

Novel·Ties

MILKWEED

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A Study Guide
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For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide to use in conjunction with the novel *Milkweed* consists of lessons for guided reading. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel at its own reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for reading development by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits, formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques, will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

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SYNOPSIS

Misha, who calls himself “Stopthief,” is a young orphan of unknown parentage who survives by scrabbling for food in the streets of Warsaw. His life becomes still more tenuous when the Nazis, or Jackboots, march into the city and inflict a reign of terror on the Jews and other “undesirable” minorities.

Misha joins a band of orphaned Jewish children who discover ways to trick and evade the soldiers. Unaware that the soldiers’ presence in the city spells disaster for many of its inhabitants, Misha longs to become a Jackboot one day, marching grandly through the avenues of Warsaw.

Uri, an older boy who befriends Misha, tries to protect him from his naïve impulses. But the younger boy continues to roam the streets, making the occasional friend, such as the good doctor who runs an orphanage and a girl named Janina Milgrom, for whom he develops an attachment. Once the Jews are driven into the ghetto, an enclosed area of the city, food and other basic necessities become scarce. Smuggling becomes Misha’s key to survival.

Misha joins the Milgrom family in the ghetto and undertakes to keep them and the children in the orphanage alive by smuggling food. Soon Janina follows Misha on his nightly raids, becoming adept at pilfering and running. But she becomes too reckless, causing Misha to fear the reprisal of the Jackboots who are executing smugglers and hanging the corpses of those caught in the act. Desperately poor and underfed, the ghetto’s residents are frequently tortured and tormented by the Nazis; even worse, terrible rumors spread about the death camps and the ovens used for exterminating Jews, other minorities, and dissenters. It is no longer safe to be a Jew or a Gypsy.

Misha learns that time is running out for people like himself. At last, the day comes when the ghetto walls are taken down and the Jews are herded like cattle onto trains bound for the death camps. Few will survive, and Misha will experience the terrible loss of the people he loves. But he does endure, through the grim post-war years in Poland, immigration to America, and a long period of near-madness that follows his extraordinary childhood. On the street corners of his adopted city, Misha relentlessly bears witness to the Holocaust, locked in his memories of suffering and terror until human kindness and compassion finally set him free.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Seeds of World War II

During the 1930s Germany, soundly defeated in World War I, gathered strength under the leadership of the fanatical nationalist Adolf Hitler. Hitler and his Nazi Party rearmed Germany, breaking the Versailles Treaty of 1919 that had been designed to keep peace throughout Europe. Hitler's trained thugs murdered political opponents, clearing his way to power. The Nazi leader entered into a series of negotiations that would allow Germany to dominate Eastern Europe. Envisioning themselves as a superior or "master" race, the Nazis ultimately planned to rule northern Europe as well.

Hitler carefully laid his political groundwork. The 1934 nonaggression pact he signed with Poland was a ploy to keep the Poles from arming against Germany. Hitler then signed an agreement with Stalin, Russia's leader, dividing Poland between them. In 1936, the Italian dictator Mussolini also signed a nonaggression pact with Germany. In 1938, the Nazi-run government incorporated Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia into an empire known as "the Third Reich." The stage was set for another world war. When France and Great Britain failed to act quickly to stop Hitler, the Germans opened hostilities.

German troops invaded Poland on September 1, 1939; sixteen days later, the army of the Soviet Union took control of eastern Poland. The main target of the German offensive was Warsaw, the capital city of Poland. The German Luftwaffe flew about 1,150 bombing raids, terrorizing the inhabitants and destroying many areas of the old city. After three weeks of intensive fighting, the Poles surrendered to the Germans. Nazi-occupied Warsaw quickly became a grim place. The invading army took over factories, lodgings and food supplies, causing serious shortages throughout the city.

The Jews of Warsaw

Amid the general suffering, the large Jewish population was hardest hit. The Nazis instituted harsh laws against the Jews, forcing them to give up monies and other valuables. The Germans targeted Jewish-owned businesses, instilling terror through random beatings and killings. Throughout the autumn of 1939, a series of discriminatory laws were enforced throughout the city. Jews were ordered to wear white armbands showing the Jewish Star of David. Jewish businesses had to be similarly identified. Jews were forbidden to own radios or to ride trains. People tried to survive by trading their hidden possessions for food, but as the war continued, this became increasingly difficult.

In October 1940, the sizeable Jewish population, the second largest in the world, was forced into a small area of the city known as the Jewish Quarter, or ghetto. The following month saw the building of a ten-foot wall that sealed in the ghetto inhabitants. Only those men chosen to perform forced labor were allowed to pass out of the ghetto into other areas of the city. Schools were not allowed to operate, and cultural activities had to be conducted secretly. A Jewish police force was created to keep order in the ghetto. These collaborators were feared almost as much as the Nazis.

Jewish leadership in the ghetto consisted of the *Judenrat* and a number of self-help organizations such as the Jewish Mutual Aid Society, which tried to assist the

indigent of the ghetto. The Nazis allowed some businesses to operate in the ghetto, but poverty and starvation, along with illness, soon caused the deaths of thousands of Jews. Food rations for the ghetto were so small as to barely sustain life. Smuggling became a common practice for the people of the Jewish Quarter, who would bribe guards or find secret ways to cross the wall. The smugglers who brought foodstuffs back to their starving families and neighbors were brave people who knew that if they were caught, they would immediately be executed.

A Jewish resistance was gradually formed by youth groups politicized in response to the intensifying rumors of Hitler's Final Solution for the Jews and other unwanted members of society. The labor camps were in fact death camps designed for the purpose of mass killings. Between 1942 and 1943, as many as 300,000 Warsaw Jews were deported to the concentration camps. Underground groups such as the Jewish Fighting Organization and the Revisionist Party mobilized to fight the deportations, temporarily succeeding in stemming the doomed tide. These groups built bunkers that could be used to hide people and fight the SS troops. The ghetto's ultimate armed struggle against the Nazis came in the spring of 1943. Although the freedom fighters were eventually defeated, the revolt, like the Warsaw Uprising, is a testament to human courage in the most hopeless of circumstances.

