now we follow the story that comes right after the “Opening” section. What do we learn about Werner’s trip? Is it difficult or easy?
2. Have you read other stories about trips? Why do you think books or stories or films are often about traveling from one place to another?
3. During the trip, several people try to harm Werner and others help him. Who are they? Read carefully, for there is one person described in this chapter who you will meet again at the end of the book. Don’t look ahead, but guess which person you think it might be.
4. “*Danke!*” Notice that there are several phrases in the German language in this chapter. Why do you think the author sprinkles some German words in here? What is your opinion -- do you like it or don’t like it?
5. Werner ends up in a little shed, curled up for warmth next to two sheep and three lambs. Why do we sometimes feel safer next to animals than with other people? What is Werner’s last thought before falling asleep? Why is it particularly important to him to please his father? Do you often like to please your parents?

### **ACTIVITY**

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. Even during the years when Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party were in power in Germany, not all Germans were unkind to Jews. Many became helpers, even risking their lives to help Jews hide or escape. There is a memorial in their honor in Israel. Find out more about the people who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. Here’s one place to get information:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individuals\\_and\\_groups\\_assisting\\_Jews\\_during\\_the\\_Holocaust](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individuals_and_groups_assisting_Jews_during_the_Holocaust)

2. Think about ways you help others. Describe a time when you were generous, kind or helpful and how it made you feel.

## CHAPTER 5 (Pages 21-25)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Werner finally reaches Hamburg, he remembers visiting the city with his mother. Back then, it was full of automobiles, crowds of people and lots of stores. Now he sees huge red banners with black swastikas draped across every building. Nazi soldiers with guns stand on most corners. Have you ever visited a place and found it was very different from the way you remembered? How do you think Werner feels when he sees the Nazi banners?
2. One soldier asks Werner where he is going. Werner is terrified. What does he tell the soldier? Do you think he's right to tell a lie in this situation? What might happen if the soldier doesn't believe him?
3. Werner is afraid he'll be too late for the ship. He doesn't want to tell his father he has failed. Tell about a time when you were worried about not completing an important task.
4. The *S.S. Hansa* is three stories high and looks like it is a whole city block long. All around him, Werner sees people hugging, kissing and crying, saying goodbye. Werner feels so alone, he pretends that one of the men is his father and one of the girls is his sister. Do you know how it feels to be alone in a crowd of people? What do you do to deal with this feeling?
5. In the crowd, he notices a "perfect-looking" girl, except that she's crying. Her father tells her some of the same things that Werner's father has told him. Now Werner knows someone who shares his experience. Explain how you think that makes him feel?
6. Werner finally finds his way to his little compartment on the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier. Even though this is a tiny and simple place, Werner feels safe there. In literature, a "theme" is a general or main idea of a story, the basic message of the story or other forms of art. What is the theme of this book? Do you think "feeling safe" or "finding safety" is a theme in this book? What other safe places does Werner find as the story continues?

### ACTIVITY

When Werner watches the girl Anika board the ship, she's with other children. *"As the sad group reached the ship, their parents on the pier grasped hands and leaned on one another, forming a knot of grief and hope. Just like his father, Werner thought, their dreams for the future were traveling ahead of them."*

Imagine how these parents felt, seeing their children leave and not knowing if or when they would see them again. Imagine how the children felt. This book is based on the stories of real children who came to the United States on their own, like Henry Frankel, author of the Foreword. Many children were dislocated by WWII, including British children who left England while it was being bombed, and Jewish children who left NAZI-dominated Europe and traveled to England.

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. You can research the real life story of these children at:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One\\_Thousand\\_Children](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Thousand_Children)

You can also research the Kindertransport or British child refugees during WWII.

2. An alternative research project: Find out about the *S.S. Hansa* on the Internet. It was a real ship. Discover all you can about when the ship was built, what kind of ship it was, how many people it held, and what happened to it. It traveled during World War II, when it was very dangerous to cross oceans because of the war.



## CHAPTER 6 (Pages 27-31)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Werner woke up in his cabin on the ship, he didn't know what time it was. Time felt different on the ship than it did on land. Have you noticed how time can feel different when we are in different places, with different people or doing different things? Does it really slow up or slow down, or do we just perceive it differently?
2. Werner is eager to explore the ship. He climbs to the top and goes outside. Looking back, it seems as if the land where he grew up, the only home he has known, has been *erased*. Can you imagine how that might feel – as if your entire past history is gone - every place you'd ever been, every person you'd known? What would you most like to remember or to forget? Would you keep looking back or begin to look forward?
3. Werner is still hungry, and again uses his sense of smell as he searches for food. But soon he's back in trouble when he finds the kitchen and steals a little meat. He's rescued by a kind person, a cook, and then chased off by the same ugly sailor who nearly threw him off the ship. It seems that trouble is always close on Werner's trail. Think about other travel stories you've read or seen in the movies – isn't there usually an element of danger or difficulty in the plot? Wild animals, sharks or monsters, mean people or bullies, storms or earthquakes. Describe the danger or difficulty in another story you've read, and how the hero or heroine deals with it.

### ACTIVITY

When Werner stands on the ship's deck, he thinks about the experience of traveling from one country to another. *Being forced to leave home, Werner knew, was nothing new. History books are filled with stories of people who must leave one country and go to another. Disease, hunger, war, poverty or other reasons people go – ending one story and beginning another.* Werner wants to know what the United States is like, but he has no idea...

Nowadays, thousands of children are traveling to new lands, new countries – for the very same reasons: They are fleeing war, disease, famine and poverty. People who are searching for a new safe home are known as “refugees.” Once they arrive in a new country, they may be considered “immigrants.” Perhaps you know this experience personally or have a friend or family member who is a refugee or immigrant. If so, you can describe what the experience is like to others – the challenges and the rewards.

### RESEARCH:

**The United States has a long history of accepting child refugees from a variety of countries including Iran, Cuba and Somalia.** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media) to explore this topic more fully by typing in “child refugee.” And you can also specify the country of origin.

## CHAPTER 7 (Pages 33-37)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As Werner flees from the mean sailor through the ship, he encounters Anika. She opens her cabin door and invites him in. Looking around the stateroom, Werner can tell that Anika comes from a wealthy family. Describe what he sees that shows this. How do you think this makes him feel? Have you ever felt “lesser than” someone because of their possessions?
2. Anika is learning to speak English. She already knows French and her native German. Since he’s heading for America, do you think Werner wishes he could speak English? Again, he’s put in the position of feeling “lesser than” someone who’s better educated – have you ever felt like that?
3. Yet, there are bonds between the two. Neither has a mother, and both have been forced to leave Germany. When Anika speaks of this, however, Werner totally blows his top. So far on his journey, he has been extremely careful to *hide* his feelings from others. But, all of a sudden, his feelings come tumbling out. Why do you think he feels comfortable expressing himself to Anika?
4. When the two play cards together, Anika proves to be a very good player. Werner usually beat his friends in the orphanage and he assumes he could beat this young girl, but he’s surprised. Do you think that makes him like her more or less? Do you like people who can challenge you and your abilities? Or do you prefer to always win?
5. It’s nearly dawn when Werner and Anika quit playing cards and he returns to his compartment. Werner is 12 and Anika is only 11 – do you think, under ordinary circumstances, they’d be allowed to play cards together all night?

