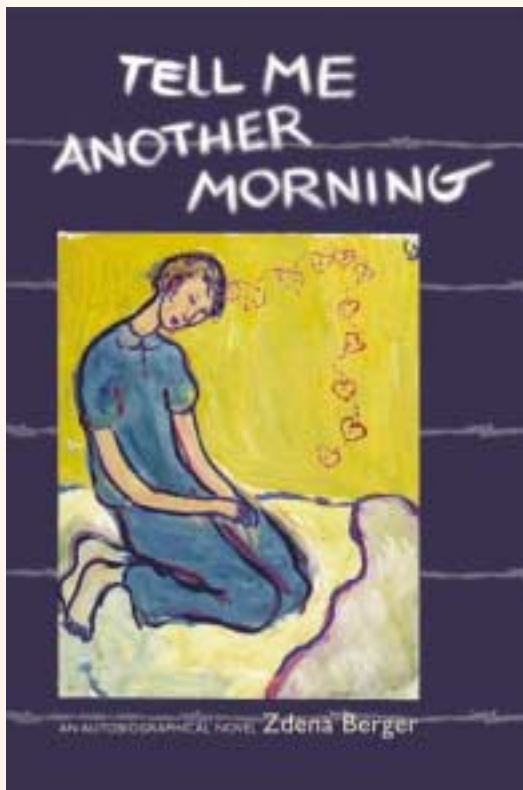

A Study and Resource Guide



Tell Me Another Morning by **Zdena Berger**

*"Words for the unimaginable.
Clear-eyed, strong, terrifying,
and finally, somehow,
hopeful."*

—Nicole Krauss,
The History of Love: A Novel

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The Story Behind *Tell Me Another Morning*

Tell Me Another Morning is an autobiographical novel—an account of Zdena Berger’s teenage years spent as a prisoner of the Nazis in Terezin, Auschwitz, a labor camp in Hamburg, and Bergen-Belsen. The book was first published in 1961 to critical acclaim, one year after the first English translation of Elie Wiesel’s *Night* was released. Now republished after 45 years of being out of print, Berger’s clear-eyed yet poetic account of survival and hope once again offers readers a unique perspective, rarely heard: that of a teenage Czechoslovakian girl as she struggles with the sense of alienation as a Jew in Prague, as she endures the horror of deportation to the camps, and as she survives the Holocaust through tenacity, hope, and her friendships with two other girls. The book takes its place in the canon of Holocaust literature, alongside the works of Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Gerda Weissmann Klein, Imre Kertész, and others who have documented the atrocities of the Nazis while at the same time honoring the human spirit of both survivors and victims of the Holocaust.

A Unique Perspective

Zdena Berger’s novel is one of the few works in English to explore the experiences of women and teenage girls in the concentration camps, and to focus on the saving power of female friendships.

Berger’s novel is one of the few works in English to explore the experiences of women and teenage girls in the concentration camps, and to focus on the saving power of female friendships. “At the core of the book,” she stated in a 2007 radio interview, “is the interrelationship of these three young girls, which truly helped them to survive with dignity.... We would not have made it without this bond, which goes beyond any bonds in normal life.”

“The idea to write the book came after I came to the United States in 1955,” says Berger in the interview. “I had to be distant from Europe....” She found that Americans did not have a clear idea of what had happened in Europe during World War II, and, like so many other survivors, she “was one of those who did want to talk about it.” She decided to write about what it was like to come of age in those circumstances. Because she could not have physically kept a journal during her years in the camps, she had to work hard to rekindle the memories: “I wonder if one remembers only that which one can deal with, ultimately.” But as she started to write, her memories came in “bursts of incidents.” It took nearly four years of writing and constant rewriting, squeezed into evenings after she returned home from her full-time job as a secretary. “In some way it was cleansing to write it,” she notes. “I do not know whether we learn from the past...[but] it is very important that we leave the documents behind us.”

Truth in Fiction, Fiction in Truth

“Truth is not only in facts. There is truth in fiction, emotional truth. Fiction is an extension of memory.”
—Zdena Berger

Although, as Berger has said, “all events in the book are based on facts,” and although protagonist and narrator Tania is Berger’s alter ego, Berger chose the form of “autobiographical novel” rather than memoir to tell her story. As she says, “I would not have been able to write a memoir. I wanted to tell the story in a way that would let a reader feel and see what we did, and fiction made it possible for me to do that.... Truth is not only in facts. There is truth in fiction, emotional truth. Fiction is an extension of memory.” Many survivors have



commented on how impossible it is for mere words to convey the horror of their experience; a certain amount of fictionalizing, such as conflation of characters and events, has been a commonplace of many Holocaust memoirs. (Even Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night* strays from strict autobiography; Eliezer, Wiesel's alter ego, is a somewhat fictionalized version of the author, as Tania is of Zdena Berger.) "I needed to present my story in as honest a way as possible. By calling this new edition 'an autobiographical novel' we are now meshing the two true aspects of the book," Berger explains.

About the Author

Zdena Berger was born in Prague in 1925 and attended school there until the German occupation. She spent the war years as a prisoner of the Nazis in several concentration camps, including Terezin, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen. Freed finally by the British Army, she returned to Prague to complete her education, then went to Paris, where she worked for the American School. In 1955 she moved to the United States. She is married and lives on the northern coast of California.



Author Zdena Berger

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About the Cover of This Edition

The cover art of *Tell Me Another Morning* was carefully selected to parallel the book's theme and contents. The painting, "Girl with Hearts Falling," is by Charlotte Salomon, a young Jewish artist who was born in Berlin and sent by her family to stay with her grandparents in the south of France after Kristallnacht, in 1938. Over a two-year period, Salomon produced over 1,000 gouache paintings and hundreds of accompanying texts chronicling her life and her family's often tragic history. She referred to these collected works as a "picture novel" which she titled *Life? or Theater?*—essentially her fictionalized autobiography.

In France, Salomon married another Jewish exile, Alexander Nagler, but in 1943 both she and her husband were captured and sent by the Nazis to Auschwitz, where she was murdered at the age of 26. Before she was deported, Salomon gave the contents of *Life? or Theater?* to a friend in Villefranche, France, saying "Keep this safe; it is my whole life." *Life? or Theater?* is one of the unique documents to come out of the Holocaust, a testament to the life, thoughts, and hopes of a gifted young Jewish woman.

The work of Charlotte Salomon is now housed in the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, where it can be viewed in person or online through the museum's website.



The painting, "Girl with Hearts Falling," is by Charlotte Salomon, a young German Jewish artist.

The Holocaust (also called the Shoah) is the term used to describe the systematic mass murder of approximately six million European Jews....

Jews lost their civil rights first, then were segregated into ghettos, and finally were deported to concentration camps where they were used as slave labor.
—Zdena Berger

Historical Background to the Novel

Shoah

The Holocaust (also called the *Shoah*, a Hebrew word preferred by many) is the term used to describe the systematic mass murder of approximately six million European Jews by the German *Fuehrer* (leader) Adolph Hitler's Nazi regime during World War II. Although approximately five million members of other groups—homosexuals, the disabled, Roma (gypsies), Soviet prisoners of war, Polish Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others—were also killed by the Nazis, the term "Holocaust" refers specifically to what the Nazis referred to as "the Final Solution"—the genocide of the Jews.

The Holocaust started slowly—long before World War II broke out in 1939—and developed in carefully laid-out stages. After the Nazis were elected and came to power in 1933, they began the persecution of Jewish citizens, which was fully sanctioned by the German government. Within a few years, Jews were forbidden to hold any social, economic, or political power in Germany. Some Jewish families left Germany between 1933 and 1938 to seek better lives elsewhere.

From 1937 to 1938, Hitler's government increased the persecution of the Jewish population. Sanctioned violence began on the nights of November 9 and 10, 1938, when a *pogrom*, or violent riot, against Jews was carried out by Nazi storm troopers and German civilians throughout Germany and in Vienna, Austria. Jewish storefronts were shattered, buildings were demolished, and synagogues and private homes were ransacked and burned. Jews were physically attacked and humiliated on the streets and in their homes, and some Jewish citizens were beaten to death. In addition, almost 30,000 Jewish men were forced into concentration camps. The event left no doubt of the Nazis' intentions for Jewish people. It became known as *Kristallnacht*, or "The Night of Broken Glass," named for the shattered glass of the windows of Jewish businesses and homes that were attacked. Many view *Kristallnacht* as the formal beginning of the Holocaust.