Because of the impossibility of keeping precise records, we do not know how many people were deported; many died in SS roundups in the ghetto, were murdered, starved to death, or carried off by disease. Survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto have recorded their stories, which are every bit as horrifying as Misha's fictionalized memoir of the war in *Milkweed*.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Preview the book by reading the title and author's name and by looking at the illustration on the cover. Also, read the publisher's blurbs on the cover. What do you think the book will be about? Where do you think it takes place? Have you read any other books by the same author? Have you read any books on the same subject?
2. **Social Studies Connection:** The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of Jews by the Nazis. In addition to Jews, the Nazis persecuted the Poles, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics, homosexuals, and Roma (Gypsies). Read the Background Information on page two of this study guide and do some additional research to learn more about the genocide orchestrated by Hitler and his Nazi troops and how it affected the Jewish population of Poland. Record information in the first two columns of a K-W-L chart, such as the one below. Fill out the third column after you finish the book.

What I Know -K-	What I Want to Know -W-	What I Learned -L-

3. Do you think it is important for people to "bear witness" to historical events? What might be the value of telling the stories? What might be the consequence if historical events were not recorded or were changed on record?
4. Do you think it is important for people to know their identity and their family background? What are the advantages of knowing? What are the possible disadvantages?
5. A stereotype is an oversimplified image of a group of people, usually held in common by some part of society. How can stereotypes be harmful? What do you think people can do to overcome stereotyping? Have you ever noticed any examples of stereotyping in your community or in the media?
6. In *Milkweed*, the main character spends years without meaningful contact with another person. During this time, he speaks few words aloud. What do you imagine might happen to you if you could not express your thoughts and feelings to anyone?

CHAPTERS 1 – 8

Vocabulary: Draw a line from each word on the left to its definition on the right. Then use the numbered words to fill in the blanks in the sentences below.

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. cellar | a. small container, such as a box |
| 2. jumble | b. came together |
| 3. canister | c. with wild excitement |
| 4. converged | d. public performance |
| 5. bombardment | e. basement |
| 6. spectacle | f. did not believe |
| 7. doubted | g. confused mass |
| 8. frantically | h. attack with guns or bombs |

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- The players _____ on the soccer field to listen to the coach's instructions.
- Everyone enjoyed the _____ of the school marching band at half-time.
- When lightning split the sky and the heavy rains began, people ran _____ into stores and restaurants.
- I could not find my library book in the _____ of papers and magazines in my messy room.
- After the _____ ended, many beautiful buildings had been damaged or completely destroyed.
- Since I felt sick at the beginning of the race, I _____ that I could win.
- You will find the dog biscuits in the red _____ on the counter.
- Fearing that our house was in the path of a tornado, our family huddled together downstairs in the _____ .

Read to find out how Uri and his group of orphaned boys survived in Warsaw.

CHAPTERS 1 – 8 (cont.)

Questions:

1. Why did the narrator call himself “Stopthief”?
2. Who were the boys that the narrator met in the stable? Why did they steal?
3. Why weren’t the boys eager to have Stopthief join their group? How did Uri convince them otherwise?
4. Why was it fairly easy for the boys to steal food?
5. How did Uri and the boys conclude that Stopthief was a Gypsy and not a Jew like them?
6. Why did Uri take Stopthief to an abandoned building?
7. What was the first evidence that revealed to Uri and Stopthief that the Nazi soldiers had begun their persecution of Jews?
8. Why did Uri create a name and a family background for Stopthief?
9. Why did Misha run off with the girl’s birthday cake?
10. Why did Misha think he would have to paint “Jew” on the barbershop window?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think Uri’s group of boys acted in such a tough, insensitive manner? How do you think they became so independent?
2. Why do you suppose the people of Warsaw did not openly fight or resist the invading soldiers?
3. Why do you think Stopthief admired the invading Nazi soldiers as they first marched into Warsaw?
4. Why do you think the Nazi soldiers cut the beards of Jewish men?
5. In your opinion, was the boys’ thievery justified?
6. What qualities do you think were needed to survive as an orphaned child in Warsaw?

Literary Devices:

- I. *Hook*—A hook in literature refers to text at the beginning of a work that is meant to grab the reader’s attention. What is the hook at the beginning of this novel?

CHAPTERS 1 – 8 (cont.)

- II. *Point of View*—Point of view in literature refers to the person telling the story. This person is called the narrator. The narrator might be the author or a character in the story. From whose point of view is this story told?

Why do you think the author chose this point of view?

- III. *Metaphor*—A metaphor is a suggested or implied comparison between two unlike objects. For example:

We passed the black, twisted skeletons of streetcars.

What is being compared?

What does this tell about what has happened in the city?

Literary Element: Setting

Setting refers to the time and place where the events of a novel occur. What is the setting of *Milkweed*?

How does the setting determine the events in this novel?

Writing Activity:

Imagine that you are either Uri or Janina and write a journal entry describing the new boy Uri has brought to the group of orphaned children. Tell whether you think he can survive conditions in Warsaw and if he will be an asset to the group.

CHAPTERS 9 – 15

Vocabulary: Read each group of words. Cross out the one that does not belong with the others. On the line below the words, tell how the remaining words are alike.

1. glittered shone sparkled combusted

The other words are alike because _____

2. disappeared vanished existed removed

The other words are alike because _____

3. brilliance murkiness dimness gloom

The other words are alike because _____

4. transparent dense thick solid

The other words are alike because _____

5. dodged evaded eluded complimented

The other words are alike because _____

6. intrigued fascinated bored absorbed

The other words are alike because _____

7. desire appetite disgust craving

The other words are alike because _____

Read to find out how Misha and Uri live after they flee the barbershop.

