

The War I Finally Won

KIMBERLY BRUBAKER BRADLEY

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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 12+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.

SYNOPSIS

Like the classic heroines of literature, Ada wins our hearts as she continues her World War II adventures after the Newbery Honor-winning *The War that Saved My Life*.

When Ada's clubfoot is surgically fixed at last, she knows for certain that she's not what her mother said she was—crippled in her mind as well as in her body. But who is she, she wonders?

Ada and her brother, Jamie, are living with their guardian, Susan, in a cottage in the English countryside, on the estate of the formidable Lady Thornton and her daughter, Maggie, Ada's dearest friend. Life in the crowded cottage is tense. Then Ruth, a Jewish girl from Germany, moves in. A German? Everyone is horrified. Ada must decide—where do her loyalties lie?

The War I Finally Won is the marvellous conclusion to Ada's powerful, uplifting story.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kimberly Brubaker Bradley has written several historical novels for children and young adults, including the bestselling Newbery Honor Book, *The War that Saved My Life*. She lives on a farm in Tennessee with her family.

PRaise FOR THE WAR THAT SAVED MY LIFE

'An inimitable, robust, yet lyrically written bildungsroman. Its gentle humour is poignant and heartwarming.' AUSTRALIAN

'Achingly lovely...Nuanced and emotionally acute, this vivid tale from the wartime home front will have readers ages 10-14 wincing at Ada's stumbles and rejoicing to the point of tears in her victories.'

WALL STREET JOURNAL

'A moving story with an authentic voice. Beautifully told.' PATRICIA MACLACHLAN, AUTHOR OF NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER SARAH, PLAIN AND TALL

'There is so much to like here—Ada's engaging voice, the vivid setting, the humor, the heartbreak, but most of all the tenacious will to survive.'

SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL

'Ada's transformation from an angry young woman into a confident lady is imaginatively drawn.'

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S WEEKLY

'Ada's voice is honest and authentic and true...It's a lovely novel to curl up with on a rainy day. It took me back to the novels I read and loved as a child.'

STEPH BOWE

'A moving and captivating story.' BEST MIDDLE-GRADE FICTION BOOKS OF 2016, READINGS

'A beautifully written and very moving book, bound to be an instant classic.' BOOKTOPIA



BEFORE READING

1. The teacher will separate the class into groups of 4 – 5 students. The teacher will give each group a particular area of WWII to research and present to the class. Areas may include The Battle of Britain, Mobilisation of Women, The Royal Airforce, Rationing and the Evacuation of London. The presentation requires each group to 'perform' and 'inform' the rest of the class about that particular area of WWII. Students may present a play, monologue, song or dance that should educate their classmates on this aspect of the historical context. Classmates are expected to take notes during this exercise.
2. What is clubfoot? Research this condition and document your findings in your workbook. How has treatment of this condition changed over time? How might this condition affect the everyday life of an individual?
3. Locate the East End in London and the district of Kent on a map of Britain. What is the physical distance between these two places? How far would Ada have needed to travel to reach Kent? Research images of these two places during the 1940s to stick into your workbook. What are the differences in the physical appearances of these two places? What kind of lifestyles do you think people living in these two locations would have? What are the similarities and differences? Do you think people can be shaped by their landscape?
6. 'It made me feel calmer that the food was so bad.' (pp. 85) Christmas is a difficult time for Ada. Why does she find it difficult to enjoy nice things?
7. 'The Swiss Family Robinson got shipwrecked onto a beautiful island where everything turned out splendid for them. Jamie loved the story. I had always disliked it. I hated it now.' (pp. 17) What are the similarities between Ada's new family with Susan and Jamie and the Swiss Family Robinson? What group of ideas is Brubaker Bradley hoping to communicate with this literary allusion?
8. "'So your mother was a monster. It doesn't mean mine is. It doesn't mean Lady Thorton is.'" Ruth prodded me with her foot. "People are complicated. You, yourself, are not the easiest person to love. But you are still my sister.'" (pp. 316) How does Ada's relationship with her birth mother impact the way she views other maternal figures in her life?
9. "'Ruth needs horses the way I needed horses.'" (pp. 281) Why do Ruth and Ada need horses? What effect does horse-riding have on the girls?
10. "'I don't think I'd better share the details. But I can say that we're learning things about Hitler, and what he's doing in Europe, to capture civilians and even to his own countrymen, that make this war seem extremely necessary. More than necessary. Right.'" (pp. 375) Using the appendix to guide you, what job with the army did Lord Thorton do at Bletchley Park during the war? What is the real history behind this important operation?

WHILE READING

1. In chapter 1, Ada tells the reader 'You can know things all you like, but that doesn't mean you believe them.' (pp. 1) What do you think this phrase might mean? What does this suggest about the nature of knowledge and experience?
2. 'I would have to think hard to find any good memories.' (pp. 26) In the early chapters of the novel, Ada is reflecting on the end of her relationship with her mother. Based on Ada's emotions and reflections, what kind of relationship did Ada have with her mother?
3. 'Eleven years into the war between the rest of the world and me.' (pp. 2) The rest of the world is at war with each other but Ada is at war with the rest of the world. Why is Ada at war with the world? Why does she have a negative relationship with the world?
4. "'Thirteen's old enough for a cabin boy.'" (pp. 47) What was the age for enlistment in WWII in Britain? Were there ways around this age minimum? How old do you think an individual needs to be in order to fight in a war?
5. "'I needed a doll a long time ago,'" I said. "It's too late for me to have one now.'" (pp. 93) What purpose do dolls have in a child's life? Why is it too late for Ada to have a doll? What might the doll symbolise?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

1. Lady Thorton could upset just about anyone. When I'd first met her, before I knew her name, I called her the iron-faced woman. She was sharp like an ax.' (pp. 5) How are Ada's initial judgments of Lady Thorton proven wrong?
2. 'I sat in front of the fire and practised breathing, in and out, to keep myself calm.' (pp. 75) Ada struggles throughout the story with her emotions. In what ways does she learn to manage her emotions?
3. 'Oban had a grace and elegance Butter could never touch. It was like the difference between the Honorable Margaret Thorton and me.' (pp. 101) Is it important to consider the personalities of the horses and ponies in the book? How do the personalities of the horses reflect the personalities of the humans in the book?
4. "'I will not have a German in this house.'" (pp. 124) "'A German is a German is a German.'" (pp. 125) Is this a fair or simplistic view of Ruth? Do you think many British people would have shared this view of other Germans during the war? If so, why would people have had these beliefs? What is your analysis of Ruth? How would you describe you?