After *Kristallnacht*, the Nazis sped up their plans for a solution to "the Jewish question." Jews lost their civil rights first, then were segregated into ghettos, and finally deported to concentration camps where they were used as slave labor. Those who did not die of exhaustion, starvation, or diseases such as typhus were shuttled from camp to camp. The elderly, weak, and the sick were killed in death camps such as Auschwitz. In the death camps, inhuman experimentation on the innocent prisoners sometimes preceded their murder, which often occurred in gas chambers. Victims were buried in mass graves or burned in crematoria or burning pits.

The Holocaust for Czechoslovakia's Jews began in September of 1938, with the signing of the Munich Pact....

The Holocaust in Czechoslovakia

Zdena Berger writes about the Holocaust experience as it affected her, a teenager living in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Prague, in the part of Czechoslovakia known as Bohemia, was home to people of Czech and German descent, and had a thriving Jewish community. The Holocaust for Czechoslovakia's Jews began in September of 1938, with the signing of the Munich Pact—essentially an appeasement to Hitler, who had demanded that the Sudetenland (an area comprising part of Bohemia's borders) be annexed to Germany. Fearing an attack on its lands, the Czech government gave up its rights to the Sudetenland without a fight. What was left of Czechoslovakia was further weakened when Slovakia broke away to become a fascist state in alliance with Hitler's Third Reich. In March of 1939, the remaining portions of Czechoslovakia were taken over and placed under the "protection" of Nazi Germany. Hitler came to Prague castle, the German army moved into Prague, and there was no resistance.

It was the beginning of the end of normal life for Prague's Jews. Six months later, World War II officially began with the Nazi invasion of Poland. Two years after that, the Nazi government demanded that Jews six years old and older wear the Star of David on their clothing whenever they went out in public.

In the panoramic opening of her novel, Berger describes all of the events of Prague's annexation by the Nazis. She mixes the inexorable march of the Nazi takeover with ordinary details of everyday life, foreshadowing the menacing changes to come. In her second chapter, "The Chain," Berger shows the takeover of Prague through the eyes of the 14-year-old protagonist, Tania. Tanks and "green uniforms" enter Prague, and true to actual events, not a shot is fired:

*People talk in whispers; some spit and shake their fists.
One man, weeping, throws a flower. It falls under a tank.
The crowd follows the sidewalk; the arms of the people tight
to their sides, they whisper their curses. They are bad words,
but I do not think they are bad now.*

*And I think, This is not possible. They cannot take us like
that. It is too quiet. Nobody fights or screams or runs. I think
of the French Revolution and guillotines. But this has nothing
to do with that. Who was ever occupied?*

"You Get Used to Everything."

Reading the first few chapters of *Tell Me Another Morning*, it may be difficult to understand why Tania and her family do not fully grasp what is really happening. Even when they are forced to start wearing the yellow Stars of David, the true situation does not register with them. Wearing the stars "separated us; it made us different," Berger recalled in a 2007 radio interview. But, as she explained, "You get used to everything. Why couldn't we see what was happening? This is perhaps just the way human beings can cope."

"You get used to everything. Why couldn't we see what was happening? This is perhaps just the way human beings cope."

“Very few people took any action. We thought this was a very temporary situation. [We told ourselves that] things will go back to normal.”
—Zdena Berger

In her novel, Berger describes a slowly dawning horror, a progression of awareness that parallels what Jews in Europe actually experienced, though there were some significant differences in how anti-Semitism played out from country to country. “I suppose there was a great deal of denial at that time,” Berger says. For the first year of German occupation in Prague, “people were not affected that much,” and Berger’s middle-class family—and their peers—did not understand what was happening. “Very few people took any action,” Berger notes. “We thought this was a very temporary situation. [We told ourselves that] things will go back to normal.” Berger herself was not deported to a ghetto until she was 16—two years after the tanks arrived in Prague—but it was not until she, her family, and her friends became “indentured slaves” in the work camps that the realization that “others were dying” began. The episode titled “The Rule” chillingly illustrates how little the deportees knew about their intended fates in the camps.



Entrance to Auschwitz, Birkenau

List of Characters

Many of the secondary characters in the novel are never named, but instead go by such general descriptions as “the old man,” “the man in stripes,” “the commandant,” and so on.

Tania Andresova The narrator and central character. Tania can be read as author Zdena Berger’s alter ego. She is an intelligent, observant, and sensitive girl who loves music and dreams of being a poet one day. She is about 14 as the novel begins and 20 when it ends.

Ella Tania’s mother.

Father Tania’s father, who owns a shoe factory.

Karel Tania’s brother, an intelligent and serious young man who wants to join the army and fight against the Germans. He is 16 when the novel begins.

Grandma Tania’s grandmother, who lives with the family.

Eva Tania’s neighbor and best friend from school, with whom Tania is later reunited after the first deportation. Eva is intelligent, serious, and sometimes cynical.

Peter A young boy in the ghetto to which Tania and her family are evacuated.

Ilse A teenager, a bit older than Eva and Tania, who works in the kitchen in the ghetto and gives extra food to Tania and her mother. She is wise, “loves men,” and is energetic and resourceful. She is protective of Tania, whom she affectionately calls “Baby.”

Sophie An older Jewish woman who arrives at the ghetto; a former artist, she refuses to paint a portrait of a horse for one of the Nazis.

Ivan Tania’s boyfriend in the ghetto.

Aram Ivan’s older brother, whom Tania meets at the concentration camp.

Sonia A young woman in a work camp who is pregnant.

Dasha A younger, calculating newcomer who arrives at the concentration camp and sets about doing whatever it takes to survive.

Carl A lesbian Nazi official with whom Dasha develops a relationship.

Vito A young doctor-in-training with whom Tania develops a relationship while she recovers from typhus, after being liberated from the final camp.

Here is an account of the Holocaust in which, surprisingly, the words *Holocaust*, *Nazi*, *Hitler*, “the Final Solution,” *concentration camp*, *gas chamber*, and *Jew* never appear.

Prague, a sophisticated city with a strongly medieval flavor, was home to people of Czech and German descent, and had long had a thriving Jewish community.

Navigating the Novel

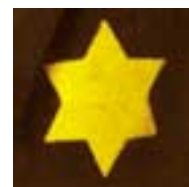
Tell Me Another Morning is a poetic, compellingly understated, and subtle depiction of a Holocaust survivor’s experiences. Here is an account of the Holocaust in which, surprisingly, the words *Holocaust*, *Nazi*, *Hitler*, “the Final Solution,” *concentration camp*, *gas chamber*, and *Jew* never appear. Nor are specific place names mentioned, or people or events referred to directly. Even the Nazis who run the camps are referred to only as “the green ones.” Some readers will have general knowledge of the Holocaust and the major events of World War II, which will help them recognize references to striped clothes, furnaces, tattooed numbers, showers, wire fences, and the like. However, other readers will experience the novel in the simple way that Berger presents events, people, and places.

The book may challenge readers who prefer more specificity in their writing, more of the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *how*, and *why* of narrative—especially autobiographical narrative that is based on actual historical events. For those readers, a general account of the historical context as it pertains to this novel is presented below, followed by a “novel navigator” that explains the location and historical context of events in each of the six Parts of the novel. To read the novel as Berger intended, however, it is advisable to read through the book once without over-concern for historical specificity, then go back and review the novel with the benefit of this information.

Part I

The opening section of the novel takes place during the years 1939–1941 and opens in the city of Prague, in the part of Czechoslovakia known as Bohemia. Prague, a sophisticated city with a strongly medieval flavor, was home to people of Czech and German descent, and had long had a thriving Jewish community. For Czechoslovakia’s Jews, the path to the Holocaust began in September of 1938 with the signing of the Munich Pact—essentially an appeasement of Hitler, who had demanded that the Sudetenland, an area making up part of Bohemia’s borders, be annexed to Germany. Fearing an attack on its lands, the Czech government gave up its rights to the Sudetenland without a fight. What was left of Czechoslovakia was further weakened when Slovakia broke away to become a fascist state in alliance with Hitler’s Third Reich. In March of 1939, the remaining portions of Czechoslovakia were taken over and placed under the “protection” of Nazi Germany. Hitler came to Prague castle, the German army moved into Prague, and there was no resistance.

It was the beginning of the end of normal life for Prague’s Jews. Six months later, World War II officially began with the invasion of Poland by the Nazis. Two years after that, the Nazi government demanded that Jews six years old and older wear a yellow Star of David—the six-pointed star that is a symbol of Judaism—on their clothing whenever they went out in public. The yellow star was meant to identify Jews and to be a public symbol of humiliation, a mark of shame. (In the chapter called “The Star” in Part 1 of the novel, this idea is given an ironic treatment as the protagonist, Tania, worries about not having enough stars for her clothing.)



Children were given toys for the duration of the Red Cross visit, and prisoners were forced to build a playground, which was dismantled when the Red Cross left.

The actions of the Red Cross during World War II are still a source of controversy.