*Yet these are not ordinary circumstances.* Both children are fleeing for their lives. And they are pretty much on their own. (Although Anika is traveling with a woman supervising 16 other children on the ship.) Have you read any other stories about children who are more or less on their own because of an ill or absent parent or for some other reason? How might youngsters behave differently when are forced to be responsible for their own behavior and decisions?

### **ACTIVITY**

*A ship is an odd place, Werner thought. All sorts of people are thrown together – people whose paths would otherwise never cross. Yet, as different as he and Anika were, their stories were similar. They had the same worries and fears; they shared the same hope.*

1. Have you ever crossed paths with someone who outwardly seemed totally different, but with whom you found a lot in common? Describe what that experience was like. Was it interesting, surprising, enjoyable?

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media) to find:

2. Werner and Anika played two games (called “Skat” and “Schafkopf” ) that were popular with German children. Find out more about these games. Here is one Internet site that will help you: <https://www.pagat.com/schafk/skat.html>. Play the games with your family. If you like the games well enough, show some of your friends how to play them.

## CHAPTER 8 (Pages 39-44)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Werner writes a letter to his father, he tells him that he made the trip from home to Hamburg with no problems and that it was a very easy trip. Why doesn't he tell his father what really happened?
2. While they play cards one evening, Anika teases Werner by talking about how the ship might be bombed or torpedoed. Werner is genuinely frightened, but Anika laughs it off. What does this incident tell us about Anika?
3. Another time, Werner sees Anika in the hallway, but her chaperone prevents the girl from speaking to him. How is she judging Werner? Why do you imagine she didn't want Anika to communicate with Werner?
4. When the ship reaches the New York harbor the next morning, everyone rushes on deck to see the Statue of Liberty. What do you think the Statue of Liberty means to them? What does it mean to you?
5. Werner lingers on the ship before climbing off. Why doesn't he rush off like the other passengers? Then he sees Anika walk down the first-class gangplank and leave in a shiny chauffeur-driven limousine. Again, can you imagine his feelings? Do you think he'll ever see her again? Why or why not?
6. Finally, Werner has reached the United States. How does the author let you know that there will be plenty of challenges ahead?

### ACTIVITY

1. Werner is a refugee from NAZI Germany but he's an immigrant to the United States. There are many stories about immigrants of all ages coming to the United States from different countries. Most (12 million people) passed through Ellis Island, a small island in New York City Harbor. You can find DVDs about the island including *Ellis Island*, a History Channel presentation; *Forgotten Ellis Island*, a PBS home video; *American Passage-The History of Ellis Island*; and the movie, *Island of Hope, Island of Tears*. If you watch one of these, discuss what you learned and how you felt about what you saw.

## CHAPTER 9 (Pages 45-48)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On the pier, Werner hears the dock workers speak in English. He wishes he had learned a little English before coming. Have you ever been to a place where you didn't understand the language that everyone spoke? Describe what that's like?
2. Finally, a short, unfriendly man named Conrad appears and leads Werner across the city. Describe his first impressions of New York City, in terms of all the senses: smell, sight, hearing, touch. What surprises him the most?
3. Werner can barely keep up with Conrad, but he keeps following until he reaches Mr. Mozer's store. Why is the bread in the store so special to Werner? Are there any different foods or drinks that mean something special to you?
4. Mr. Mozer greets him in a friendly way – how do you think he feels to be welcomed in this strange place?

### ACTIVITY

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. Google the Yiddish word *schlemiel* to find out what it means. There are a lot of clever Yiddish words that can't be translated into English. We also use words from other languages without knowing their derivation like "pajamas" or "umbrella" or "chandelier" or "kindergarten." Go online to discover where these words come from (their etymology).
2. Have you grown up in the same neighborhood, town or country? Or have you moved from one home to another? If you have moved, describe what that experience was like. If you haven't moved, imagine what it might be like to experience a new house, a new school, a new neighborhood, a new language or new friends and describe what that might feel like.

## CHAPTER 10 (Pages 49-52)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Conrad leads Werner upstairs. What do we know about the apartment building from the sounds, smells, and from the feel of the bannister?
2. Conrad is mean to Werner, but his voice changes when he calls out to Esther who's inside the apartment. Do you ever notice how people speak to one another in different voices? Describe a time when that might happen and who's talking to whom?
3. What is the special smell that greets Werner in the apartment? Why does he like it? Describe any special yummy aromas that you look forward to in your home?
4. What does Werner soon learn about Esther? What does she say or do to make him feel at home?
5. Is her apartment different from what he may have expected from a home in the United States? Do you think many people have a false idea about what life is like in the United States based on what they see in the media?

### ACTIVITY

1. Werner wonders if his father and Bettina can squeeze into the apartment, then he decides: *Of course they would! And they would! Father and Bettina had to follow him here. They had to know what it felt like to be in a free country. He'd only just landed, but Werner already knew. Crossing the city, he had seen hundreds of people. Some had been Jewish, no doubt. Yet not one person had a yellow star sewn onto their jackets. Not one walked with his shoulders hunched up, guarding himself from a cruel look or sharp blow.* Werner is making an observation about life in his new country, the United States. It seems that not all Americans are rich or live in big houses, but what should Americans expect to enjoy in this country?

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

2. Write a paragraph about the gift of freedom and democracy. Are they truly available to all American citizens? What can we do to make sure all Americans enjoy these rights?
3. Werner loves *nudel kugel*, which were noodles baked in sweet cottage cheese with plump raisins. Have you ever had *nudel kugel*? Perhaps you or your parents can make some – it's not difficult. Find a recipe, gather the ingredients and make it as a dessert to treat your family. Here are three places on the Internet where you can find a recipe for *nudel kugel*:

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/dave-lieberman/noodle-kugel-recipe.html>

<http://www.marthastewart.com/346796/noodle-kugel>

<http://allrecipes.com/recipe/220950/cinnamon-noodle-kugel/>.

## CHAPTER 11 (Pages 53-56)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner lives with Esther for only two weeks when he begins to call her “*Mutti*.” What are her qualities that make Werner think of her as a mother?
2. When Werner writes to his father, he carefully includes some information, but not everything. What does he leave out? Why?
3. Esther was sick because ten years ago she had polio. She says that now she has “good days” and “bad days.” Have you ever cared for a person with a disability? If so, describe what that experience was like and what it meant to you?
4. Esther loves her canary. Why do you think he’s named Mozart? Why does he cheer her up?
5. What do we learn about Esther? Do you think you’d like Esther and do you know anyone who seems like her?
6. How does Werner help Esther?
7. Werner rushes downstairs to get the newspaper every day. Why do you think he’s so eager to learn English? Do you believe that knowing English makes an immigrant more American?
8. Sometimes Esther tells Werner stories from when she lived in a village in Germany. Do your parents or grandparents, aunts or uncles tell you stories about their past? Can you remember any of the stories they’ve told you?

