



HC: 9780823424160 • Ages 7 & Up

PETER'S WAR

A Boy's True Story of Survival in World War II Europe

by Karen Gray Ruelle and Deborah Durland DeSaix
illustrated by Deborah Durland DeSaix

“This **affecting compilation** [and] **accessible tribute** is an **important addition** to children’s Holocaust literature.” —*Booklist*, Starred Review

About the Book

The harrowing true story of a German-Jewish boy who had to survive World War II on his own, separated from his parents as they fled the Holocaust.

Beautifully illustrated in a scrapbook style, featuring original artwork alongside historical photographs from Peter’s early life, this one-of-a-kind nonfiction picture book offers a very personal look into the lives of young people trying to evade—and resist—the Nazis. Excerpts and images from Peter’s diary of those years add irreplaceable, first-hand details to the account of his survival.

Classroom Discussion

BEFORE READING

Essential Questions

- What was the Holocaust? Who were the major people involved?
- Were all Germans collaborators of the Holocaust?
- Who were the Nazis? What did it mean to resist the Nazis?
- What is the meaning of *human dignity*? How did the Nazis seek to deprive their victims of basic human dignity?
- In what ways did individuals use willful disobedience to resist the Holocaust?
- Would you stand up for what you believed to be right even if it meant potential danger?
- What is the difference between prejudice and discrimination?
- What is the difference between collaborators and bystanders?



- How did human moral judgment and individual decision-making play a key role in the Holocaust?
- Why is it important to confront the brutality of this history? How is this relevant to modern-day society?

Examining the Holocaust within the context of European history

- What is anti-Semitism?
- What did Jewish life in Europe look like before World War II?
- What events happened after World War I, and how did they affect World War II?
- When and how did the Nazi Party rise to power?
- What factors and events lead to the Holocaust?

DURING READING

Discussion Questions

- What is the setting of the story? How does the setting change as the plot moves forward?
- How do the authors structure the book?
- What was Peter's life like prior to 1933?
- Why was World War II the beginning of the end for Peter and his family?
- How did the Nazis' distorted views of human history influence the Holocaust?
- Why were the Jews specifically chosen for extermination?
- How did Peter and his family attempt to preserve or reclaim their dignity?
- At what point did Peter's world change? To what lengths did Peter's family go to survive?
- What were the reasons Peter's parents did not automatically leave their home to escape the Nazis?
- What difficulties did Peter's family face each time they fled their country to seek refuge?
- How did the arrest of Peter's parents change his life?
- How do the authors incorporate primary sources? What impact do the journal entries, documents, and photographs have on you as you read?
- Why did Peter begin to write a diary? Why did Peter write two diaries? What danger did the diaries pose to Peter and the people around him?
- How does Peter's story reveal hatred and cruelty as well as courage and humanity?
- What are the major themes in the book?
- How does reading Peter's story evoke powerful emotions?
- What factors made resistance difficult for Peter and his family during the Holocaust?
- Who are the perpetrators in the book? How did the perpetrators know who was Jewish?
- How did Peter use his street smarts to stay alive?
- What was the French Resistance? How did the French Resistance affect Peter's journey?
- What other influences kept Peter from perishing?
- What events lead up to the end of "Peter's war"? What are the authors referring to when they say it is the end of Peter's war?
- How did the war affect Peter as a person even after his war was over?
- As an adult, Peter had to face many sad truths about his past. What does he learn about his parents?
- Who are the heroes in this story?
- How do the authors prove Peter is resilient and inspirational?
- Why do you think Peter agreed to be interviewed and have his story told?
- Explain this quote: "The end of the war was not the end of his journey."



AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

- How was the Holocaust a turning point in history?
- How does studying the Holocaust help you develop an understanding of the roots and consequences of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping in society?
- In studying the Holocaust, what can you learn about the dangers of remaining silent, apathetic, and indifferent in the face of the oppression of oneself or of others?
- What do you think about the use and abuse of power? What are the roles and responsibilities of individuals, organizations, and nations when confronted with civil rights violations and/or policies of genocide? How is this related to the use and abuse of power?
- Discuss the historical, social, religious, political, and economic factors that cumulatively resulted in the Holocaust.
- Explain the responsibility of citizens in any society to learn to identify danger signals and to know when to react.
- What is genocide? How can prejudice and bigotry lead to genocide? What factors have led to different genocides throughout history? What do you think is the responsibility of the international community with regards to genocide?
- Explain who the following groups were in the Holocaust:
 - victims
 - perpetrators
 - collaborators
 - bystanders
 - rescuers
- Many events in history can be remembered differently depending on who tells the story. Consider the history of the Holocaust from the perspectives of each of the above: victims, perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, and rescuers.

Concluding Activity

Create a Found Poem

- Found poems are created from pieces of literature that already exist, like a collage of poetry. Found poems can be inspired by the pages of a magazine, a newspaper, a book, or even another poem. You can create a found poem using words, phrases, or quotations that have been selected and rearranged from other texts.
- Choose language that is meaningful and interesting to you, and then organize the language around a theme or message about the Holocaust.

STEP-BY-STEP

• Create a List of Words, Phrases, and Quotations

Review a text, or multiple texts, related to the Holocaust, including magazines, newspaper articles, books, journal entries and other primary source documents, and *Peter's War*. Record words, phrases, or quotations that are relevant and meaningful to you. Choose between 15 and 20 different words or phrases, so that you have plenty of ideas to choose from when creating your poem.



- **Identify a Theme and Message**

Identify a theme and a message that represents some or all of the language you have selected. *Survival, coming of age, good versus evil, war, family, anti-Semitism* are a few examples from the story. A message is a specific idea you would like to express about this theme.

- **Select Additional Language**

Once you have chosen a theme and a message, review your materials and collect more language if needed.

- **Compose a Poem**

Arrange the language you have selected to create a poem. Write all of the words and phrases on slips of paper, so you can move the slips around and rearrange them until you are satisfied. You cannot add your own words when creating a found poem. Not even one! But you can repeat words or phrases as often as you like. You do not need to use all of the words that you found on your search.

- **Share Poems**

Have peers write comments on their classmates' poems. How did it connect to the story? What feelings did it evoke?

- **Discuss Your Found Poems in a Group**

- What do the poems reveal about the Holocaust or about *Peter's War*?
- What is most striking about the poems?
- What do the poems have in common? How are they different?
- What surprised you when reading them?

Guide written by Marla Conn, MS, Ed., reading/literacy specialist and educational consultant.

About the Creators



Karen Gray Ruelle, co-author of *Peter's War: A Boy's True Story of Survival in World War II Europe*, is a former librarian turned full-time author and illustrator of children's books. Her many books include *The Grand Mosque of Paris: A Story of How Muslims Rescued Jews During the Holocaust*, co-written with Deborah Durland DeSaix, and the upcoming *Surprising Spies: Unexpected Heroes of World War II*. Karen lives in New York City.

Deborah Durland DeSaix, co-author and illustrator of *Peter's War: A Boy's True Story of Survival in World War II Europe*, is a former college professor who now devotes her time to painting, ceramics, and writing. She lives in Lisbon, Portugal.



Illustration © 2020 by Deborah Durland DeSaix from *Peter's War*

7.2020