5. “Ada,” Susan said, “people choose their own beliefs all the time. Mr. Collins isn’t lying. He preaches what he sincerely believes. Ruth sincerely believes something else. That’s all right.” (pp. 136) Create flashcards with each of the characters from the book. On one side of the card illustrate the character and on the other make a list of this person’s beliefs as shown in the book. Use evidence where applicable.

STRUCTURE

1. Why does Ada travel back to her old home at Elsa Street with Lady Thorton? Why is it significant that she visits her old home? What does this communicate to the reader about her physical and emotional journey?
2. Using the narrative arc of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution as a guideline—create frames of a graphic novel communicating the plot of the story.
3. At what points in the text does Ada, Ruth or Maggie go horse-riding? Consider the symbolism of horse-riding and how this act may reveal inner emotions and thoughts of the characters.

THEMES

Education

1. “How am I supposed to know what’s real and what isn’t?” I almost shouted. “Nobody tells me! Nobody tells me anything!” (pp. 159) As a child, how did you learn to discern between what is real and what is make believe? Is it important to be able to make the distinction? If so, why?
2. “Education is a luxury in war-time. Jonathan left Oxford to fight. I do not see why this girl’s education should be ahead of his.” (pp. 127) Do you agree with Lady Thorton? Should Ruth still be entitled to an education when Jonathan and other men are away fighting in war?
3. “I will not continue to conflate lack of intelligence with lack of knowledge.” (pp. 161) What is the difference between intelligence and knowledge?

Courage

1. “Courage,” she said. “Is that the same as being grateful?” I said. I felt rebellious. Susan nodded. “Sometimes.” (pp. 29) What are the similarities between courage and gratitude?
2. “I’ll tell the boys at the airfield about you. You’ll give them courage, you will.” (pp. 235) Why does Ada’s story inspire Jonathan?
3. ‘Fear and what you did with it were two separate things.’ (pp. 371) How does Ada learn to control her fear?

Identity

1. ‘I tried to force myself to feel happy, but underneath the happiness I felt prickly, like my skin was stretched too tight all over. I might not be a cripple,

but I didn’t know who I was.’ (pp. 78) What has prevented Ada from finding her identity? Are there certain elements needed to encourage an individual to find their identity?

2. ‘I am merely preparing for the future. That, and I should like to feel useful again.’ (pp. 92) How does employment and engaging with the local community help a person feel a sense of belonging?
3. ‘But all those words—lame, crippled, nobbut a disgrace. I wanted to forget I’d ever been that girl.’ (pp. 102) Using just adjectives, how would you describe Ada’s personality at the conclusion of the novel?

RESPONDING

1. Reread page 105 of the novel that explores the idea of a ‘Guardian’ and of a ‘Guardian Angel’. Write your own definition of a guardian. What should a guardian be expected to do or be?
2. The story of *Paddington Bear* by Michael Bond tells a similar story to that of Ada’s. Like Paddington, Ada must travel to a new destination for refuge. Create a picture storybook similar to *Paddington Bear* that tells the story of an orphan and how they are able to find their new home.
3. In the novel, Ada has a fascination with learning new words and their definitions. She becomes quite upset when Jamie begins to call Susan ‘Mum’ despite at the end of the novel, Ada also calls Susan ‘Mum’. How do you think Ada’s personal definition of a ‘Mum’ changes over the course of the novel? Write two definitions in your book explaining Ada’s initial definition and her definition at the conclusion of the book.
4. Create a character chart, mapping the different ways that each character in the novel contributes to the war effort.
5. Can Mam ever be forgiven for her treatment of Ada and Jamie? Like Ada and Jamie, is she too a victim of her circumstances? In an extended response, reflect on this question and use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
6. While away at boarding school, Maggie and Ada exchange a number of letters. Select a chapter in the novel to write a letter exchange between the two girls focusing on the events occurring, how the girls are feeling and the war that is raging around them.
7. “You’re eleven years old,” Susan said. “You get to be the child now, Ada, for once in your life. I will be the adult.” (pp. 92) What are the roles and responsibilities of children and adults? Should there be different expectations for different age types? Or should expectations be leveled with a person’s maturity and experience? Reflect on these questions in an expository piece of writing.
8. ‘Words can be dangerous, as destructive as bombs.’ (pp. 224) In the text, how does Brubaker Bradley

show that words can be dangerous? Can you locate examples of words used 'dangerously' in the text? What are the implications of using these words?

9. Symbolism is employed throughout the novel to support the themes and ideas. How are the symbols of fire watching, the zoo, Ada's shoes and horse riding used to support the themes of the novel? Draw these symbols in your workbook before annotating the connotations, themes and ideas these symbols may represent.
10. "There isn't a right and a wrong," Susan said. "There are just different ways of thinking."
(pp. 172) If there are just different ways of thinking how does one determine what is right and wrong? How does Ada grapple with this question? How does she identify right and wrong? How does Brubaker Bradley show that sometimes they can be both?