Questions:

1. Why were Uri and “Misha” forced to leave their hiding place in the barbershop building?
2. How did Misha try to lure Janina out of her house?
3. Why did Uri tie a rope around Misha’s waist?
4. Why did Misha desperately want to believe in angels?
5. What did Uri mean when he said he believed in bread? What did this statement reveal about him?
6. Why were the trees disappearing in Warsaw?

Chapters 9 – 15 (cont.)

7. Why did Uri become angry with Misha after he was struck by the car?
8. Why were “black pearls” valuable?
9. Why did Dr. Korczak have all of the orphans in his house thank Misha?
10. Why did the soldiers torture the innocent Jewish man upon discovering the theft of the merry-go-round horse?
11. Why were so many of Warsaw’s Jews walking in the streets carrying possessions with them?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think that only the Jews of the city had to obey a curfew?
2. Why do you think Enos said that only Jackboots believed in angels?
3. Do you imagine Misha and Uri would have been better off in Dr. Korczak’s orphanage than they were on their own? Why did the boys prefer to live on the run?
4. Why do you suppose Misha insisted to Dr. Korczak that he was not an orphan?
5. What do you think was suggested by Misha’s comment about the doctor that “there was a question on his face, but I could not answer it”?
6. Why do you think the authorities forced the Jews to live in the ghetto?

Literary Devices:

- I. *Simile*—A simile is a figure of speech in which two unlike objects are compared using the words “like” or “as.” For example:

The streetlights were like moons cupped in iron fingers.

What is being compared?

What does this reveal about the narrator’s view of the world around him?

Chapters 9 – 15 (cont.)

- II. *Personification*—Personification is a figure of speech in which an author grants human qualities to a nonhuman object. For example:

One, a thick, burly monster of a tree with warts, came down with a high, thin wail that sounded exactly like a baby crying.

What is being personified?

What does this reveal about the narrator’s feelings?

- III. *Dramatic Irony*—Dramatic irony is a device, usually found in plays, in which one character is unaware of information that the audience or reader already knows. It is used to create tension or provide humor. What is the dramatic irony in the scene when Misha accompanies Janina’s family on their way to the ghetto? What is the effect of this device?
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- IV. *Symbolism*—A symbol in literature is an object, person, or event that represents an idea or a set of ideas. What do you think the black horse on the merry-go-round might have symbolized?
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What do you think the fox-face furs with beady black eyes symbolize?

Social Studies Connection: Life in a Ghetto

Do some research to find out about Dr. Janusz Korczak, an actual hero of World War II. What were some of Dr. Korczak’s accomplishments? Why should his memory be honored? Write a brief report and present it to a group of your classmates.

Writing Activity:

Imagine that you are Dr. Korczak, and write a letter to a friend in which you describe the little boy who calls himself Misha Pilsudski.

CHAPTERS 16 – 22

Vocabulary: Use the context to help you determine the meaning of the underlined word in each of the following sentences. Then draw a line from each numbered word below to its definition on the right.

- After a good growing season, the farmer had a fine harvest in the autumn.
- The people on the coast heeded the storm warnings and left their homes for safer areas.
- I was so nervous before the test that I could barely eat a morsel of food.
- The vendors at the street fair arranged items on tables and racks so that shoppers could easily see their wares.
- The hungry wolf rapidly devoured the meat and then trotted off to drink from a nearby stream.
- When the door of the paddock swung open, the horses stampeded into the field.
- I regret my decision to spend so much money on entertainment, and wish I had saved some cash for more important things.
- When my father came upon an intruder in the backyard, he was surprised to see it was a hungry raccoon in search of garbage.

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| 1. harvest | a. small bite or portion |
| 2. heeded | b. people who sell goods |
| 3. morsel | c. feel sorry about |
| 4. vendors | d. unwelcome visitor |
| 5. devoured | e. gathering of a crop |
| 6. stampeded | f. paid attention to |
| 7. regret | g. ate up greedily |
| 8. intruder | h. ran in a scattered way |

Read to find out about life in the Warsaw ghetto.

Chapters 16 – 22 (cont.)

Questions:

1. Why did the people hurry to reach the ghetto?
2. Why had Mr. Milgrom carried his bottles of medicine all the way across the city?
3. How did the Jackboots regard Gypsies, Jews, and disabled people? Why were all these groups the same in their eyes?
4. Why was a wall built around the Warsaw Ghetto?
5. Why were Misha and the boys evicted from the stable?
6. Why were dead bodies a common sight in the ghetto?
7. What evidence showed that the residents of the ghetto were starving?
8. Why did Misha slip out of the ghetto from time to time? Why was he able to do this?
9. Why did Uri attack one of the flops?
10. Why were people in the ghetto concerned about the rumor that Himmler would be coming to the ghetto?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do you think the people in the ghetto had any choice but to accept their conditions of deprivation and humiliation?
2. In your opinion, why did some of the Jews in the ghetto act brutally toward fellow Jews?
3. Why do you think Ferdi chose to deny the existence of mothers and oranges?
4. What do you think was the purpose of making the ghetto inhabitants stand at attention for hours in the snow?
5. Why do you imagine Mr. Milgrom finally chose to claim Misha as one of the family?

Literary Devices:

- I. *Simile*—What is compared in the following simile?

The bricks were red, the sky was brilliant blue, the knots in the barbed wire sparkled like ladies' earrings.

How does Misha's observation reveal his state of mind? Why didn't he simply say, "the knots in the barbed wire were shiny"?

Chapters 16 – 22 (cont.)

- II. *Cliffhanger*—A cliffhanger is a device borrowed from serialized silent films in which an episode ends at a moment of suspense. In a book, a cliffhanger usually appears at the end of a chapter to encourage the reader to continue on in the book. What is the cliffhanger at the end of Chapter Twenty-two?
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Writing Activity:

Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter and write an article about what is happening inside the Warsaw Ghetto. Draw upon details from the story to make your article realistic.

Chapters 16 – 22 (cont.)