In the panoramic opening of her novel, Berger describes Prague's annexation by the Nazis, mixing the inexorable march of the Nazi takeover with ordinary details of everyday life, an introduction to the Andresova family, and unsettling details, some in the form of newspaper headlines, that foreshadow the menacing changes to come. In her second chapter, "The Chain," Berger shows the takeover of Prague through the eyes of the 14-year-old protagonist, Tania. Tanks and "green uniforms" enter Prague, and true to actual events, not a shot is fired.

Part 2

The section "The Walled Town" shows Tania and her family being taken to Terezin, Czechoslovakia (also known as Theresienstadt in German), originally a military fortress built by the Austrian empire in the late 1700s. Named after Austrian empress Maria Theresa, Terezin was set up by the Nazis as a ghetto for Jews deported from Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands, Denmark, and other areas. Terezin was actually the focus of one of the Nazis' most appalling charades: The stated public policy regarding Terezin was that it was a special ghetto where elderly Jews were sent for their comfort and safety. The Nazis' public reason for the expulsion of Jews from Germany and German-held cities was that they were being pressed into service as forced labor. Older Jews would, of course, be exempt from such labor, so, according to the Nazi propaganda machine, they were deported to a "spa town" for those too old to work. In reality, Terezin was mostly a transition center or "holding place" for Jews who were later sent to concentration camps, including extermination camps such as Auschwitz. For many Jews, however, Terezin was the end of the line. The ghetto was so overcrowded, and its conditions so poor, that about a quarter of the Jews sent there died from illness and other causes.

In the chapter "The Carnival," Berger describes the arrival of "visitors" to the ghetto. This episode recounts an actual event that took place in Terezin in June 1944, when the Nazis invited members of the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit and observe the "model Jewish ghetto." The Nazis staged an elaborate ruse, fixing up the ghetto, deporting prisoners so that it would not seem overcrowded, and wining and dining the visiting dignitaries, who were only shown what the Nazis wanted them to see. As the novel recounts, children were given toys for the duration of the Red Cross visit, and prisoners were forced to build a playground, which was dismantled when the Red Cross left. The actions of the Red Cross during World War II are still a source of controversy. They played it very safe with Germany and did not confront Hitler's regime, doing little to call attention to what was happening in the camps. They also did not act on information they had regarding the true nature of the camps and what was actually occurring in them. Nazi officers were able to hide the truth from Red Cross investigators, knowing that they would not delve deeply due to the prevailing political situation.

Part 2 ends with the episode "The Long Train," in which Tania, her family, and Eva are packed into a cattle car and sent to their next, and unknown, destination. Jewish camp inmates were often transported by freight trains, often so impossibly crowded—and with no food, water, or sanitation—many passengers died

before ever reaching their destination. Tania's family and Eva arrive in an unnamed camp that is undoubtedly Auschwitz, where Zdena Berger was sent after living in Terezin. Auschwitz was actually several camps in a large complex:

- **Auschwitz I**, the original concentration camp, contained the administrative center for the complex. A metal sign at the entrance to Auschwitz I (a sign that can still be seen today) carries the German slogan "*Arbeit macht frei*," meaning "*Work will set you free*"—a phrase that will be used ironically later in the novel. Many of the concentration camps had the same slogan at their entrances.
- **Birkenau, sometimes called Auschwitz II**, was the extermination camp where over one million Jews—and thousands of others—were murdered. Most of them were killed in one of four large poison gas chambers, some by execution-style shooting, others through medical experimentation. Their bodies were burned in the camp's four huge furnaces, or crematoria.
- **Monowitz, or Auschwitz III**, was a labor camp. Anyone healthy enough to work for twelve or more hours per day was housed here for use as slave labor for local factories. If they became too ill or malnourished to work, they were sent to Birkenau. There were also a number of Auschwitz "subcamps" in the area, also used to house slave labor.



Auschwitz barbed wire fence, Poland

The Nazi government created an enormous, and very efficient, bureaucratic "machine" for "processing" their victims....

Many kapos were prisoners who did work [for the Nazis] as a kind of "plea bargain" for lighter work and to stay alive.

Part 3

This part of the novel opens in the Administration Building of what seems to be Auschwitz I, showing the commandant, or German officer in charge, engaged in his bureaucratic duties and lamenting that he can't streamline the process at the camp by simply killing the prisoners immediately in the furnaces instead of "housing" them for six months. The Nazi government created an enormous, and very efficient, bureaucratic "machine" for "processing" their victims and carrying out genocidal policies. Though Part 3 takes place in the infamous Auschwitz and might be expected to be among the most graphic parts of the book, Berger carefully avoids sensationalizing events by approaching them "sideways," with subtlety and irony. Instead of describing the horrors of this camp outright—for, as other Holocaust witnesses have noted, what words can capture the incomprehensible?—Berger tends to hint at and allude to the atrocities at Auschwitz, some of which are explained below.

In "The Small Room," Berger touches on an aspect of life in the camps that will come up again in later chapters: the presence of certain prisoners who have special jobs in the camp and therefore special "privileges." Berger reintroduces Ilse, who is working with a prisoner who obviously has a different status from the rest of the prisoners. This man is probably a *kapo*, a prisoner selected to perform low-level administrative duties for the Nazis in exchange for certain privileges. Many kapos were prisoners who did the work as a kind of "plea bargain" for lighter work and to stay alive. Kapos would often treat their fellow prisoners harshly, a fact that Berger illustrates in the chapter "The Box," when the large

A single-needle instrument—the “blue pen”—was used to tattoo the prisoner’s camp serial number in blue on his or her left arm.

woman in prisoner’s clothing sadistically punishes Eva. Auschwitz also used some prisoners as *Sonderkommandos*—men who would dispose of the corpses of prisoners in exchange for less harsh conditions. These improved conditions were often temporary, however, as *Sonderkommandos* were routinely killed, lest their special knowledge of what was going on in the camps ever be revealed to the outside world.

In “The Blue Pen,” Berger describes the Auschwitz policy of tattooing prisoners—usually the healthy, younger people who were selected for forced labor. A single-needle instrument—the “blue pen”—was used to tattoo the prisoner’s camp serial number in blue on his or her left arm. Prisoners who were immediately selected for extermination did not get a tattoo, as the point of the tattoos was essentially to enable the Nazis to keep an “inventory” of laborers and know how many were working, how many had died, and so on.

In the chapter “The Riding Crop,” Berger describes the horrifying periodic selection process that would determine who would continue in forced labor and who would be sent to die in the gas chambers. In addition to this type of selection process, prisoners were constantly subjected to the dreaded *Appelplatz*, or “the place of the roll call.” During these outdoor roll calls, which could last for several hours, all prisoners lined up in columns for a thorough “inventory” of their ranks. (One reason for the roll call was to see if any prisoners were missing or had escaped.) It was not uncommon for ill or weak prisoners to collapse and even die while standing during one of these roll calls, and anyone who moved could be beaten or otherwise punished.

In “The Box,” Tania and her friends seem to be in a subcamp of the complex. The cramped and horrible conditions in the “boxes”—jail cells—are typical of the treatment of the Jewish prisoners; whether in cattle cars on trains or in overcrowded barracks, they were treated like animals being prepared for slaughter, often crammed into dark, physically torturous surroundings. Some cells were “standing cells,” in which four or five men would be forced to stay for hours or days in an upright position.

“The Shower” alludes to Auschwitz’s horrifying method of exterminating its prisoners in large groups....

“The Shower” alludes to Auschwitz’s horrifying method of exterminating its prisoners in large groups by leading them—ostensibly to clean and de-louse them—into large public “showers” where, instead of being bathed in jets of water, they were blasted with jets of cyanide gas and killed by the hundreds. There were four such “showers” in Auschwitz-Birkenau to accommodate the large numbers of prisoners who would arrive daily. Almost three-fourths of the daily arrivals—mostly women, children, and the elderly, as well as those deemed “unfit” for labor—were sent to these “showers.” At one point, up to 20,000 prisoners were gassed each day at Auschwitz. No wonder, then, that the dry showerheads, suspicious-looking soap, lack of faucets, and hissing in the pipes lead Tania and her friends to assume the worst—and to be filled with something approaching joy when they find that they are in ordinary showers after all.

This part of the novel ends with Tania and her friends being sent by train to yet another destination. Although it was the fate of the majority of those sent to Auschwitz to die in the camp, the girls’ lives have been spared because they are

[Hamburg] was bombed repeatedly by the Allies during World War II; over 40,000 Germans were killed in the frequent attacks, which laid waste to buildings and houses.

young and still strong and healthy enough to be of use to the Nazis. As Zdena Berger noted in an interview, she and the other young women who shared her fate were basically “indentured slaves” for the Third Reich, allowed to live as long as they could work, and killed when they could not be productive.

