

Sample Review

By Allison Hambrick

Reading a book is one of the most imaginative forms of entertainment. Books can provide daring adventures in far off places, epic romances, intriguing mysteries, or even a glimpse into the perspective of another. It is this idea that books are an important form of both entertainment and communication that prevails in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak is not your run of the mill World War II novel. Not only does the novel cover the life of a regular German gentile with just the right coloring for the Nazi era, but it does so using an unusual perspective. Utilizing characterization, personification, and cryptic diction, Zusak crafts a unique story about a girl who steals books and her run ins with a surprising narrator, Death himself.

Greeting the reader with the truth that they are "going to die," Death establishes himself as an uncaring character who unapologetically accepts his role in ending people's lives. That is, until he encounters Liesel Meminger, who he affectionately titles "the book thief." Death humorously, and sometimes regretfully, chronicles Liesel's life and every previous encounter between the two, starting with the year she was adopted by Hans and Rosa Hubermann.

Total opposites of one another, Liesel's parents are arguably the best characters in the novel. Hans Hubermann is a kind-hearted World War I veteran who clearly has a soft spot for children. Liesel credits him with teaching her how to read, but he taught her something far more important: how to be kind and generous. Rosa Hubermann, on the other hand, is a harsh, often mean woman who constantly hurls insults at her husband and daughter, but she often comes through when they need her. The Hubermann's relationships with each other and with Liesel are organic and read very much like a real family.

Alternately, Liesel's best friend, Rudy Steiner, is often a source of debate amongst readers. Rudy is Liesel's neighbor, an arrogant boy with a not-so-secret crush on Liesel and the inability to take a hint. He often waits for her to leave her house in the morning and follows her as she does her chores throughout the day, regardless of whether he was invited to come along. Rudy is, at his worst, a stalker-like, annoying character, who does little more than insult Liesel and get her into trouble. At his best, however, Rudy is a kind, sincere friend who truly values Liesel.

The relationship between the two preteens starts off as a very unrequited crush, with Death humorously noting that "the only thing worse than a boy who hates you is a boy who loves you." Throughout the book, Liesel and Rudy form a strong connection, with Rudy being the first to come to Liesel's aid when she needs him. So while Rudy is often irritating, the beautiful friendship between Liesel and Rudy shows how natural and perfect the innocent friendship of a little girl and her best friend is capable of being.

The Book Thief tackles many larger issues as well, such as the Holocaust, resistance to the Nazi party, and bombing raids. What is interesting, however, is the author's ability to make what is important to Liesel important to the reader, whether it's having enough money to buy candy or hiding in a bomb shelter. Zusak does a superb job of displaying that when you are young, every problem feels like the end of the world, no matter its severity. So while the novel tackles many larger than life issues of 1940s German life, Zusak brings it all into perspective by blending in realistic problems that readers can relate to.

Hilarious, nostalgic, and frequently melancholy, *The Book Thief* is a thoughtful commentary on life in World War II Germany as well as love, loss, and how to be young.