Literary Element: Characterization

As you read about the people in *Milkweed*, fill in the character chart below. Make note of any special or unusual qualities of each character. You may add other characters to the chart.

Character	About the Character
Misha	
Uri	
Janina	
Dr. Korczak	
Mr. Milgrom	
Uncle Shepsel	

CHAPTERS 23 – 30

Vocabulary: Word analogies are equations in which the first pair of words has the same relationship as the second pair of words. For example: SLIM is to STOUT as DULL is to BRIGHT. Both pairs of words are opposites. Choose the best word from the Word Box to complete each of the analogies below.

WORD BOX			
confirmed	deserted	pestered	torment
contrary	goad	salute	

1. APPLAUD is to ACTOR as _____ is to SOLDIER.
2. PEACEFUL is to EXCITED as _____ is to AGREEABLE.
3. _____ is to TORTURE as WANDER is to ROAM.
4. PULL is to TUG as _____ is to PUSH.
5. PRAISED is to CRITICIZED as _____ is to DENIED.
6. _____ is to ANNOYED as SOOTHED is to CALM.
7. ABANDONED is to _____ as TREASURED is to CHERISHED.

Read to find out about worsening conditions in the Warsaw ghetto.

Questions:

1. Why was Misha unable to believe that the man in the car was actually Himmler?
2. Why did Misha tease and taunt Buffo? Why were these pranks dangerous?
3. How did the relationship between Misha and Janina gradually change after Misha was accepted as one of the Milgrom family?
4. How did Misha help the Milgroms and the orphans to survive?
5. Why were crows the only birds to visit the ghetto?
6. What made Misha “the perfect smuggler”?
7. Why was Janina surprised to discover that the city outside the ghetto still existed?
8. Why did Misha want to prevent Janina from joining him on his smuggling raids?
9. What were the Flamethrowers trying to accomplish?
10. How did Janina manage to continue smuggling without “disobeying” her father?

Chapters 23 – 30 (cont.)

Questions for Discussion:

1. Under what circumstances could a person such as Buffo flourish? Might such a person flourish anywhere today?
2. Why do you think Misha was accepted as a member of the Milgrom family?
3. Why do you think the soldiers and their girlfriends took pictures of Janina?
4. What do you think Janina learned from her smuggling expeditions with Misha? What skills could he teach her?

Literary Device: Symbolism

What do you think the milkweed symbolized?

Literary Element: Synesthesia

Synesthesia is the description of one kind of sensation in terms of another. For instance, sounds may be described as colors, or colors may be described as temperature. Writers use synesthesia to create comparisons that appeal to more than one physical sense at a time. Underline the phrases that illustrate this device in the following passage:

Soon we were among the people, the source of the voices and sounds that came drifting over the wall. In the ghetto all was gray: the people were gray, the sounds were gray, the smells were gray. Here everything was colors to me: the red clang of the streetcars, blue music from the phonographs, silver laughter of people. In the distance the tootles of the merry-go-round were a swirl of colors. Whenever I came through the wall, I wanted to do nothing but walk the streets.

Writing Activity:

Imagine you are living in the Warsaw ghetto and you want the rest of the world to know what is happening there. Write about the sights and sounds and the incidents that you witness.

CHAPTERS 31 – 36

Vocabulary: Synonyms are words with similar meanings. Draw a line from each word in column A to its synonym in column B. Then use the words in column A to fill in the blanks in the sentences below.

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| <u>A</u> | <u>B</u> |
| 1. fragment | a. disturbance |
| 2. reliable | b. sneaking |
| 3. commotion | c. portion |
| 4. accused | d. dependable |
| 5. veering | e. depression |
| 6. lurking | f. bothering |
| 7. harassing | g. blamed |
| 8. crater | h. turning |

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1. My brother _____ me of taking his football, but I protested that I was not guilty.
2. The sixth graders were warned against _____ the younger children in the playground.
3. The policeman noticed a suspicious man _____ around the bank and ordered him to move on.
4. When we found the large _____ in the field, we assumed a meteorite had landed there.
5. The group of runners was _____ to the right to avoid a patch of rough ground.
6. This _____ of pottery, all that is left of a Grecian bowl, is many centuries old.
7. When they heard the _____ on the street, the firefighters stopped their truck to see whether help was needed.
8. My car has always been so _____ that I was amazed when it needed repair.

Chapters 31 – 36 (cont.)

Read to find out how life becomes even worse in the ghetto.

Questions:

1. Why did Uri order Misha never to speak to him?
2. Why did the Jackboots hang Olek? Why was Janina stunned at the sight of Olek's corpse?
3. Why was Misha solemn on the day of Mrs. Milgrom's funeral?
4. How did Mr. Milgrom pay the undertaker for his services?
5. How did Mr. Milgrom try to shield Misha and Janina from the bombs?
6. What did Misha mean when he said, "This was the ghetto: where children grew down instead of up"?
7. What happened to make life in the ghetto even worse than it had been before?
8. Why did Mr. Milgrom decide to celebrate Hanukkah in the midst of all the suffering?
9. How did Misha's physical growth threaten his survival?
10. Why did Misha work hard to find an egg for Janina? How was his struggle rewarded?
11. Why did Uncle Shepsel convince himself that he was a Lutheran?
12. Why did Uri advise Misha to get out of the ghetto?

Questions for Discussion:

1. In what ways do you think the Nazis showed evidence of excessive cruelty and insensitivity?
2. Why do you think food was being thrown over the wall into the ghetto? Why might it have stopped happening?
3. Why do you imagine the ragged man with the silver pipe invited the children "to come to the candy mountain"?
4. Why might the Jackboots have set fire to the cow? Why do you suppose no one had ever seen the cow before?
5. Why do you suppose Misha found it hard to identify the emotion of happiness?
6. Where do you think the trains were taking Jews?

Chapters 31 – 36 (cont.)