Part 4

This section opens with a description of the docks and warehouses of Hamburg, one of the largest ports in the world. This city of canals was bombed repeatedly by the Allies during World War II; over 40,000 Germans were killed in the frequent attacks, which laid waste to buildings and houses. Tania and her friends experience a reprieve of sorts as they are forced to perform various outdoor duties that bring them into close contact with Hamburg civilians. But the threat of being sent back to Auschwitz is always present.

In “The Lost Days,” Ilse and Eva fear for Tania’s life because she is sick, and unless she can show up for work the next day she is in danger of being “sent back.” In “The Single Sunday,” the sadism of the Nazis returns in the form of “the man with the list,” who visits every Sunday to read off the identification numbers of certain prisoners who are to be either punished or “taken back” to be killed. Since pregnant women and women with young children were automatically exterminated at Auschwitz, the fate of the pregnant woman, Sonia, in this chapter is certain.

“The Last Camp” takes place in a camp based on Bergen-Belsen, a former prisoner-of-war camp for Soviet soldiers that became a concentration camp in 1944. Though not an extermination camp like Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen was the last stop for over 50,000 Jews, as well as other victims of the Nazis, who died of typhus, malnutrition, and other causes brought about through overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. The camp was built to accommodate about 10,000 prisoners; at its height, however, the population reached 60,000. Thousands of prisoners were sent to Bergen-Belsen in the last months of the war as advancing Soviet troops forced the Nazis to clear out of camps farther to the east. Anne Frank and her sister Margot died at Bergen-Belsen in March 1945.

Part 5

Still in Bergen-Belsen, Tania and her friends feel the tide of war turning at last. On April 15, 1945, a British army division liberated Bergen-Belsen. The British soldiers found 60,000 prisoners in the camp, most of them starving and ill with typhus and other diseases. They also found thousands of unburied corpses on the grounds. The health hazards presented by the camp forced the British to burn it to the ground. A new camp, called Bergen-Belsen DP (Displaced Persons) was set up not far from the original camp to serve the needs of the survivors and act as a transitional living area until they could return to their homes—if they still had homes, which many did not.

For those who somehow survived Bergen-Belsen, the threat of death was not yet over, as the typhus epidemic that had run through the camp had still not run its course. Typhus, caused by bacteria carried in body lice, is a common epidemic

For those who somehow survived Bergen-Belsen, the threat of death was not yet over, as the typhus epidemic that had run through the camp had still not run its course.

in the aftermath of war. The characteristics of typhus—a rash of red spots, high fever, delirium, coughing, chills—are described several times throughout the novel. In “The Louse,” we see Tania nearly succumb to the typhus that kills Dasha and so many other prisoners.

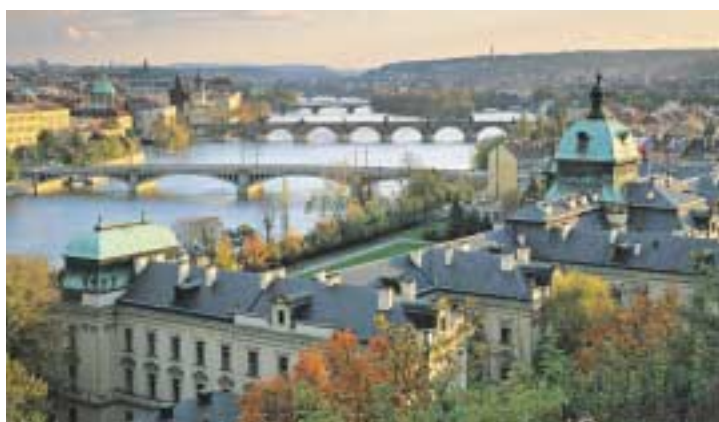
While those who are liberated recover at the new camp, the Allies proclaim May 8, 1945, as Victory in Europe Day, V-E Day. (The Allies were the group of nations that fought against the “Axis powers”—Germany, Japan, and Italy—during World War II. There were 26 allied nations in all, led by Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and, later, the United States.)

Part 6

The end of the novel brings Tania’s story full circle as she returns to her home city in Prague, to find that it is eerily the same and yet, for her and other survivors, irrevocably changed. The opening sequence of Part 6 presents a stylized dialogue between a “Citizen” and a “Survivor”—in other words, between a non-Jewish Czech citizen, who has been living life “as usual” (or as normally as possible given the circumstances of the war), and a concentration-camp survivor returning to the city that was once his or her home. In this dialogue, the strange and bitter paradox inherent in a Holocaust survivor’s “re-integration” into society is explored with no small amount of irony. The awkward meeting of the Survivor with “someone who had known them before” is a meeting of two realities that no longer have anything in common. The sheepish Citizen, acting as if his former neighbor had simply returned from a long and difficult journey, cannot wait to put distance between himself and the Survivor’s experience. The Citizens are still in denial about what has happened; they find it too awkward or troubling to acknowledge, and they have little desire to know more. While Tania and others were in the camps, for the most part life went on as always for their non-Jewish neighbors in Prague. For the Survivors, alienation and separation persist, and life can never be as it once was.

Tania makes a wrenching, yet emotionally necessary, visit to her childhood home before making her way to her Aunt Magda’s house, the home that will serve as the launching point for her new life as a survivor of the Holocaust. For a fuller view of her experience returning “home,” read Berger’s poignant “Afterword” at the end of the novel.

While Tania and others were in the camps, for the most part life went on as always for their non-Jewish neighbors in Prague. For the Survivors, alienation and separation persist, and life can never be as it once was.



Present-day Prague

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As [Elie] Wiesel noted, “language failed us. We would have to invent a new vocabulary, for our own words were inadequate, anemic.”

[T]he effect of what is not revealed or said is profound; far from undercutting the sense of horror, it brings the horror into stark relief.

Key Literary Elements in the Novel

Style

One nearly universal stylistic quality in the writing of Holocaust survivors is understatement and ambiguity in the telling of events. This tendency is understandable, given that nearly every Holocaust survivor has spoken of the impossibility of putting their experience into words. As Elie Wiesel said in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, “The experience of the camps defies comprehension.” Although survivors of the genocide felt that they had to “bear witness,” to testify to the horrendous experience, putting that experience into words was seemingly impossible. As Wiesel noted, “language failed us. We would have to invent a new vocabulary, for our own words were inadequate, anemic.”

Zdena Berger’s approach to writing about her experiences is compellingly understated and subtle. Here is an account of a Holocaust survivor in which the words *Holocaust*, *Nazi*, *Hitler*, *the Final Solution*, *concentration camp*, *gas chamber*, and *Jew* never appear. Nor are specific place names mentioned, or people or events referred to directly. Even the Nazis who run the camps are referred to only as “the green ones.” As is usually the case with understatement, the effect of what is not revealed or said is profound; far from undercutting the sense of horror, it brings the horror into stark relief. Without the overtly stated context of political and social terms, the novel manages to focus on the thoughts and experiences of one person. This makes Tania both a unique individual caught up in the horrors of the Holocaust, and a representative of every Holocaust victim and survivor.

The prose style, which some critics have compared to Ernest Hemingway, is spare at times and filled with remarkable imagery and powerful figurative language. Sequences of stream-of-consciousness prose evoke Virginia Woolf. Inviting inference and interpretation, Berger’s style asks readers to “read between the lines” and apply their own meanings.

Point of View/Dramatic Irony

Except for the six Part Openers, which are told from an omniscient point of view, the novel is told from Tania’s first-person point of view. This limits the reader’s perceptions to what Tania sees, knows, feels, and experiences, and thus opens the potential for dramatic irony. An informed reader, looking through the lens of history, will know—as Tania and her family do not—what is behind the changes in Prague, the enforced wearing of the yellow stars, and the deportation to concentration camps. The dramatic irony inherent in this approach heightens the sense of Tania’s family as innocent and unwitting victims of an unknowable evil, and it enables the reader to share their experience: the gradually dawning awareness that they have not merely been ostracized from their society, but that all forces are aligned against them and aim to kill them.

[A]ll Holocaust writings share certain main themes: the darkness of the human heart and its capability for evil....

[S]ome of the most important motifs to look out for in the novel include the importance of storytelling and memory; [and] menstrual blood and other aspects of being female....

Themes

Almost all Holocaust writings share certain main themes: the darkness of the human heart and its capability for evil; intolerance that gives rise to segregation, ostracization, and even genocide; the subjects of God and faith; the inability of people to comprehend the unimaginable. Other themes include survival, individual heroism, and integrity. Berger's novel shares these themes, but it adds other themes that are not always explored in Holocaust works: the power of friendship, coming of age in the concentration camps, the sustaining bonds of girls, the power of storytelling and memory, and the concept of home. In addition, the novel presents hope in the face of despair, the struggle for survival, the self versus society, and staying true to oneself.