### **ACTIVITY**

1. Esther finds out what’s happening in her community and the world through the newspaper. Do you believe it’s important to find out what’s happening in your community and the world? How do you go about doing that? Find a newspaper and see what kind of information it offers.
2. Nowadays, there are many other sources of information for news: newspapers, television, radio, and the internet. Which sources do you and your family use? Newspapers, radio and television traditionally prided themselves on reporting “the facts.” Nowadays there are information sources (especially on the internet) that invent stories. They pretend these stories are factual. How do we distinguish between facts and invented stories? Talk with your teacher, librarian and other students about this important issue. Figure out ways to distinguish between true factual information and invented, non-factual stories.

## CHAPTER 12 (Pages 57-63)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner lives in a busy community. People of many different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds live and work there. Yet, Werner remains fearful and doesn't explore the neighborhood. How do our past experiences sometimes affect how we behave? Is the present always like the past? Or should we take chances to discover something new?
2. On an errand for Esther, Werner encounters some bullies. How are these bullies similar or different from the *Hitler Jugend*?
3. The boys trap Werner and hit, kick and punch him. Werner is outnumbered three to one. That's when another boy named Sam appears. The mean boys seemed to respect Sam. Why do you think they look up to Sam?
4. The three mean boys steal Werner's jacket that had belonged to his mother. What does it mean for Werner to lose his jacket?
5. Conrad comes to visit Esther every Sunday afternoon. He still does not like Werner, and he accuses him of sponging off Esther. He threatens Werner – what does he say he'll do?
6. Esther wishes she could be a better *Mutti*, but Werner is happy to live with her. Again, is he trying to balance the positives and negatives of a less-than-perfect situation?
7. When Esther had polio, she had to lie in an iron lung so that she could breathe. Because she had experienced so much trouble breathing, she is afraid of catching even a little cold. Werner is afraid she might die, so he tries very hard to keep the apartment warm. Do you have any heavy responsibilities in your life? Do you deal with them by yourself or do you try to find help?

### ACTIVITY

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. Werner hears the story about Jews and other refugees from Europe who arrived in New York on the *S.S. St. Louis*. No one was allowed to get off the ship. This is a true story. Find out more about where the ship went and what happened to its passengers.
2. Werner has to deal with bullies as well as the other challenges he faces. If he had just one friend, he believes, things might be easier for him. Think about the people in your neighborhood, school, church or youth organization. Are there any kids who don't have a friend? Think of ways you can introduce different kids to one another. See if you can help one or two find a new friend.

## CHAPTER 13 (Pages 65-69)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner likes to read comic books. Why do you think comic books appeal to him? Describe some of the comics you like to read and why.
2. Werner has a new coat that a man who lived in one of the apartments below Esther gave him. It came from the man's son, who worked in the Garment District in town. The people in the apartment building seem to help one another. Describe how people in your neighborhood may help one another?
3. Werner is walking back toward his apartment when he sees Sam, the boy who had rescued him from the bullies. Sam is crying, and he doesn't have a coat. How does Werner react? Would you react in the same way or would you walk past Sam? Why or why not?
4. Werner knows all about feeling unhappy and miserable. So he stands beside Sam, even though Sam doesn't seem to want him there. Werner is showing "empathy" by understanding Sam's feelings. Describe times when you have felt empathy toward another person.
5. Sam tells Werner about his life. It's not easy. Do you have friends you can tell everything to and friends who do the same? How does it help to tell a friend about the difficult things in your life?
6. Werner takes Sam to Esther's apartment. How does she respond? If you came home with a friend who is cold and hungry, how do you think your parents would respond?
7. Now that Sam and Werner are friends, the bullies don't bother Werner. Why do you think that is?
8. With Sam as his friend, Werner begins to learn English quickly. He writes to his father and sister that he will soon be able to get a good job, because he knows English. He urges his family to come to America and join him, but they never write him any letters. What are some reasons why his father may not be writing back?

### *ACTIVITY*

1. Do you read comic books? Do you know anyone who does?
  - Ask your parents and grandparents if they ever read comics when they were growing up or do they read them now. Ask them who their favorite comic book characters were and why they liked them.
  - Check at your public library to see if they have any comics. The library may also have a new kind of comic book: graphic novels. Many comic books have also been made into movies and television shows.
  - Make your own comic book and share it with your family, your teacher and your classmates.



## CHAPTER 14 (Pages 71-75)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The neighbors come to see Esther and ask for her help. Why do they need her help? What do they ask her to do?
2. Werner helps people fill out the forms, including one man who wants to get his sweetheart out of Germany. There are so many forms! They stretch nine feet across the apartment. The government wants six copies of the forms, all copied by hand. Why do you think the government requires so many forms?
3. Werner wonders why he and Esther had not filled out any forms to help his father and sister go to America. What does Esther tell him? How does this information make him feel about his father?
4. How does the government clerk treat Werner and Sam and the others who are asking for help? Do you think he should have behaved differently?
5. The clerk said the new quota applied to Jews, gypsies, thieves and “undesirables.” How does Werner feel to hear his Jewish people being called “undesirables?”
6. Werner learns that the brilliant German scientist, Albert Einstein, who’s Jewish, was welcomed into the United States. Why do you think Einstein was treated differently than other Jews? Do you believe this is fair treatment?
7. Esther tells Werner about the words carved in big letters on the Statue of Liberty. What are these words and who wrote them? Why are they important?

### ACTIVITY

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. Werner is a refugee from war-torn Europe to the United States from war-torn Europe. But, in the late 1930’s, many Americans didn’t believe our country should take in many immigrants, not even children. The country was just recovering from the Great Depression. People believed that refugees would take away jobs from other Americans. Go online to this source of information that comments on American attitudes towards refugees in 1939:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/11/17/what-americans-thought-of-jewish-refugees-on-the-eve-of-world-war-ii/?utm\\_term=.29a6bba0ce8d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/11/17/what-americans-thought-of-jewish-refugees-on-the-eve-of-world-war-ii/?utm_term=.29a6bba0ce8d)

One family of refugees who couldn’t get into the United States was the Frank family of Holland. Their daughter, Anne Frank, wrote a beautiful account in her diary of hiding from the Nazis before she was captured by them and died in a concentration camp. In addition to her book, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, you can read more at:

<http://www.nationofchange.org/2015/11/22/refugee-anne-frank-was-turned-away-by-the-u-s/>

2. Esther and Werner write to Mrs. Roosevelt. Have you ever written a letter to someone in a position of power – the school principal or the School Board or the mayor of your city or town or to the U.S. President? You can read the letters that children have written to different U.S. presidents by researching this subject online. Write a letter to the present President about a topic that you think is important today.