Literary Device: Irony

- I. What was ironic about Misha’s calling the city outside the ghetto walls “Heaven”?

- II. *Foreshadowing*—Foreshadowing refers to the clues that an author provides to suggest later events in the story. What do you think is foreshadowed by Mr. Milgrom’s saying “There is nothing else they can do to us”?

Writing Activity:

Imagine you are Mr. Milgrom and write about hope. Tell what you think the best thing for which each member of your surviving family could hope.

CHAPTERS 37 – 45

Vocabulary: Antonyms are words with opposite meanings. Draw a line from each word in column A to its antonym in column B. Then use the words in column A to complete the sentences below.

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>
1. agitated	a. tiny
2. dozing	b. innocent
3. enormous	c. calm
4. forbidden	d. dull
5. guilty	e. ordinary
6. insane	f. waking
7. exotic	g. sensible
8. radiant	h. permitted

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- The wounded soldier was declared temporarily _____ and placed in a hospital that treated mental disorders.
- Usually we were _____ to eat any candy at all, but on Halloween my parents let us have some of the treats we received.
- I felt quite _____ when I missed my bus because I would be late for the concert.
- This _____ bird is found only in the tropics and is rarely seen outside of its native habitat.
- The farmer came home from a tiring day in the fields and was soon _____ in his old armchair.
- The child's _____ smile seemed to light up the whole room.
- A(n) _____ bookcase occupied an entire wall of the family room.
- The teacher could tell from her student's _____ expression that he had forgotten to do his homework again.

Read to find out how Misha survived the war.

Chapters 37 – 45 (cont.)

Questions:

1. Why did the people of the ghetto prefer the word “resettlement” to the word “deportation”? What was the underlying significance of these words?
2. What was the quota that the Jackboots had to fill each day?
3. Why did the ragged man return to the ghetto? How did most people respond to what he told them?
4. Why did Mr. Milgrom try to send Misha and Janina away from the ghetto?
5. Why was it finally impossible for Misha to protect Janina from the Jackboots?
6. Who was the Jackboot who shot off Misha’s ear? Why do you think he did it?
7. How did the farmer’s wife help Misha survive after he left the ghetto?
8. How did Misha survive immediately after the war ended?
9. Why did Misha rant and rave about the war even after he arrived in America? What finally stopped him from doing this?
10. What ruined Misha’s marriage?
11. How did Misha finally find peace?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you suppose many of the Warsaw Jews believed they would be resettled in a better place?
2. Do you think Uri was justified in becoming a Jackboot and then injuring Misha?
3. What were the advantages of being “nobody”? What were the disadvantages of lacking an identity?
4. Why do you think it was important for Misha to learn that the last Jews in the Warsaw ghetto fought back against the Nazis?
5. Whom do you suppose Misha was addressing when he said, “You were the thing that gave me shape. . . . You were the bottle I poured myself into”?
6. Why do you imagine Misha never told anyone about Janina?
7. In what sense do you think Misha was healed by at last having a biological family of his own? In particular, how did watching over his granddaughter help him recover from the terrors of his own childhood?

Chapters 37 – 45 (cont.)

Literary Devices:

- I. *Allusion*—An allusion is a literary reference to a familiar person, place, or event. Sometimes writers allude to other works of literature. Why did the author refer to “Hansel and Gretel”? Why did this folk tale emphasize the horror of the Holocaust for Misha?

- II. *Irony*—What was ironic about finding the book of Lutherans in the abandoned apartment?

Literary Element: Mood

In literature, mood refers to the atmosphere or state of mind produced by a passage. Mood also creates certain expectations on the reader’s part about what may follow. Consider the following passage from *Milkweed*:

I saw that there was not one train, but many. Thick, yellow light came from lamps hung high on a forest of poles. Locomotives huffed and whispered and blew steam from their wheels. Endless lines of boxcars vanished into the blackness. Jackboots and Jackdogs flashed from the shadows.

What mood does this passage create? What were your feelings as you read this description of a Warsaw train platform? Underline the words that contributed to this mood.

Chapters 37 – 45 (cont.)

Social Studies Connection:

Do some research to find out about the Warsaw Ghetto revolt of 1943. How did the people of the ghetto fight back? What was the result of the revolt? Write a brief report based on your findings.

Writing Activities:

1. Imagine that Janina managed to survive the war and reunited with Misha many years later. Write a dialogue that might take place between the two characters.
2. Write a journal entry describing your feelings about Misha's experiences. Which events were especially memorable for you?

CLOZE ACTIVITY

The following passage has been taken from the Chapter Thirty-nine. Read it through completely. Then fill in each blank with a word that makes sense. Afterwards, you may compare your language with that of the author.

When night returned, we approached the wall. And I realized how _____¹ I was. What had I been thinking? _____² the holes going to come back? Was _____³ wall going to be lower than last _____⁴? I wished we had Big Henryk's shoulders to _____⁵ on. I tried to think, tried to _____⁶. Suddenly Janina ran to the wall and _____⁷ her hands about her mouth and yelled _____⁸ all her might: "Tataaaa!" I tackled her _____⁹ rolled us into the shadows as a _____¹⁰ down the wall turned.