Symbols and Motifs

Symbolism in novels can be highly personal and is subject to interpretation. Berger's novel is full of images that seem to symbolize various ideas. Berger often imbues very specific things—a chain on a door, a statue of a saint, a tree—with meanings that sum up the theme of a given episode. Her symbols, for the most part, take the form of motifs, or recurring elements that add thematic weight to the novel. In addition to the objects and ideas that form the titles of some episodes, some of the most important motifs to look out for in the novel include the importance of storytelling and memory; menstrual blood and other aspects of being a female; historical events from the distant past learned in school; seasonal imagery; human hands as deliverers of both pain and comfort; the concepts of house and home; the juxtaposition of emptiness and fullness; sounds and silence.



St. Wenceslas

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Understanding and Interpreting the Novel

PART I

1. What do we learn about the changes taking place in the city in this opening prologue? From what point of view is this opening section told?
2. What do we learn about the family that has lived on the same street for fifteen years? What is the effect of juxtaposing details about the city and details about the everyday life of the family?

The Last Day

1. How does the point of view change here? Who is the narrator now?
2. What is different about the family's dinner on this night?
3. Where is the family going? Why? How do they travel?
4. What do you learn about Tania from her thoughts in this section? How would you describe her personality?
5. What dream does Tania have? When she awakens, what does Tania discover?

Discuss: What might Tania mean when she says: "With the feeling that I am not the first one and that I am not alone, the thought: I cannot stop anything."

The Chain

1. What time of year is it in the village? How does the village differ from when Tania usually visits it?
2. What does Tania's brother Karel hope to do? What does Tania think about this?
3. Why did the family evacuate to the father's village?
4. What makes the family go back to their old neighborhood?
5. What unexpected sight does Tania see one day after school? How do others in the city seem to react? What surprises Tania in all of this?

Discuss: What is "The Chain" of the title? What might it symbolize?

The Star

1. What does Mother bring home for her family? How does Tania react?
2. What does Tania say in the morning that causes her grandmother to cry? What does Tania then agree to do?
3. What reactions does Tania get the morning she first wears her yellow star? Explain how reactions differ between those who wear the star and those who don't.
4. What are some things those who wear the stars are not allowed to do?
5. Why does Tania want more stars?

Discuss: The first episode in Berger's book is "The Star." There are several keenly ironic moments in this episode. (a) What is the irony in Tania studying the ancient Romans and the Crusades but not having any idea what is going on in

Prague in the present? What does this tell us about Prague at this time?

(b) What is ironic about the effect the stars have on the wearers? How are they both ostracized and united by wearing the stars? (c) What is ironic about Tania's complaints that there are not enough stars, and her mother's assurance that "They will give us more"?

The Saint in Stone

1. What has happened to the town during the past six months?
2. What is happening to Tania and her family? Where is Karel?
3. Which family member does not get a green ticket? What does it mean to not get a ticket?
4. What has Father gone out in the morning to try and accomplish?
5. How is this Christmas different from previous ones?

Discuss: What might "the saint in stone" symbolize?

Part 2

1. What does this section describe about the differences between the Christian citizens and the Jewish people who are ostracized?
2. What contrasts exist between the "walkers" and "those behind the windows"? Why are the walkers referred to as "the chosen ones"?

The Walled Town

1. At what kind of place do the train passengers arrive? How do Tania and her parents react?
2. What do the men in green do when the passengers reach the square?
3. What happens to Tania's father? Where are Tania and her mother led?
4. How do the women in the barracks act toward one another?
5. What does the boy Peter like to do?

Discuss: How do you know that the deportees still aren't completely aware of what is going to happen to them? Why do you think this is so?

The Tree

1. How do you know that time has passed? What details indicate the season?
2. What is daily life like in the barracks?
3. Where does Tania work? Where does her mother work?
4. How has Tania's mother changed since they arrived?
5. Who is Ilse? What does she do for Tania and her mother?
6. What person from Tania's old life arrives at the camp? What does she bring with her?
7. What do the green ones want Sophie to do? What is her response?
8. How does Sophie spend her days in the camp?
9. When Sophie tells Tania, "Today I want beauty," what does she ask Tania to do?

10. Where does Tania put Sophie's knife?

Discuss: Tania reflects on the contrasts between Ilse and Eva. She comments on Ilse's liveliness, laughter, and health, and says that Eva "does not laugh any more" and "makes me see what is happening and why, but sometimes I want to close my eyes." **(a)** How do Tania, Ilse and Eva complement each other? **(b)** If Tania had only Ilse or only Eva as a friend, what possibilities for growth and insight might she miss?

The Rubber Bands

1. Why is Tania looking after Peter?
2. How does Tania try to comfort and distract Peter?
3. What does Tania obtain for Peter from Ilse? Why?
4. How is Tania's gift received by Peter? What does this tell her?
5. What does Peter mean when he asks Tania, "Tell me another morning"?

Discuss: The title of the novel comes from this episode. **(a)** What do you learn about Tania's character from this episode with Peter? **(b)** Why do you think Berger found this episode important enough to supply the title of her novel?

The White Night

1. Why does Eva dislike Ilse? How do Tania and Ilse see Eva?
2. What does Eva identify as a "big problem"? What is Tania's position?
3. Who is Ivan? What are Tania's feelings about him?
4. According to Tania, how are people different in the camp from the way they were in their old lives? What decision does Tania come to about how she will conduct her own life in the camp?
5. How does Eva plan to handle her boyfriend?

Discuss: Tania and Eva still have their virginity, something that Eva says is "a big problem." Sexual mores are different in the camp than they were in normal life, and Tania sees men and women getting together "as if they have to hurry before time runs out, to live more by living faster." Even the straight-laced Eva is considering losing her virginity. But Tania refuses to have sex with Ivan: "I have nothing to hold on to any more. But I still have that." Do you understand Tania's position here? What is at stake here for her?

The Window

1. What does Tania see through the window? What thoughts pass through her mind?
2. What happens to the eight men who have gone behind the wall?

Discuss: How does Tania "bear witness" to the fate of the eight men?

The Attic

1. Where is Tania now?
2. How much time has passed?
3. What does Tania wonder about Ilse?

4. How does Ilse treat Tania? What name does she use for Tania?
5. What does Ilse reveal to Tania in her “speech”?

Discuss: What is it about Ilse that makes Tania think of “home”?

The Carnival

1. What is being built on the square? What is surprising about this?
2. What do the Elders in each barracks announce one evening about the changes taking place in the camp?
3. What do the visitors see when they are shown the town?
4. How does Tania feel about the visitors? What observations does she make about the entire situation?
5. What happens once the visitors are gone?

Discuss: In this episode, Tania’s and Eva’s sarcasm and anger are aimed at the “visitors” more than at the “green ones.” Why?

The Scar

1. Who arrives at the barracks late in the summer?
2. How has Karel changed? How does Tania react to this?
3. What does Tania discover about why Karel won’t let his father see him wash?
4. What does Tania tell Karel about transports?
5. What are Karel’s views of God now? How does Tania respond?
6. What happened to Tania’s grandmother?
7. Who is selected to leave the camp on the next transport?
8. What does Ilse promise Tania?
9. What does Tania recall were Ivan’s last words to her?
10. What do Tania and her family receive in early spring? How does Tania react?

Discuss: Karel says to Tania, “If there is a God, it is the chemical in your cells. The stuff that holds life together. And sometimes, like when you are hungry or something hurts you very much.... God leaks out. The cells break. Just pain or hunger is left and no space for God.” **(a)** Do you think this would be a common belief of someone being held in a concentration camp? **(b)** Do you think Tania will ever come to Karel’s conclusion about God? Why or why not?

The Long Train

1. Where are Tania, her parents, and Eva forced to go?
2. How do the passengers on the train react? What stories has Tania heard about these train trips?
3. What does Tania wonder about “the whole world outside”?
4. How does Tania react to the new camp? What thought comforts her mother?
5. What image haunts Tania as she is about to fall asleep?

Discuss: In his speech “The Perils of Indifference” delivered April 12, 1999, in Washington, D.C., Elie Wiesel spoke of how alone and forgotten the inmates of the camps felt, and he noted:

[O]ur only miserable consolation was that we believed that Auschwitz and Treblinka were closely guarded secrets; that the leaders of the free world did not know what was going on behind those black gates and barbed wire; that they had no knowledge of the war against the Jews that Hitler's armies and their accomplices waged as part of the war against the Allies.

If they knew, we thought, surely those leaders would have moved heaven and earth to intervene. They would have spoken out with great outrage and conviction. They would have bombed the railways leading to Birkenau, just the railways, just once.

