

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Number the Stars

by  
Lois Lowry

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### Book Information

Lois Lowry, Number the Stars  
Quiz Number: 379  
Houghton Mifflin, 1989  
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137 Pages  
Book Level: 4.5  
Interest Level: MG

In 1943, during the German occupation of Denmark, ten-year-old Annemarie learns how to be courageous when she helps shelter her Jewish friend from the Nazis.

**Award:** ALA Notable/Best Books; Jane Addams Book Award/Honor Books; Misc./Other; Newbery Medal; State Award; Sydney Taylor Award/Honor

**Topics:** Adventure, Escape; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Power Lessons AR, Grade 4; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Recommended Reading, Jewish Stars; Wars, World War II

### Main Characters

Annemarie Johansen the principal character in the story; a ten-year-old girl who shows great courage to save her friends, the Rosens, from the German soldiers

Ellen Rosen Annemarie's best friend and neighbor; a Jewish girl who needs to escape from the Nazis

Kirsti Annemarie's little sister

Mr. and Mrs. Rosen Ellen's parents, who are neighbors and friends of the Johansens

Mr. Johansen (Papa) Annemarie's father

Mrs. Johansen (Mama) Annemarie's mother, who helps Uncle Henrik carry out the escape plan for the Rosens at the seaside farm

Peter a family friend of the Johansens and a Danish Resistance leader who is later executed

Uncle Henrik Mama's brother and a fisher, who secretly carries Jewish people across the sea to Sweden

### Vocabulary

**casket** a coffin; a burial box

**custom** a usual or long-established practice; a tradition; a habit; a ritual

**gestured** moved a part of the body to communicate an idea or feeling; motioned or signaled

**gnarled** knotted or twisted in appearance; having been distorted, deformed, or bent out of shape; weathered; ragged

**harsh** strict or severe; extremely unpleasant; not pleasing to the senses; mean, nasty, or cruel; brutal or tough; bitter; rough

**imagination** the power or ability to create things, usually pictures or ideas, in one's mind; the ability to think creatively

**psalm** a song or poem, usually Biblical

**simply** just; only; merely; certainly or clearly; surely; without question or without a doubt

**synagogue** a Jewish place of worship

**unfamiliar** unknown; foreign; strange

### Synopsis

German soldiers have occupied Denmark, and Danish citizens are suffering from harsh restrictions imposed upon them. Food, fuel, clothing, and shoes are scarce. Soldiers standing on the street corners with rifles are a constant reminder of the Nazi threat. In the midst of the disruption, the Johansens and Rosens struggle to live normally.

When Peter, a family friend of the Johansens and a Nazi Resistance leader, comes to tell the Johansens of the Nazi plan to arrest and relocate the Danish Jews, the family becomes concerned. Annemarie Johansen, a ten-year-old girl, realizes very quickly that her Jewish friend and neighbor, Ellen Rosen, and her parents, are in danger. The Johansens are quick to respond to their neighbors' plight. With the help of Peter and Uncle Henrik, a plan is set into action.

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The Johansens take the responsibility of caring for Ellen while her parents go into hiding. When German soldiers discover that the Rosens have disappeared, they search the Johansen apartment. Mr. Johansen tells the Germans that Ellen is his daughter, Lise. This is particularly poignant because Lise was his daughter who had been killed by Nazi soldiers as she ran from a Resistance meeting.

In the next stage of the plan, Mrs. Johansen and her daughters, Kirsti and Annemarie, accompany Ellen to Uncle Henrik's seacoast farm. Uncle Henrik is a fisher. He, along with other fishers in Denmark, secretly carries Jewish people across a saltwater strait to neutral Sweden in his fishing boat. Peter plays an important role in an intricate plan to help the Rosens and other Jews to escape.

Annemarie is mystified with the code language Henrik and her mother use during the period leading up to the Rosens' departure. She is especially confused when a wake is arranged for her Great-aunt Birte, the aunt who never was. Gradually, she understands that her mother, Henrik, and Peter are taking extra precautions to prevent the Germans from destroying their plan--a plan that requires great courage to carry out.

Annemarie's own courage is tested when she needs to carry an important package to Uncle Henrik's boat. German soldiers and their dogs stop her in the woods and create a tense scene. Annemarie is brave and acts her way out of the situation. She delivers the package to Henrik. Later she learns that her brave act saved her friends and the other Jews aboard the boat.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

Annemarie becomes angry with her mother because she lied about Great-aunt Birte. What makes her more understanding of her mother's decision to be untruthful?

*She realizes her mother is trying to both protect her and make her brave. Later in the story, Annemarie herself tells the German soldiers a lie to protect the Rosens and the other Jewish people.*

### Constructing Meaning

Do you know of anyone who has risked his or her life to protect someone? How was that person like Annemarie, Peter, Uncle Henrik, or Mrs. Johansen?

*Answers will vary. "Courage" is a key word, as is "brave." Uncle Henrik says "brave" means "not thinking about danger."*

### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** Recognizing Setting

**Understanding Hist/Cultural Factors**

Understanding Historical & Cultural Factors

**Responding to Literature** Responding to Literature

**Understanding the Author's Craft**

Understanding Author's Craft

**Comparing and Contrasting** Compare & Contrast