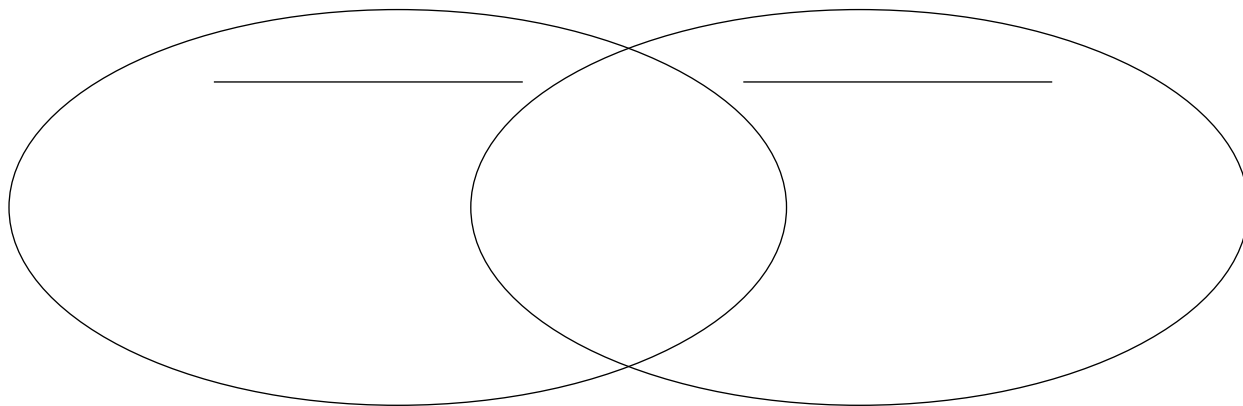
Just to be _____¹¹ something, we began another tour around the _____¹². When we came to Stawki Station, where _____¹³ was always daytime, with the lights and _____¹⁴ people and clanking boxcars, I suddenly knew _____¹⁵ to do. The Stawki Street gate in _____¹⁶ wall was open. People were parading through. _____¹⁷ grabbed her hand, pulled her along. We _____¹⁸ behind a shed near the gate.

Jackboots _____¹⁹ dogs guarded both sides of the gate. _____²⁰ people slumped along with their suitcases, heads _____²¹ low, as if they did not know _____²² teeth of the dogs were snapping into _____²³ faces.

I did not bother to give _____²⁴ instructions. Why should I? She copied everything _____²⁵ did. I dashed for the parade of _____²⁶. I plunged into them. I lost myself _____²⁷ their legs. While they headed for the _____²⁸, I groped and shouldered in the opposite _____²⁹. They paid no more attention to me _____³⁰ to the dogs. When I sensed I _____³¹ passed through the gate to the ghetto _____³², I broke sharply to my right, popped _____³³ of the parade, and bolted. There were dogs and shouts behind me, then gunshots—my first prayer plucked at my lips: *No flamethrowers, please*—but by then there were shadows and rubble and I was tucked into a pocket of blackness like a rat.

POST-READING ACTIVITIES AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Return to the K-W-L chart on the Holocaust that you began in the Pre-Reading activities on page four of this study guide. Based on your reading, correct any errors that you might have made in column one, and then record what you learned in the third column. Compare your notes with those of your classmates.
2. Return to the character chart that you began on page fourteen of this study guide. Add further information. Discuss your entries with others who have read the same book. Choose two characters and create a Venn diagram, such as the one below, to compare them. Record the characters' similar qualities in the overlapping part of the circles.



3. **Social Studies Connection:** Do some research about the lives of Holocaust survivors. You might look up some general articles or find personal accounts written by those who endured life in a concentration camp in Europe. How did people adjust to their new circumstances after the war? Write a brief report about the survivor's experiences after the war ended.
4. **Literary Element–Symbolism:** Trace the symbol of the milkweed throughout the novel. When did it first appear? Did its meaning remain the same or change during the course of the novel? Trace the symbols of the carousel horses, the angels, and Janina's shiny black shoes. What might each of these symbols represent?
5. **Literary Element–Theme:** The theme of a work of art is the author's main idea or message. *Milkweed* contains many themes, such as the struggle for survival, compassion *versus* inhumanity, the search for an identity, and isolation *versus* community. Choose one of these themes and show how it is worked out in the novel.
6. It takes the narrator of this novel many years to find a reliable identity and a voice he can use without fear. What would it mean to lack these human attributes? How would being nameless and essentially ignored damage a person?

Post-Reading Activities and Questions for Discussion (cont.)

7. The novel begins with the sentence “I am running.” Trace the act of running and the references to running throughout the book. How does running shape Misha’s life? What happened to those who couldn’t or wouldn’t run? At the end of the novel, do you think Misha was able to stop running?

8. **Literature Circle:** Have a literature circle discussion in which you tell your personal reactions to *Milkweed*. Here are some questions and sentence starters to help your literature circle begin a discussion.
 - Do you find the characters in the novel realistic? Why?
 - What questions would you like to ask the author about this novel?
 - Who else should read this novel? Why?
 - I (like, do not like) the way this story is told because . . .
 - Misha learned that . . .
 - It was exciting when . . .
 - It was frightening when . . .
 - I wonder . . .

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Bitton-Jackson, Livia. *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust*. Scholastic.
- _____. *Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust*. Times Books.
- Boas, Jacob. *We Are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teens Who Died in the Holocaust*. Scholastic.
- * Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*. Random House.
- * Giff, Patricia Reilly. *Lily's Crossing*. Random House.
- * Greene, Bette. *Summer of My German Soldier*. Random House.
- Glass, Linzi. *The Year the Gypsies Came*. Henry Holt.
- * Orlev, Uri. *The Island on Bird Street*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Levitin, Sonia. *The Return*. Random House.
- Lobel, Anita. *No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War*. HarperCollins.
- * Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Random House.
- * _____. *Number the Stars*. Random House.
- * Matas, Carol. *Daniel's Story*. Scholastic.
- Opdyke, Irene. *In My Hands: Memoirs of a Holocaust Rescuer*. Random House.
- Perl, Lila. *Four Perfect Pebbles: A Holocaust Story*. HarperCollins.
- Schmidt, Gary. *Mara's Stories: Glimmers in the Darkness*. Henry Holt.
- * Yolen, Jane. *The Devil's Arithmetic*. Penguin.
- * Wiesel, Eli. *Night*. Hill and Wang.
- Zacharius, Walter. *Songbird: A Novel*. Atria.
- Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Random House.

Some Other Books by Jerry Spinelli

- The Bathwater Gang*. Little, Brown.
- * *Crash*. Random House.
- Fourth Grade Rats*. Scholastic.
- * *Loser*. HarperCollins.
- * *Maniac Magee*. Little, Brown.
- Space Station Seventh Grade*. Little, Brown.
- * *Stargirl*. Random House.
- * *Wringer*. HarperCollins.
- * NOVEL-TIES study guides are available for these titles.