Explain how Tania’s musings about “the whole world outside” relate to Wiesel’s comments.

Part 3

1. What is ironic about the description of the commandant and his garden?
2. What do you learn about the commandant and about Nazi bureaucracy in this prelude? What would the commandant change about the way things are done at the camp, and why?

The Rule

1. The morning after they arrive, what do Tania and her mother try to find out from the man in striped clothes?
2. What does the man in stripes tell Tania and her mother?
3. What is the “rule”?
4. Why does the man say they are “lucky to be in this camp”?
5. Why does Tania’s mother feel relieved when she remembers the date on Karel’s postcard? What does the man in stripes explain about the dates on postcards?

Discuss: Why don’t Tania and her mother initially understand what the man in stripes is trying to tell them? Why is this information so difficult for them to grasp?

The Small Room

1. What is Eva excited to tell Tania? How does Tania react?
2. Why is Eva certain she has found Ilse?
3. How does Ilse account for the fact that she is still alive?
4. What does Ilse tell Tania about Karel?
5. Why does Ilse tell Tania as many details of “how they do it” as she can?

Discuss: What does Eva mean when she says of Ilse, “I like her better now...since she went through hell”?

The Safety Pin

1. How often are the prisoners fed now?
2. Why is it a good thing to get soup “straight from the bottom”?
3. How has Tania’s father changed? How does Tania feel about this?
4. What does Tania discover about why her father’s jacket is closed with a safety pin?
5. Why does Tania’s father say he made a “good trade”? Why does this make Tania weep?

Discuss: In an interview, Berger stated that the incident she now finds most powerful in the book is “The Safety Pin”: “After 60 years...it still brings tears to my eyes. That’s the one passage that holds the most emotion for me.” **(a)** What does this tell you about the relationship between Zdena Berger and her father? **(b)** What universal truths about parents and children does this episode speak to? **(c)** What does Berger’s recent reaction suggest about the “truth” and the “fiction” of this episode?

The Road

1. What does the man carrying the stone tell Tania?
2. What does the man say about himself and the other men carrying stones?
3. What do all the men know?
4. What do the men carrying stones know better than the green ones?
5. What happens to the man by the end of this section?

Discuss: How do you interpret what the man carrying the stone said to Tania? Is it an expression of courageous resistance or a self-comforting delusion? Does his fate change your response to him?

The Blue Pen

1. What is Tania thinking as this section begins?
2. Describe Tania’s state of mind.
3. What does Ilse come to tell Tania?
4. What are the blue pens for?
5. Why does Tania’s mother think the numbers might be a good sign? Is Tania convinced of this?

Discuss: Why do you think Tania whispers the French conjugation exercise, which translates to: “I am not, you are not, he is not....”? What is implied by this?

The Last Wall

1. Who is Aram?
2. What does Aram want from Tania?
3. How do Aram’s and Tania’s views of love differ?
4. Why does Tania decide not to meet Aram behind the barracks?

5. What does Tania's decision suggest about her feelings about her body and her sense of self?

Discuss: When Tania refuses the advances of Aram, she says, "Keep that last thing. Hang on to it as to the last wall." What does she mean by "the last wall"?

The Riding Crop

1. What do the green ones make the women do?
2. Who is the man with the riding crop? What does he do with it?
3. What does Ilse do to Tania's mother? Why?
4. To what side are Tania and her mother directed? What suggests that being sent to the right is "better" than being sent to the left?
5. What does Eva mean when she asks, "Which way is luck?"

Discuss: How might Ilse's generosity put her in danger? Why does she put herself at risk?

The Circle

1. What direction was Tania's father sent?
2. Where does Ilse say "the right ones" are going to be sent the next day? What does Ilse explain about "the ones that went left"?
3. What is Tania's mother's "final and first decision"? Why does it make Tania feel "cheated"?
4. What instructions do Tania's mother and father give her?
5. What does Tania ponder about her life after her parents' decision?

Discuss: (a) What was your reaction to this episode? (b) Why do you think the episode was titled "The Circle"?

The Box

1. Where is Tania now?
2. What do the women think is about to happen?
3. What does Tania remember about her father's good-bye to her?
4. What did Tania promise her mother?
5. What does Eva have in her palm? Why? How does Tania react to it?
6. What makes Ilse think they are not going to be killed?
7. What do the women find when they are led outside the barracks? How do they react?
8. What does Eva do during the counting?
9. How does the fat woman punish Eva?
10. How does Tania help her friend?

Discuss: Why do you think Tania is angry at Eva? Why does she respond in this way?

The Shower

1. Why does Tania think of the picture, “The Entrance to Hell”?
2. Why do Tania and Eva now speak in lower voices? When did they start to have this voice?
3. Why are the women lined up in front of the brick house?
4. What does Ilse bring from one of the men in the special detachment? What do she and Eva urge Tania to do with it? Why doesn’t Tania agree?
5. What details does Tania note about the showers? What comes out of the pipes?

Discuss: What does Tania mean when she makes the observation, “Five hundred women are less than one”?

The Place

1. Why are the women on the train smiling and laughing?
2. What happens to Tania’s hair during the shower?
3. What else happens to Tania after the shower?
4. What happiness does Tania think about when she remembers the dog?
5. Why does Tania think to herself, “The door does not open any more—I do not see my place”?

Discuss: Where else in the book thus far has Tania had thoughts of her own home or mused about what home is? What is now happening to Tania’s memories of home?

Part 4

1. What is happening in this city? What details here suggest that the tide of war may be turning?
2. Why are animals hidden under warehouse floors? Who are the people hidden under warehouses?

The Lost Days

1. What is Tania’s state of mind? Where is she?
2. Why is Tania alone?
3. When Eva and Ilse arrive, what do you learn about Tania?
4. What does Ilse urge Tania to do? Why?
5. How many “lost days” have passed?

Discuss: How do Eva and Ilse continue to care for Tania?

The Shovel

1. What is Tania’s work now?
2. Why does Tania borrow Ilse’s knife?

Discuss: Why is it ironic that Tania is now “a builder of foundations,” laying the groundwork for new houses?

The Single Sunday

1. Why has Tania lost count of the weeks?
2. What does the man with the list come to do on Sundays? What are the numbers he reads off?
3. Why does the man carry a pool cue? What does he use it for?
4. Why does the man pick out the woman named Sonia? What does he tell her?
5. How do the other women act toward Sonia after the man with the list leaves?

Discuss: How do you know that Sonia realizes what her fate will be? What makes her most afraid? How does Tania “reassure” Sonia?

The Chocolate

1. What wakes Tania and the other women? Where do they go?
2. What seems to be wrong with Eva? Why does Ilse watch her?
3. What is Ilse’s plan, and why is it dangerous?
4. Why does Ilse undertake the risk?
5. Whom does Ilse visit? What does she bring back?

Discuss: What heroism and unselfishness does Ilse demonstrate in this episode? Based on what you already know about Ilse’s character, did her actions surprise you in any way? Explain.

The Old Man

1. What work are Tania and the others doing now?
2. What is distinctive about the winter coats the women have to wear? Why do you suppose they have to wear coats like these?
3. Why is it dangerous for Tania and the others to visit the shack? Why do they do it anyway?
4. Who is the old man in the shack?
5. How does the old man treat his unexpected visitors—and why?

Discuss: When Ilse says the old man was like “a saint or something,” Tania says, “We don’t have saints.... We have only prophets.” In Judaism, a prophet is one who speaks words that have come directly from God. In what ways is the man in this episode like a prophet?

The Moving Days

1. What is Tania getting ready to do?
2. In what condition is Tania leaving the cot she had been sleeping on?

Discuss: (a) What were moving days like when Tania was growing up? (b) What “home” is she leaving now, and how does it compare to the home she once knew?

The Pines

1. What is Tania's job now?
2. How does Tania respond to the trees and snow in the beginning of the day?
3. How does she respond to the trees after her day of work?
4. What seems to be Dasha's attitude?
5. Why does the new girl have gloves and socks?

Discuss: Describe the new environment Tania and the others find themselves in. Why does Tania say, "I think we are going to be all right here"?

The Snow

1. Why does the green one call Tania over as she walks back from the washhouse?
2. What advice does Ilse give Tania about the green man?
3. What had the commandant said in his speech the previous Sunday?
4. Where does Dasha go that night?
5. What does Tania mean when she observes, "It is the first time for her—I am sure it is the first time from the way her face looked."

Discuss: What do you think Tania mean when she says "I know how the snow works and I accept it"? What does this tell you about the realizations she has come to?