## CHAPTER 15 (Pages 77-81)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner decides to go to school. It is a hard decision, because he doesn't want to look stupid. If you were in Werner's position, would you be brave enough to go back to school?
2. When Werner arrives at school all by himself, the principal put him in first grade. The desk and chair are too small for Werner, but the first graders like him. How would you feel if you had to go to school with the first graders? What would you dislike? And what might you enjoy?
3. It only takes Werner six weeks to learn everything in first grade, then it's time for him to move to a higher grade. His teacher, Mrs. McIntosh tells him he can see her for 30 minutes every day at lunch time. She gives him lessons to help him do even better. Have you ever had a teacher who did something special to help you? If so, describe.
4. Werner lives in a neighborhood with many Jewish families. They all light candles for Chanukah, a Jewish holiday. After his experiences in Germany, how do you think Werner feels when he sees all those candles glowing in many windows?
5. Werner works hard to learn English and forgets most of his German. The original language that your family speaks at home is called your "mother tongue" or your "first/home language." Do you have a mother tongue that's different from English? If so, how and when did you learn English? How does it feel to speak more than one language?
6. One day, when Werner is mailing a letter to his father, a man speaks to him. His name is Oscar Buddorf. He belongs to a group called *Amerika Deutscher Bund*. People in this group were proud of Adolph Hitler and the German Nazi Party. Describe how Werner might feel to discover there are Germans in the United States who liked Hitler?
7. Oscar Buddorf claims Werner's letter would never reach his family. Describe how you would feel if you couldn't communicate with your family – not by telephone or letter or email.
8. When Werner is worried and scared, he feels like a huge ugly spider is crawling up his back. What does your body feel like when you are worried and scared?

### **ACTIVITY**

Werner does something scary and hard-to-do when he decides to go back to school. Think of something that you know is important for you to do. For some reason, you have been putting it off and you have not done it. Maybe you are embarrassed or scared like Werner was. Maybe you think you will fail or it will be too hard. Is now the time to do it anyway? Talk it over with your parents or teachers or coach and ask for their advice. Then work up your courage and actually do whatever it is you have been putting off. Write down how it feels to do that thing. Share your experience with your family.

## CHAPTER 16 (Pages 83-87)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Because of what Werner learned in school, he is able to get a job at Mr. Mozer's grocery store. Have you ever thought about getting a job after school? What sort of things would you like to do?
2. One of Werner's tasks is to carry garbage bags to the alley behind the store at the end of every day. That's how Werner meets a hobo named Alf. How does Alf describe himself? Does Alf seem like an appealing person? Would you want to get to be his friend?
3. Because of what he's been taught in Germany, Werner doesn't think it is safe to be around black people. What are some of your beliefs that are based on what you've been taught? Have those beliefs ever changed because of new experiences?
4. Alf brings to Werner and Sam a number of gifts. Why are these precious to the boys? One day, he surprises them with a special gift – what is it?
5. Werner is so happy to get a pet of his own! Have you ever longed for a pet? Sam names the turtle "Julius Caesar." Why does he pick that name? What do you think of this name?

### *ACTIVITY*

1. The hobo Alf turns out to be a wonderful storyteller and a generous person. Once Werner gets to know him, he's no longer afraid of him. When someone makes a judgment about others before they actually know him or her, we say that person has a "prejudice" (pre-judge). In your life, has you or your family or someone you know well experienced prejudice from someone else? Describe how this feels.

## CHAPTER 17 (Pages 89-93)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner moves quickly from one grade to the next. In fourth grade, his teacher is named Mr. Pendergrast. Describe Mr. Pendergrast. Why do you think the students seem to be scared of him? How does he make Werner feel? Do you think his behavior is appropriate for a teacher – why or why not?
2. Mr. Pendergrast tells Werner that he doesn't have a good American name like the names of the presidents or first colonists who first came to America from England. Yet Werner notices that none of his classmates have what Mr. Pendergrast would call a good American name. Look around your classroom. What are the names of the students? Do you believe there are any names that are more American than others? Why or why not?
3. Mr. Pendergrast says other negative things about immigrants – what are they?
4. Even when Werner knows more than any other fourth grader in the class, Mr. Pendergrast refuses to move him to the next grade. Why do you think Mr. Pendergrast keeps Werner so long?
5. Finally, Werner tells Mrs. McIntosh what is going on in his class. She speaks to the principal. Would you tell a trusted adult if you thought there was something wrong in your classroom, on the playground, in the gym, or at your home? Why or why not?
6. Every day at lunch, Mrs. McIntosh continues to teach Werner. One day, she tells him about the beautiful trees, grass, ponds, zoo and lake at Central Park. Before, Werner had never thought of going there. What makes him decide to go to Central Park now?

### *ACTIVITY*

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

Mr. Pendergrast brings up an important point. He seems to believe that his ideas and opinions are true. And he states them as if they're factual. And yet others disagree with him.

How do we distinguish between facts and opinions? This is an important skill to learn. Practice writing factual statements such as "Ice cream is made of sugar and cream." or "I have 3 sisters." Then write statements that are opinions like "Chocolate ice cream is best." or "My oldest sister is a pest." Look at a newspaper and see how the news articles are presented in a different manner from the commentaries on the opinion page. Why is it important for us to know what is factual and what is not? What errors could we make if we don't have accurate information? What does it mean when a newspaper or TV reporter talks about a "fact-checker"? How can you become a "fact-checker"?

## CHAPTER 18 (Pages 95-102)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner is extremely excited to go to Central Park with Sam and his turtle, Julius. He and Sam go together on the subway. Do you remember the excitement of going some place new and different? Describe that feeling.
2. Werner can hardly believe he is still in New York City when he gets off the subway. The buildings, cars and people seem taller and grander. Are there different neighborhoods in the town or city where you live that feel different? Describe the differences.
3. It doesn't take long for the boys to smell the green grass, bushes and trees of Central Park. They start running as fast as they can to get there. What is the attraction of a place with grass, bushes, trees, birds, squirrels and even other animals? What sorts of places give you that feeling?
4. Werner spreads out on the grass even though a sign says, "KEEP OFF THE GRASS." He isn't afraid of getting in trouble if a cop comes by. How have his feelings changed since coming to the United States?
5. Why is it so difficult for Werner to let go of his turtle? Do you think Sam gives him the right advice?
6. Do you know what a metaphor is? Could the turtle be a metaphor for Werner's experience? How so? In what ways might they be similar?
7. When it starts to rain hard, the boys try to find shelter. They huddle under an awning of a fancy apartment building, even though the doorman calls them "punks." What attitude is the doorman showing?
8. Whom does Werner suddenly see? From the description, can we guess how she's feeling? He also sees whom she's living with – what is your impression of the twins?
9. Sam teases Werner about having a girlfriend. Werner insists that Anika isn't his girlfriend. Do you think Werner is being honest to Sam or to himself?