ANSWER KEY

Chapters 1 – 8

Vocabulary: 1. e 2. g 3. a 4. b 5. h 6. d 7. f 8. c; 1. converged 2. spectacle 3. frantically 4. jumble 5. bombardment 6. doubted 7. canister 8. cellar

Questions: 1. The narrator called himself “Stopthief” because, not knowing his given name, he assumed that the word people shouted after him was his actual name. 2. The boys that the narrator met in the stable were Jewish orphans, hiding from the Nazis; they stole because they had no other way to obtain food, clothing, and other necessities. 3. The boys were not eager to accept Stopthief because they thought he was too young, too small, and not smart enough. Uri convinced them to accept Stopthief because a runt like him would be able to snatch food and run away fast. 4. The boys were able to take advantage of the state of alarm and general disorder in the city. With the sirens blaring and shops closing up abruptly, the children learned they could slip into a grocery or bakery and grab what they needed, or steal directly from passersby. 5. The boys concluded that Stopthief was a Gypsy because he wore a yellow stone as an amulet around his neck. 6. Uri took Stopthief to an abandoned building to offer him a home and protection in the place where he had appropriated to make his own home. 7. The first evidence of Nazi persecution of Jews in Warsaw was the sighting of bearded men scrubbing the streets with their beards and having their beards shorn by Nazi soldiers. 8. Uri made up a name and a family background for Stopthief because he realized that the orphaned boy needed to be able to identify himself in a plausible way, and that as a Gypsy he might be treated better than as a Jew. 9. Misha ran off with the girl’s birthday cake because he had no appreciation of the traditions surrounding the celebration of a birthday. Assuming that someone was trying to set the cake on fire, he decided to snatch it and run away. 10. Misha naïvely thought they would have to write “Jew” on the barbershop window because he saw that all Jewish-run businesses in Warsaw had to be labeled thus.

Chapters 9 – 15

Vocabulary: 1. combusted—the other words describe a steady casting off of light 2. existed—the other words indicate that something is gone 3. brilliance—the other words describe a condition of low light or semi-darkness 4. transparent—the other words describe the quality of being compressed, closely-packed, or heaped 5. complimented—the other words describe the action of avoiding or escaping someone or something 6. bored—the other words describe a condition of being enthralled or highly attracted by an object or person 7. disgust—the other words are alike because they indicate a state of longing

Questions: 1. Uri and “Misha” were forced to leave their hiding place in the barbershop building because the Jackboots had begun destroying the property and would soon have discovered and harmed the boys. 2. Misha tried to lure Janina out of her house by leaving her loaves of bread on the steps in hopes she would venture out to see him. 3. Uri tied a rope around Misha’s waist to keep him from going off on his own and to punish him for his reckless behavior in the streets. 4. Misha desperately wanted to believe in angels because he longed for a more powerful being to protect him. 5. When Uri said he believed in bread, he meant that he had faith in tangible things, not in what he could not see; this statement revealed that he was a practical, down-to-earth boy with an instinct for survival. 6. The trees were disappearing in Warsaw because it was a time of great poverty in the city; people needed to keep warm and had to cut down trees to make fires in their homes. 7. Uri became angry with Misha after he was struck by the car because he had explicitly instructed the younger boy not to attract attention to himself in any way; and instead, Misha had caused people to notice the pair, a circumstance that could have led to their arrest or worse. 8. “Black pearls,” lumps of coal one could find scattered around in the rubble, were valuable because once ignited, they would burn well and provide light and heat. 9. Dr. Korczak had all of the orphans thank Misha because he had left them numerous gifts of food and coal. 10. Upon discovering the theft of the merry-go-round horse, the soldiers tortured the innocent Jewish man because all Jews were being made scapegoats by the Nazi regime, and one Jew would serve as an example as well as any other. 11. The Jews of Warsaw had been rounded up, told to take only the possessions they could carry, and walk to a place in the city that had been designated as a ghetto.

Chapters 16 – 22

Vocabulary: 1. e 2. f 3. a 4. b 5. g 6. h 7. c 8. d

Questions: 1. The people hurried to reach the ghetto in search of a habitable dwelling-place: those who arrived last got the worst quarters. 2. Mr. Milgrom carried his bottles of medicine all the way across the city because he realized there would be no doctors, pharmacists, or medicines for the inhabitants of the ghetto, and thought that perhaps his supply could save some lives. 3. The Jackboots regarded Gypsies, Jews, and disabled people as unfit to live among their “master race”;

these groups were all the same to Nazi eyes because they were deemed “inferior” specimens of humanity. 4. A wall was built around the Warsaw Ghetto to keep in the residents, turning the ghetto into an unofficial prison. 5. The boys were evicted from the stable because a “finch” must have reported them to the Nazis who were taking all the remaining “undesirables” to the ghetto. 6. Dead bodies became a common sight in the ghetto due to starvation, disease, and murder. 7. It was clear that starvation of the ghetto residents had become Nazi policy when there was no food in the stores and the meat of horses, dogs, cats, and even rats (sold as squirrels), appeared in the market. 8. Misha slipped out of the ghetto from time to time to pilfer food; he was aided by his small size which made it possible for him to slither through a drainpipe. 9. Uri attacked one of the flops in retaliation against his persecution of Big Henryk: the flops, who were Jews themselves, were generally hated by ghetto inhabitants. 10. Since Himmler was the second most important Nazi in command and the one ultimately responsible for conditions in the ghetto, people were worried that his visit could only signal worse times ahead.