The House

1. What are Tania, Eva, and Dasha sent to do?
2. What do the girls find in the pantry?
3. What does the idea of a house mean to Tania, to Eva, and to Dasha?
4. What is the dynamic like between Dasha and Tania and Eva?
5. How is Dasha different from Tania and Eva?

Discuss: What does Tania mean when she says that freedom is "a home inside yourself"?

The Men

1. Who arrives at the newly built camp?
2. Why do Tania, Ilse, and Eva always volunteer for "special duty"?
3. How does Tania feel about "the men of the other camp"?
4. What does Tania feel about pity?
5. Why are the girls locked in the farmer's cellar? What do they find there?

Discuss: Tania observes, "The men on the other side. They are very close to me. There is a warmth in me, as if the love I feel was made of wool, like a blanket. I would like to spread it over them and make a new sky for them." How does she contrast these men with the men "outside" who are fighting the war? Why is her warmth reserved for the men in the camp?

The Gift

1. What preparations are taking place in the dining-room barracks?
2. What has Eva made for Ilse and Tania?
3. What does the Christmas Eve feast consist of?
4. Describe the content of Eva's Christmas Eve play.
5. Why does Tania fear the soldiers' reactions to the play?

Discuss: Describe how the soldiers actually react to Eva's play. Why is their response unexpected?

The Women

1. How has the long winter affected Tania and her friends?
2. What do the five women in green who arrive in early spring do?
3. What new work are Tania and the others doing?
4. How does the foreman help Tania and the others?
5. Who do Tania, Eva, and Ilse see Dasha with? What conclusion do they draw from this?

Discuss: What judgments do Ilse and Eva make about Dasha? How are Dasha's actions different from Ilse's?

The Loud Sky

1. When the air raid starts, what does the girl with the book do?
2. How does Tania react to the girl?
3. What happens to Tania during the air raid?
4. What is the aftermath of the air raid at the camp?
5. What discovery does Tania make when they bring the wounded and the dead into the dining room?

Discuss: Why do you think the girl with the book refused to go to the shelter?

The Silence

1. Why does Dasha now have leather shoes?
2. What does Tania see that makes her wonder about the possibility of escaping?
3. How does Ilse respond when Tania asks her if she would like to escape?
4. What are Ilse, Eva, and Tania able to do when no one is looking?
5. How do the green ones react to those who were wounded during the air raid?

Discuss: Why does Ilse think the green ones are going to help those wounded in the air raid? Why are she and the others stunned by what happens?

Part 5

1. What is different about this spring? What do these details suggest about the green ones?
2. What are the walkers on the road unaware of?

The Long Walk

1. What is happening to those who cannot keep up with the column?
2. What does Eva know that helps Ilse and Tania?
3. What makes Ilse conclude that “it’s the end”?
4. What does Tania find, and what does she do with it?
5. What is wrong with Eva? Why is it essential for Eva to be able to get her own ration?

Discuss: (a) Describe how Eva’s presence helped Tania keep going through all the hardship and horror. What does Tania picture when she thinks about Eva before the war? (b) How does this scene fit into the novel’s theme of the power of memory as well as the theme of the power of friendship?

The Sound

1. How is this new camp unlike any of the others Tania has been in?
2. Why does Tania wish she knew what the “rules” were?
3. Why does Eva want Tania to go for a walk?
4. What news does Ilse share with Tania and Eva?
5. How do the distinctive personalities of Ilse, Eva, and Tania come out in this episode?

Discuss: In what sense is this episode a “breakthrough” for Tania? What does she mean when she says, “I am steady. I will not fall. My legs are wide and will hold me”?

The Tent

1. How old is Tania now?
2. What is on the ground that Tania and the others have to step over in order to get to the tent?
3. What secret does Dasha reveal to Tania, Ilse, and Eva?
4. What does Ilse believe will happen soon? What has Eva heard that contradicts this?
5. What is inside the tent? How do each of the young women react to the sight?

Discuss: When the young women hear what Dasha has planned to do to Carl, Ilse’s reaction is: “Why...you’re worse than she is.” Based on her actions, what separates Dasha from Tania, Eva, and Ilse? How does Dasha’s behavior highlight their traits in contrast to her own?

The Bread

1. What is in the bread that is delivered to the prisoners?
2. What sounds does Tania hear as she is about to go to sleep?

Discuss: Why does Eva say, “The green ones—they are funny”?

The Earth

1. What task have the green ones set for Tania and the others?
2. What happened to Carl?
3. What does Ilse think the “clean up” means?
4. Why do Tania, Eva, and Ilse decide it’s better to sleep outside?
5. What sound do the young women hear in the middle of the night?
Why does this sound give them hope?

Discuss: Why do you think this episode is titled “The Earth”?

The Gate

1. What sound awakens Tania?
2. What do the camp’s inhabitants see through the gate?
3. What do the soldiers do that makes Tania weep?
4. How do Tania, Ilse, and Eva react to the arrival of the liberators?
5. What is wrong with the woman who is beside Tania? What happens to her?

Discuss: Why is Tania so angry at the woman who was next to her?

The Doctor

1. Where is Tania now? What has happened since the liberators came?
2. Why doesn’t Tania like sharing a room with Dasha?
3. What is wrong with Dasha?
4. Who does Tania think Vito is? Who is he really?
5. What does Vito say about Dasha’s condition?

Discuss: What do Tania’s actions toward Dasha tell you about Tania’s character?

The Louse

1. What has happened to Tania, Eva, and Ilse?
2. How has the relationship between the girls changed? What does Tania think about this?
3. How is Tania handling her “re-entry” into life? How is Ilse handling hers?
4. What is the significance of the louse? Why does Tania think, “This louse did it”?
5. What happens to Tania when she returns to the white buildings?

Discuss: What is Vito’s advice to Tania? Why is it unlikely that Tania can or will take this advice?

The First Steps

1. What has happened to Tania?
2. What does Tania find so difficult about her new freedom?
3. What has Vito discovered that he and Tania have in common?
4. What is Tania able to do now?
5. How did Aunt Magda escape the fate of Tania's other relatives?
6. What does Tania write to Aunt Magda?
7. What happened to Dasha? How does Eva remember her? What are Tania's thoughts about her?
8. What does Eva say she would like to do?
9. What do Eva and Ilse force Tania to do? Why?
10. What does Tania see through the window? Why is this a "big day"?

Discuss: In this episode, how do Ilse and Eva prove that the bond they all formed in the camps is about more than need or fear? How do you account for the strength of their bond?

The Dress

1. Where has Ilse gone? What has she given to Tania as a parting gift?
2. What does Tania tell Vito? How does he respond?

Discuss: Vito seems to truly care for Tania, and she for him. Why, then, does Tania say, "I am not ready yet"? Can you understand her feelings? Why does she say, "I see now that the dress is too big for me, but it should not be too long before I grow into it"?

Part 6

1. What do the returnees find in Prague?
2. What does the dialogue between the Survivor and the Citizen reveal?

The Return

1. Why does Tania leave the train before the others?
2. What does Tania find as she re-enters Prague?
3. What do the two soldiers in the city offer Tania?
4. Where does Tania go first in the city? What does she experience there?
5. What causes the pains Tania is feeling? Why does she laugh when she realizes this?

Discuss: We leave Tania suspended in mid-action: "I stand still in the quiet house and lift my hand to cover the hard knocking of my heart." (a) What do you think of Berger's artistic decision to end the novel with this image instead of showing the reunion of Tania and Aunt Magda? (b) Why do you think Zdena Berger decided to offer extra information about her life in the author's "Afterword"? How do you respond to the additional information?

Topics for Discussion and Analysis

1. The novel is divided into six untitled parts consisting of three-to-five page chapters. Berger says that the book came to her “in bursts of incidents,” which could be one explanation for her style of titling her sections. What is the artistic effect of arranging the book in this way and using simple, declarative titles for each episode? Which titles seemed particularly symbolic or otherwise meaningful?
2. Except for the six Part Openers, the novel is told entirely from Tania’s first-person point of view. This point of view limits the reader’s perceptions to only what Tania sees, knows, feels, and experiences. Why did Berger decide to present her novel in this voice, as opposed to third-person? What is gained by presenting the novel from Tania’s point of view?
3. What function do the six Part Openers serve in the novel? How are these sections different from the rest of the novel in terms of point of view, tone, writing style, and narrative function? What do you learn in the Part Openers that you can’t learn from Tania’s point of view? How would the novel have been different if it had been told solely from Tania’s point of view, without these “bridging” sections?
4. Starting from the first time you meet her in the book, trace Tania’s development over the course of the novel. What is she like when she is with her family in Prague? When she is in the ghetto? When she arrives at the first camp? When do you notice the biggest changes in Tania? What about her doesn’t change from the beginning to the end of the novel?
5. Zdena Berger says, “[Tania] is like me. I tried to have an objective view about her at the time that I wrote the book. Looking back on her now, I find her very passive. I was reading the section ‘The Circle’ last night and thought—I don’t understand her. Why didn’t she try to persuade the mother? I became almost angry at her. Did she fail in some way to protect her mother? By not taking a stand.” Berger goes on to say she then recognizes that Tania is just a girl and she accepts her with less judgment. Do you think Tania is “passive” in the book? Why couldn’t she have changed her mother’s mind about staying with her father? Were there things she could have done to change the outcomes of events at different times in the novel? Explain.
6. “Coming of age” stories chart the growth of a person from innocent youth to experienced adult. The growth that takes place is not only physical and intellectual but, perhaps more importantly, moral and spiritual as well. In what sense could *Tell Me Another Morning* be considered a traditional coming-of-age story? How is it different from other coming-of-age stories—and what accounts for these differences?