### *ACTIVITY*

1. Central Park is a beautiful place that thousands of New Yorkers visit every year. It's a key location in this story. Werner especially enjoys the park after the cramped apartment and crowded neighborhood where he lives. Think about a place that you love to go. It could be a backyard or an empty lot or a city park or a nearby farm or a river-walk. Describe the place and how it makes you feel. Can you go there on your own, or do you go with your family or friends? If you don't have such a place, can you create one in your imagination and visit it in your mind?

## CHAPTER 19 (Pages 103-106)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Werner gets home from Central Park, he knows something is wrong. What did Werner forget to do? What are the consequences?
2. Esther doesn't blame him, but he feels terrible and tries to make amends. Think of a time when you didn't do what you were supposed to do and there were negative consequences. How did you feel?
3. In Mr. Mozer's store, people gather to learn the news from Europe. Most of it is bad. Describe what is happening in Holland and France. At this point in the war, one country is still resisting Nazi control – which is it? The people listening to the news respond differently. What are some of their points of view?
4. Why does Mr. Mozer ask Werner to speak? What does he know that the others in the room don't know? Do you think it's important for Werner to give his opinion?
5. What is the position of the United States, at this point, in regard to the war in Europe? What does Werner wish the President would do?
6. While the group is discussing the situation, Oscar Buddorf comes in to buy groceries. Why do you think the Jewish customers stop talking when he enters?
7. Werner is worried about the war in Europe, but he has another big worry. What is it?

### **ACTIVITY:**

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. If you lived at that time, think how it would feel to hear that Nazis were taking over so many European countries. In 1939, there were Americans who were in favor of our joining the war on the side of Great Britain and there were also those against it. Use the term, "World War II (WWII)" to find out the reasons for each side. Ultimately, our country did join the fight against Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperialist Japan. In hindsight, almost everyone agrees that our country did the right thing. But, at the time, it was a difficult decision – explain why.
2. The United States still debates what role it should play in terms of conflicts in other countries, and American people still disagree. Research a conflict that's going on today in some part of the world. Describe the pros and cons of the United States taking part in the fighting. What role do you think the U.S. should play?

## CHAPTER 20 (Pages 107-114)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Esther is still very sick the next day. How do you think Werner feels when he sees she isn't getting any better? Have you ever felt helpless to help someone you loved – a person, a pet? Describe how you cope with those feelings?
2. Just before Conrad came to the apartment, Werner goes downstairs and begins playing ball outside with Sam. Why do you think he left the apartment before Conrad arrived?
3. When Conrad comes downstairs, he blames Werner for Esther's illness. Do you think Werner deserves the blame? Have you ever been blamed for something, whether it was your fault or not?
4. Conrad says he will take Esther the next day to a special hospital for people who have suffered polio. Werner is worried he will never see her again. In a sense, he is losing the person he is closest to. What other losses has Werner experienced?
5. Conrad not only blames Werner, he begins fighting him. At first, Werner doesn't fight back because he thinks he deserves to be punished. Then he realizes Conrad may kill him, so he begins fighting back. Describe another story you've read where the hero or heroine gets pushed to the very limit before he or she fights back?
6. Conrad stops fighting and explains to Werner why he's so unhappy. After learning his story, do you feel some sympathy or understanding for Conrad? What would you say to Conrad at this point?
7. Now that Esther has left the apartment, the only thing Werner has to take care of is Esther's canary, Mozart. What do you think the little bird means to Werner?
8. Who shows up to help Werner? As he and his friend play checkers, Werner thinks that Sam is a naturally nice person. *Sam's life wasn't easy, but he didn't let the bad times ruin his heart.* Nowadays we have a lot of terms for the role Sam plays in Werner's life: someone is "there for you"; someone "has your back". How would you describe what Sam does for Werner.

### ACTIVITY

1. Think about all your friends and nearby relatives. Do you know anyone who's having a difficult time? Think about what you can do to cheer them up. Could you play a game with them, visit them, take a walk with them, fix them a meal? Tell what you plan to do and how you'll go about it.
2. Polio is a disease that no longer threatens Americans. But in the 1920's and 1930's and even 1950's it was greatly feared. Research polio and its impact on the U.S. and other countries. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had polio and it greatly changed his life. Some would say for the better. Learn how he responded to his illness and how he coped as a American with a serious disability.

## CHAPTER 21 (Pages 115-118)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This entire chapter is in the form of a letter. Why do you think the author chose to tell this part of the story in this way? Do you think it's effective? How else could the story be told?
2. Sam and Werner go to Coney Island because Sam found a \$5 bill on the curb. Mr. Mozer says it looks like real money to him, so Sam decides to treat himself and Werner to the trip. Have you ever had something really lucky happen to you? Did you share your good fortune with others?
3. Werner calls Coney Island the greatest amusement park in the country, maybe the world. They take a train there. Sam is very eager to ride on the roller coaster and all the big rides. Werner is not. How do you feel about scary rides at the amusement park? Are there family members who adore them and other who don't?
4. Sam wins a doll for his sister's birthday. Up-close the doll looks different from how it looked on the shelf. Have you ever had an experience (like ordering something from a catalogue or online) that doesn't measure up to its picture? How does that make you feel? What does the doll remind Werner of?
5. When the two boys ride the Steeplechase, Werner reaches for the gold ring, but it whizzes by. What do you think the gold ring signifies to Werner?
6. Just before they head home, Sam convinces Werner to take a ride on the Cyclone. When the Cyclone goes up high, Werner gets to see all of Coney Island and even some of the Atlantic Ocean. What does this cause him to think about? Sometimes we talk about seeing "the bigger picture"? Why is this important in the story and in our lives?

### **ACTIVITY**

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. Coney Island was considered the greatest amusement park in the world at the time of this story. You can find out more about it at: <http://coneyislandfunguide.com/>
2. What are some differences between an amusement park 100 years ago and today's amusement parks? Are they still fun places to go with your family? Write a letter to a friend about a trip you have taken to an amusement park or a trip you imagine taking – who you'll go with, what you'll do, what you'll eat.



## CHAPTER 22 (Pages 119-122)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner doesn't tell his father everything about the trip to Coney Island. What does he leave out of the letter? Why do you think he doesn't tell everything?
2. Although he mistakes the mean girl at the Steeplechase for his friend Anika, it reminds him that he wants to see her again. Why do you think he wants to see her again?
3. First, he needs to visit Esther in the sanatorium. He brings Esther cherries from Mr. Mozer's grocery store, and he brings Mozart, her canary. A nurse tries to prevent Werner from carrying Mozart up to Esther's ward, but a doctor helps him out. Do you think the bird will aid Esther's recovery? Have you any pets that help you feel better?
4. Werner has traveled far to find his family a safe home, yet he still feels he hasn't achieved his goal. So he imagines moving somewhere else. Where does he think of going and why? How does he describe this different and better place. Do you think he's being realistic? What sort of place would you dream of going that's different from where you now live?