Chapters 23 – 30

Vocabulary: 1. salute 2. contrary 3. torment 4. goad 5. confirmed 6. pestered 7. deserted

Questions: 1. Misha was unable to believe that the scrawny, partially blind, and altogether unimpressive man in the car was Himmler because he expected to see a powerful, imposing man capable of wielding great power. 2. Misha teased and taunted Buffo because the terrible Flop was so fat that he could not easily catch a quick child; these pranks were dangerous because Buffo was a pitiless murderer of children and adults. 3. After Misha was accepted as one of the Milgrom family, the relationship between Janina and Misha became one of fierce sibling rivalry instead of friendship. 4. Misha helped the Milgroms and the orphans to survive by smuggling food and supplies into the ghetto from the other side of the wall. 5. Crows were the only birds to visit the ghetto because unlike most common city birds, they were scavengers who could feed on flesh; the other birds, who would have sought crumbs of food, had nothing to lure them over the wall into the ghetto. 6. Misha was “the perfect smuggler” because he was small, quick, fearless, and he had a good knowledge of Warsaw. 7. Janina was surprised to discover that the city outside the ghetto still existed because months behind its walls had reduced her world to the cramped ghetto and partially erased her impressions of the larger world. 8. Misha wanted to prevent Janina from joining him on his smuggling raids because her lesser skill and lack of self-restraint made her a dangerous ally; he was also afraid that she would be caught and murdered by the Jackboots who had already given the family a warning. 9. The Flamethrowers were trying to drive people out of the sewers, where they were hiding from the Jackboots. 10. Although Janina understood her father’s meaning, she followed the letter of his command by smuggling on her own, instead of going with Misha.

Chapters 31 – 36

Vocabulary: 1. c 2. d 3. a 4. g 5. h 6. b 7. f 8. e; 1. accused 2. harassing 3. lurking 4. crater 5. veering 6. fragment 7. commotion 8. reliable

Questions: 1. Uri ordered Misha never to speak to him because Uri was now passing as a Gentile; if he had been seen talking with Misha, his Jewish identity might have been recognized and his life endangered. 2. The Jackboots hanged Olek because he had been caught smuggling; Janina was stunned at the sight of his corpse because, although she had seen many dead bodies in the ghetto, she had never seen the corpse of a person she knew. 3. Misha was solemn on the day of Mrs. Milgrom’s funeral because he knew the family mourned her passing; he too grieved because, despite her rebuff, he thought of her as his mother. 4. Mr. Milgrom paid the undertaker with prescription pills. 5. Mr. Milgrom tried to shield Misha and Janina from the bombs by lifting them into Mrs. Milgrom’s grave, where they would have some cover from the air strike. 6. When Misha said, “This was the ghetto: where children grew down instead of up” he meant that starvation was reducing the children physically, and that they were pared down in size and weight, and often died from lack of nutrition. 7. Life in the ghetto became worse than it had ever been because more people were forced into the area by the Nazis, so there was less food, less space for living, and more tension; also, with the attack by the Russians, there was now danger from the bombings. 8. Mr. Milgrom decided to celebrate Hanukkah in the midst of all the suffering to show that he still had hope: Hanukkah is the celebration of survival against great odds. 9. Misha’s physical growth threatened his survival because if he got too big to slip through the hole in the wall, he would no longer be able to scavenge for food. 10. Misha worked hard to find an egg for Janina to cure her depression; he was rewarded by her obvious enjoyment, a brief moment of satisfaction which seemed to break her cycle of depression. 11. Uncle Shepsel convinced himself that he was a Lutheran because he foolishly believed that this would save him from the Nazis. 12. Uri advised Misha to get out of the ghetto because the Nazis would soon be deporting all Jews.

Chapters 37 – 45

Vocabulary: 1. c 2. f 3. a 4. h 5. b 6. g 7. e 8. d; 1. insane 2. forbidden 3. agitated 4. exotic
5. dozing 6. radiant 7. enormous 8. guilty

Questions: 1. The people of the ghetto preferred the word “resettlement” to the word “deportation” because while “resettlement” suggested a fresh chance at life in a different place, “deportation” suggested that people would simply be shipped away with no concern for what would become of them. 2. The Jackboots had to fill a quota, meaning a certain number, of deportations each day; the rumor was that the quota was between 5,000 and 10,000 people a day. 3. The ragged man returned to the ghetto to warn people about the concentration camp from which he had escaped, where people were being killed by the thousands; most people responded to these reports with disbelief, shutting their ears to the unbearable truth. 4. Mr. Milgrom tried to send Misha and Janina away from the ghetto because he thought they would have a better chance of survival living by their wits than they would have if they were deported to the camps. 5. It was finally impossible for Misha to protect Janina from the Jackboots because while he knew enough to avoid the trains, she ran wildly toward them and was easily caught and thrown on a traincar. 6. The Jackboot who shot off Misha’s ear was Uri; he did it to prevent him from being deported to the death camps. 7. The farmer’s wife helped Misha survive after he left the ghetto by feeding him, tying him up so that he could not try to reach the camps in his delirium, and making him run away from the farm when the Nazis approached. 8. After the war ended, Misha’s life continued to be a struggle for survival, in which he used his skills in running and thieving to become a vendor of stolen goods that people badly needed; these skills allowed him to survive amid the desperate poverty of the region. 9. Misha continued to rant and rave about the war even after he came to America because he was mentally deranged as a result of his war experiences and yet he was sane enough to want to bear witness to the atrocities. He finally stopped due to the kindness of the two women who reassured him that he had been heard, and that this nightmare was at an end. 10. Misha’s marriage was ruined because of his abnormal behavior, the result of his terrible childhood deprivation and trauma, coupled with his wife’s inability to understand how to deal with this behavior. 11. Misha finally found peace twenty-five years after his marriage ended, when his daughter and grandchild came to claim him as family.

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Little Bear's Visit.....S0504	Song Lee in Room 4B.....S1839	Shortstop From Tokyo.....S0938	The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane.....S3799
Little Runner of the Longhouse..S1318	The Stories Huey Tells.....S3116	Sidewalk Story.....S2549	Mississippi Bridge.....S2736
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