### **ACTIVITY**

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. There are many new techniques for helping sick people or people in the hospital. Bringing in music (*music therapy*) and animals (*pet therapy*) are a few of these. There are others like clowns and magicians visiting hospital patients. Choose one of these therapies and explore how it benefits ill people.
2. Consider visiting a sick friend or relative with your family or think of ways to make them feel better like a gift or a card.

## CHAPTER 23 (Pages 123-127)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner has a plan for going to see Anika. He tells it to Sam and asks his help. What is the plan? Do you think it will work?
2. Sam ends up being unable to go. Werner considers scrapping his plan. Why do you think he decides to keep going?
3. Werner heads for Central Park by himself. When he arrives, he again feels as though he's walking into a different universe. Describe what he likes and doesn't like about this uptown neighborhood?
4. As he looks around, Werner wonders if people understand how quickly their lives can change. Do we sometimes take for granted the security in our lives? There are many major changes that can occur nearly overnight like automobile accidents, illness, hurricanes, floods, job loss, someone moving away. Describe a big change that may have occurred in your life and how it affected you.
5. While he is on the way to Anika's apartment, a plump little boy named Harry runs into him. Harry's mother snatches her son away and tells Harry to stay clear of people like Werner. What is her basis for judging Werner? What sort of attitude does she show towards people who are poorer than she?
6. Werner is afraid Anika might not want to see him. How does he try to improve his appearance? Do you think Anika will notice?
7. When Werner reaches Anika's apartment building, he has to use his wits to get past the doorman and into the elevator. Then he has to come up with a plan to contact her inside the apartment. What do we learn about Werner from these efforts? Is he successful in his goals? How do you think Werner got to be so resourceful?

### ACTIVITY

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. Central Park is ringed by many beautiful old buildings like *The Dakota*. Several famous people lived there including the Beatles musician John Lennon and the actress Judy Garland who starred in *The Wizard of Oz*. Learn about this building at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Dakota](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dakota). Another great place on Central Park is the Natural History Museum which is the setting for **Night at the Museum**, starring Ben Stiller. Also, there's a charming picture book for young children, **Eloise at the Plaza**, about a girl who lives in a fancy hotel on Central Park.
2. Are there some great old buildings in your town or city? Do you know their history or who lived there? How could you find out more about the history of the buildings where you live? Talk to your teacher, a librarian, your parents. Find out if there's a historic preservation association. Visit an old building and draw a picture of it.

## CHAPTER 24 (Pages 129-133)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Anika sees Werner, she jumps into his arms. What does this show about her feelings?
2. Werner can see that Anika is unhappy. What does she tell him about her host family.
3. Anika thinks Werner must have a better family. She wants to go there. Why doesn't Werner tell her the truth?
4. The two children run off together and end up in Central Park. At first, it seems like a fun place to be and they behave like young children. What sorts of things do they do?
5. Anika tells Werner he seems like the character *Huckleberry Finn*. (That's the name of a book by the American author Mark Twain.) How do you imagine Werner might resemble Huck? How has Werner changed since Anika last saw him?
6. Anika insists that she doesn't want to go back to the Furstburners. As evening arrives, Werner and Anika head deeper into the park. Do you think they have a good plan? Can you imagine spending the night in a park on your own?

### **ACTIVITY**

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

Central Park is a magnificent old park in the center of Manhattan. It's loved by the inhabitants of New York and thousands of visitors to the city. The park is now hilly and grassy with big trees and bushes and lovely ponds and lakes. But it hasn't always been like that. The original land was empty, flat and desolate. Research Central Park's history and its construction and the man who transformed it. His name is Frederick Law Olmstead.

## CHAPTER 25 (Pages 135-139)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner and Anika have fun playing on a playground in Central Park. Werner shows Anika how to roll down the hill, but she wasn't ready to do something that wild and free in public. Do you think Werner has changed more than Anika? Why or why not?
2. As it gets later, people begin to leave the park. Werner and Anika are more and more alone. How do you imagine they feel in this strange place in the dark? Would you have stayed?
3. Werner thinks of taking Anika back to his old neighborhood. Why does he change his mind?
4. As it gets darker and darker, Werner leads the way through thickets of trees and bushes. He doesn't know where he's going, but when Anika asks if he knows where they are going, he promises her that they aren't lost. Do you think he gave her a truthful answer? Why or why not?
5. When Anika refuses to go any farther, they lie down near a bush. Pretty soon they see lightning bugs flying around, with the back part of their bodies lighting up. Werner thinks they look like magic. Have you ever seen lightning bugs? What would you do if you saw one?
6. As Werner lies on the ground waiting for sleep to come, he sees some lightning bugs and some little animals. How does he feel there?

### ACTIVITY

In this chapter, Anika and Werner embark on an adventure. In *Webster's Dictionary*, an adventure is defined as "an exciting and dangerous undertaking." Describe what's exciting and possibly dangerous about their adventure. Have you read other books or seen films about children engaged in an adventure? Why do you think stories often feature adventures? Do you think it's possible to experience danger and excitement through a book or film that you might not want to experience in real life? Give some examples. Think of an exciting, even dangerous experience, in your own life, and what you may have learned from it. Or write about an adventure you imagine taking. Who would you choose to accompany you?

## CHAPTER 26 (Pages 141-144)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the morning, a kind black man named Amos Todd finds Werner and Anika asleep in the park. Why do you think Mr. Todd isn't surprised to see them?
2. How does Werner react in a way that's different from Anika? Werner thinks he knows why – what's his reasoning?
3. What do we learn about Amos from the way he behaves?
4. Amos gives Werner a shovel so he could help dig a ditch. This is a new experience for Werner. What do you think he gains from the hard work of digging this ditch?
5. When Werner and Amos are digging the ditch, people walk by and don't even notice them. Why do you think this is? Do you think some people in our world seem invisible to others? Why?
6. Anika explains what's happened to her father. Why is she worried?
7. Amos tells Werner he will take him and Anika home with him that night. Werner can feel his chest lighten. Tell about a time when someone lightened the load for you.

### **ACTIVITY**

In this chapter, Werner finds a new helper. Or rather, the helper finds him.

The author has designed this book so that Werner first encounters adversaries (also called antagonists or even villains) and then he discovers people who help him along the way. What is he learning from each one as he progresses on his journey? The title of the book is *Forced Journey: The Saga of Werner Berlinger*. The word “saga” is a Norwegian word that means “a long story of adventure or heroic deeds.” Why do you think the author chose this title? Does Werner behave like a hero? Do you think heroic deeds can be either physical or mental or emotional? Think about your own life and whether you've performed any heroic deeds. Were you rewarded or recognized for it?

## CHAPTER 27 (Pages 145-147)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Amos and the children get on the bus, Werner can tell the bus is going to a part of town where he's never been. How would you feel about taking a bus (or car, plane, train or subway) to a place you'd never been?
2. The farther they ride, the more black people get on the bus. What do we learn about the people on the bus?
3. When the children follow Amos off the bus, they have the only white faces in the neighborhood. Have you ever visited or lived in a place where you looked different from everyone else? How did it feel?
4. In his apartment, Amos introduces his niece Bessie. Does she seem like a likeable character? Why or why not?
5. What does Werner know about Jesus? Why was he surprised to learn from his father that Jesus was a Jew?

### ACTIVITY

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. Find out more about the community of Harlem in the early 1940s. Here are two Internet sites where you can find more information:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Harlem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Harlem)

<http://www.harlemheritage.com/history-of-harlem/>

*“Now Anika gazed intently at the picture of Jesus. “What’s wrong with his heart?” Werner shrugged, but Bessie overheard her question. “Ain’t nothing wrong with His heart, honey,” she said. “Jesus puts His blessed heart out there like that so we’ll know what to do with our hearts. Those thorns digging in, that’s the meanness and selfishness in the world. He feels the pain we got, the pain we all got.” Anika turned from the picture and looked straight at Bessie. “He knows everybody’s pain?”*

2. What do you think the author is saying in this paragraph? Do you think that emotional pain or suffering can be part of everyone’s life, whether they’re black or white, rich or poor?
3. Do you think we sometimes feel more in common with others when we’re disappointed or sad or lonely, than when we feel popular and successful? Write about a time when you felt unhappy and someone or something lifted you out of that feeling – it could be a person, a book, a bird or a tree.

## CHAPTER 28 (Pages 149-152)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the evening, Werner looks out the window. He sees people talking and laughing and listening to the radio. He even sees a man playing a trumpet. This is a part of New York City he had never known existed. Are there parts of your town or city that you've never visited? How do they differ from where you live?
2. Amos wakes him up early in the morning. He asks if Werner wants to go to work with him again. Werner's hands are blistered and they hurt, but he decides to help Amos. Why does he decide to go?
3. At lunch time, Amos tells Werner a little more about himself. When Werner asks if Bessie has children, Amos says she had a son, "but he ain't with us no more." What do you think Amos means when he says that?
4. As they stand at the bus stop to go home to Harlem that evening, a policeman notices Werner in line with the black men. What does the policeman say to Werner about standing in that line? How does Werner respond? Why do you think he acts this way?
5. When the policeman leaves, Amos asked Werner, "You coming?" Werner gets on the bus, but he feels terrible. He has discovered that Esther was wrong about something. Not everyone in America is treated equally. This story takes place in 1939, what about today? Do you think everyone in America is treated equally?
6. Werner is embarrassed and upset about his behavior. He compares the way he behaved to how he was treated by the Hitler Jugend who spit at him and forced him to write "I am an ugly Jew-boy" on the pavement. Do you believe the two behaviors are similar? In what way? In what way are they different?

### **ACTIVITY**

1. Respecting one another is an important issue in our country. Respecting someone is not necessarily liking that person, or even knowing that person. Think of how people can be disrespectful to one another just by driving by and honking loudly or saying something ugly. Have you ever had that happen? How does it make you feel? How do you respond?

Think about ways we show respect for each other and write them down. They could be actions, such as saying hello in a friendly way. They could be listening while a person is talking, either another student or an adult. It could be lowering your voice or turning down the volume of your music when you're in public.

Think of the ways you can show disrespect and write them down. They could be things such as rolling your eyes when someone says or does something you think is stupid. They could be ignoring someone, saying something mean, cutting in line or pushing past someone in the hall. What other ways can you show disrespect?

When you are finished, study your two lists.

Try for a whole day to do only things that show respect. If you do something disrespectful, apologize to the person and really mean it. At the end of the day, think about how your day went. Was it a better day than normal? Did you feel better about yourself? If so, dedicate another day, or even a week, to being

respectful to everybody. You may discover that it will change your life for the better. You may discover that you have more friends.

2. Alternative activity: *Anika's big eyes were the last thing that Werner glimpsed before the door closed. He guessed she was still a little fearful. Spending a day with Bessie, however, might turn her around. That's how it was – you meet one person and they change how you see the world.* Write how one person in your life has changed the way you see the world....



## CHAPTER 29 (Pages 153-158)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Anika has a good day helping Bessie. They have cleaned, pressed and folded a stack of laundry. Anika ironed most of it herself. Why do you think doing that work made Anika happy?
2. At supper, Bessie serves pork chops. Anika says she can't eat pork chops because she is Jewish. Werner tries to prevent her from speaking by kicking her under the table. What is he afraid of?
3. Werner and Anika tell Amos that it is horrible in Germany. Amos looks at the picture on the wall of Jesus, who was Jewish. He said, "I never could see how folks could worship one Jew and act so hateful to others." What do you think about what Amos said?
4. That night, Werner has a nightmare. He dreams that his father and sister are in a forest and that his sister is playing hide and seek. He sees Oscar Buddorf sneaking up on his sister. He tries to warn his sister, but no words come out. Dreams are often *symbolic - that is, a thing or material object that represents a feeling, a concept or a value*. This dream could represent something Werner fears – what is it?
5. Early the next morning, Werner hears Anika crying. She is afraid if she stays with Amos and Bessie that her father will never find her. After Werner has time to think, he tells Anika they will do. What does he say to her? Does it seem like a difficult decision for him to make? Why?
6. When Amos walks the children to the bus stop, Werner wants to apologize. He feels bad about what he said to the police officer, but he can't think of the right words. Have you ever wanted to say something to someone but lacked the words to express your thoughts or feelings? What can you do when this happens?
7. When they walk through Central Park on the way back to Anika's apartment, Werner tries to delay their arrival. Why do you think he's stalling?
8. Anika finally explains to Werner why she doesn't have a mother. What does she tell him? Describe how she might feel. Have you ever felt torn apart by conflicting desires or emotions?
9. When Anika and Werner say good-bye to one another, it's a sad moment for both of them. How does Werner describe the feeling? Why do you think Anika says her good-bye in German and Werner says his in English?

### ACTIVITY

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. Think about a time you said or did something that you wished you hadn't. Think about the person whose feelings you may have hurt. Werner couldn't find words to apologize to Amos for what he had said to the policeman about being in the wrong bus line. Sometimes, it is hard to find the words to apologize, and yet, apologies can be very important.

Recently, a police chief apologized for the lynching of a young black man that had taken place decades earlier, before the police chief even lived in that town. But the police chief wanted to improve relations with the black community. He wanted members of the black community to trust the police. See article <https://nyti.ms/2jDiaGA>

There have been other very important apologies. Here are ten such apologies, including for apologies for Holocaust victims, American slavery, apartheid in South Africa and the internment of Japanese-Americans.

<http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,1997272,00.html>

Read about these apologies. Think about their impact on the people receiving the apology. Do you think they're helpful? Is there anyone you would like to apologize to?

## CHAPTER 30 (Pages 159-164)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After Anika returns to her apartment with the twins, what does Werner do? How does the author show Werner's feelings through his behavior without saying that he's upset or hurt or angry?
2. Werner thinks about Amos Todd: "...his hands were deeply calloused, but his heart sure wasn't. No amount of troubles had made him mean and bitter." What has he learned from Mr. Todd?
3. When Werner returns to his neighborhood, it feels as though he's been gone three years instead of three days. Why do you think this is? Have you ever had an experience where time seems much longer than usual?
4. How does Mr. Mozer greet Werner? What does he give him? How does Werner react?
5. Mr. Mozer tries to comfort Werner. He tells him, "There's always hope that they have found a safe place." Do you think Mr. Mozer believes that? Does Werner?
6. Sam bursts into the store then, happy to see his friend. When he sees how upset Werner is, Sam suggests that they go outside. Do you think this is a good idea? Do you ever go out of doors when your thoughts are sad or heavy?
7. When Sam tells Werner he wants to take him to a place Werner has never been, Werner doesn't want to go. Then he sees Conrad. What does he fear from Conrad?
8. Werner decides to go with Sam. Is this a good decision?

### ACTIVITY

1. From Page 2: *But Werner at least had a goal – get a foothold in America – a place to live, a home. Then Father had promised that he and Werner's little sister would follow. This dimly burning ember of hope lit the boy's path...*

In the beginning of this story, Werner has a strong goal – for his father and sister to follow him to the United States. During nearly the whole book, he holds fast to this goal. Now, 160 pages later, it seems that he won't achieve this goal. Think about a time when you had an important goal in school, on your sports team or at home with your family - and that hope or dream was dashed. What do you do next? How do you adjust? This is the dilemma Werner faces and which we all may face at different times in our lives. Describe how you might respond.

## CHAPTER 31 (Pages 165-170)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Werner and Sam run from Conrad. Finally, they reach the East River. From there, they can see the Manhattan Bridge and the Williamsburg Bridge. Across the river is Brooklyn, a place where Sam has relatives and where he hopes to live someday. In other words, Sam is thinking of the future, a good future. But his friend Werner can't yet think about the future. In your own words, describe what's happening to Werner, what are his thoughts and feelings.
2. Werner falls into the river and starts to sink. The river's dark swift current drags him down. His mind, his muscles and his heart almost give up. Do you think the author is using a *symbol* here – what might be truly dragging Werner down? What will happen if he does totally give up?
3. Suddenly, he hears Sam's voice, "Werner, Werner, grab on!" How important is this to Werner? Have you ever had a friend who nearly saved your life? What else saves Werner?
4. As the boys sweep by a pier, Sam calls for help. Who pulls them out of the water? Are you surprised when you discover who it is? Why or why not?
5. As Conrad drives them back to Second Avenue, he explains how he had tried to catch up to the boys. When they pull in front of the store, Conrad tells Werner he doesn't have to worry about being sent back to Germany. Do you think Conrad has changed - how?
6. *Trudging upstairs, Werner could feel the stairs beneath his feet. Each step felt as if he were lifting the weight of centuries.* What do these lines mean to you? How does the past sometimes weigh on our present?
7. In the apartment, Werner has a wonderful surprise. Did you see this coming? Why do you think the story ends with Mozart's song?

### ACTIVITY

1. *He was tired, damp, sore and alone. Yet, even in his aloneness, he felt close to everyone he had ever cared about - Mother, Father, Bettina, Esther, Mr. Todd, Anika – each would stay in his heart as long as he lived.*

Think about the people in your life who will remain in your heart always. Do you appreciate them and show your appreciation? Think of ways you might express your appreciation – in a letter, a picture, a song or even a smile.

2. *The river hadn't done its deadly work. He had escaped – he was the lucky one. Werner stumbled and reached for the rail. He hadn't succeeded in saving anyone, only himself. But wasn't that something?* Think about these words. Do you believe Werner was lucky? Werner had only saved himself. Do you think that's enough? Is that a worthy goal?

## EPILOGUE (Pages 171-176)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Life continues for Werner. He learns that the mean teacher, Mr. Pendergrast, isn't at his school any more; he has moved to Connecticut. The principal says, "I think he'll be happier there." What do you think the principal is really saying?
2. Almost a year and a half later, on Dec. 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the American military base on the island of Oahu in Hawaii. That's when the United States entered World War II. Why does this make Werner happy?
3. When America gets into the war, Germans like Oscar Buddorf leave the neighborhood. Any idea why Oscar moves away?
4. When Werner is a senior in high school, he sees Anika and her father sitting in a fancy restaurant. He thinks about going inside to greet Anika and her father. Why does he decide not to? Do you think he and Anika will ever get together again?
5. When Werner turns 18, he and Sam sign up for the Army. What do they see when they reach Europe? What does Werner do the first time he comes close to a Nazi soldier? How does Sam help him?
6. Werner's job is handing out food to hungry families. One day, a 12-year-old German girl comes for food. What does she look like? Is it possible we've met her before in the story? If so, why do you think she's in the story again?
7. One day, Sam talks Werner into going to a concentration camp with him. What does Werner see?
8. When Werner is about to leave, he spots something familiar. What is it? Who did it belong to? His heart feels as if it's exploding in his chest. He's about to throw the doll's head away, but he doesn't. Why does he decide to keep it?
9. In spite of his sadness, what does Werner end up doing? What has Esther taught him that helps him to keep going?

### **ACTIVITY**

**RESEARCH:** Use online and print resources (books, magazine articles or other media).

1. Sam's job with the Army was to open up concentration camps. Hitler had put people he hated in those camps – Jews, communists, homosexuals, gypsies and others. *Although Sam worked hard and took his job seriously, he lost his smile for months.* Many Americans wrote or talked about their experiences in opening up the concentration camps, including General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who later became President of the United States. Find and read about some of these experiences.
2. A few people today claim that the concentration camps didn't exist. How do we know they did exist? How can we find the facts?
3. What do you think of the conclusion of this story? Did it surprise you? Was it satisfying? Was it appropriate for this story?

4. Do you think that reading and discussing this story has influenced how you think or feel about topics such as: prejudice and discrimination, refugees, “minority groups,” World War II, the Holocaust, or survival?
5. This story is an example of “realism” in fiction. Do you think the characters, setting and plot are believable, i.e., that they are like “real life?” Why or why not?
6. Did you enjoy doing background research as requested? Which activities did you like best?