7. Tania's identity as a teenage girl is an important aspect of the novel. When does Tania have her first period, and why is that significant? When does Tania stop having periods altogether as a result of her near-starvation, and what does she feel about that? When do Tania's periods begin again, and what effect does this have on her? What point do you think Berger is trying to make about how Tania's body is desecrated by what the Nazis are doing?
8. Maintaining her virginity is an important decision that Tania makes soon after her arrival in the first camp. Even at the end of the novel, she announces to her potential boyfriend Vito that she is not yet "ready." What do you think Tania is attempting to do by keeping herself "unchanged"?
9. How does Ilse use her sexuality to help herself and her friends survive? Is Ilse still able to hold on to her "self" as much as Tania is able to hold on to hers? Do you think that Ilse still, like Tania, manages to maintain her integrity—her wholeness—in her approach to her sexuality?
10. In an interview, Berger says that Tania is based on herself, but that Ilse is based on two different girls she knew. Describe Tania, Eva, and Ilse. How do their personalities complement one another? What does Tania learn from Eva and Ilse during their experiences? In the end, what do you think brought them together: Was it only their shared experience of the Nazi horror, or were there other factors that united them?
11. Why do you think Berger titled her novel *Tell Me Another Morning*? (Recall the episode "The Rubber Bands," from which the title is taken.) Titles of works often suggest a main theme of the work. What theme does this title suggest?
12. How do storytelling, imagination, dreams, and memory create a source of strength and resilience for Tania, as well as for other characters in the novel?
13. Discuss the religious references in the novel. Did it surprise you to find that many of the religious references in the novel are to Christian concepts and events—the St. Venceslav statue in Prague, the last celebration of Christmas in Tania's home and memories of previous Christmases, the importance of Sundays in the camps, Ilse's reference to the Jewish man who gives them food as "a saint," and the Christmas program the Jewish inmates are forced to put on for the German soldiers? Where—and how—are Jewish observances and beliefs portrayed? What points might Berger be making about humanity, assimilation, and identity?
14. Many horrible, almost inconceivable, events and incidents occur in this book. Why do you think Berger uses an understated approach in presenting the atrocities in the camps? Which episodes stuck with you the most, and why?
15. Where did you find moments of lightness and even humor in the novel? What effect does humor have in these moments?

16. Were you surprised by the hopeful note on which this autobiographical novel ends? Where were other hopeful notes struck in the book?
17. Talk of home, memories of home, and the abstract concept of “home” recur throughout the novel. When the young women are moving things from a house that has been bombed, Dasha starts talking about the home she will have one day, and Tania says, “You don’t need walls and doors.... You want to be free, don’t you? Well, freedom is not a place you can own, it’s...it’s a home inside yourself.” How have Tania’s experiences brought her to this realization? How many “homes” does Tania experience in the course of the novel? Why is it significant that on her return to Prague she visits her childhood home—and that the very last sentence of the novel reads: “I stand still in the quiet house and lift my hand to cover the hard knocking of my heart”? What is more important to Tania after her experiences—a house or a home?
18. In literature, a **Bildungsroman** (a German term meaning “novel of personal development”) is a fictional form that shows the inner growth of a person from innocence to experience—generally after undergoing a physical journey that parallels an inner journey to maturity. Often, the heroes are separated from their families and have to go on a journey of some sort. It may be by choice if the theme is one of escape; or it may be against one’s will if the theme is one of exile. A key element in the Bildungsroman is the struggle between the self and society. The typical Bildungsroman follows the protagonist over a period of time, showing how he or she clashes with the surrounding society and the restrictions of “the way things are.” At the resolution, however—similar to the resolution of the archetypal “hero’s journey”—the protagonist incorporates society’s values and expectations in order to re-enter the culture, in a new and more powerful position. In what sense could *Tell Me Another Morning* be considered a traditional Bildungsroman? How does it depart from the traditional motifs of a Bildungsroman? How have the horrible experiences that Tania endured shaped her into a more mature and aware individual? In what ways can she be considered a hero?
19. Writing about *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Holocaust survivor Primo Levi said, “One single Anne Frank moves us more than the countless others who suffered just as she did, but whose faces have remained in the shadows. Perhaps it is better that way: If we were capable of taking in all the suffering of all those people, we would not be able to live.” Do you agree with Levi’s statement? How do you think it applies to *Tell Me Another Morning*? Discuss.
20. If you have read another work by a Holocaust survivor, such as Elie Wiesel’s *Night* or Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz*, describe how Zdena Berger’s account compares in terms of theme, presentation of incidents, writing style, characterization, irony, symbolism, and other elements. What are the works’ main points of difference? How are they similar? Discuss.

21. Zdena Berger has said, “One has to believe that people are basically good because otherwise you would not be able to go on. There is a constant battle between the forces of good and evil. We have to have hope that the good will prevail eventually.” This statement closely echoes Anne Frank’s famous quote: “In spite of everything that has happened, I still believe that people are really good at heart.” Where in *Tell Me Another Morning* do you find evidence that “people are basically good”? If you have read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, explain how the two books are alike and different in their portrayals of human kindness in the face of atrocity.
22. Victor Frankl, a survivor of the Holocaust and one of the preeminent psychologists of the 20th century, said, “We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances—to choose one’s own way.” How does Tania exemplify the truth of this statement? What other characters in the novel exercise this “last of human freedoms”? How do they do this?
23. In a review of the book in its first publication, *The Columbus Dispatch* noted, “It is not merely a rehash of the horrors of the Nazi occupation and the reaction of a young girl to spending years in concentration camps. It is all young girls and all horror....” Do you agree with this assessment? In what sense is it simply the story of Zdena Berger? In what sense is it the story of every victim of the Holocaust—both the survivors and the millions who died? In what sense is it the story of every human being, in every time and place?
24. Zdena Berger has said, “Truth is not only in facts. There is truth in fiction, emotional truth. Fiction is an extension of memory.” Explain how this idea is supported by the novel. How does the statement “Fiction is an extension of memory” help to explain why Berger chose to write her story as an autobiographical novel?
25. At the beginning of the novel, Tania says, “Only Eva knows about my poetry. One day, when I don’t have to go to school any more, that is all I will be doing.” Near the end of the novel, Vito, the doctor, asks Tania what she wants to do with her life, and she responds, “I wanted to be a poet. Your mind full of words that you think are precious, words that nobody ever put down in just the same way....” How does the novel demonstrate that Tania is, at heart, a poet? Assuming that Tania is Zdena Berger and Zdena Berger is Tania, do you think that, in the writing of this autobiographical novel, she fulfilled her ambition to be a poet?

Further Activities and Research

1. Research the life and work of Charlotte Salomon, whose painting “Girl with Hearts Falling” appears on the cover of this book. Look for parallels between this young woman, who did not survive the Holocaust, and Zdena Berger, who did. Try to show some reproductions of Salomon’s work and summarize what she attempted to do in *Life? or Theater?* Explain her importance in 20th century art, including major museum exhibitions of her work and adaptations of her life and work into plays and film. You may wish to present your findings as a PowerPoint presentation.
2. Find another work that deals with the Holocaust from the female perspective and compare and contrast this work to *Tell Me Another Morning*. Focus on what is unique about the female experience and perspective in each work.
3. Ernest J. Gaines, author of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *A Lesson Before Dying*, considers *Tell Me Another Morning* “a classic” and says: “At times this book reminds me of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, but with a much broader perspective.” Read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and write an essay comparing and contrasting the two works.
4. Research the history of the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia and create a timeline of events.
5. Write a proposal to your teacher explaining why *Tell Me Another Morning* should be placed on a recommended reading list for students in your school.
6. Write a proposal for a film version of *Tell Me Another Morning*. What qualities would the actresses portraying Tania, Eva, and Ilse have to be able to convey? What would the directorial style have to be like in order to keep the integrity of the text? Do you have a specific director in mind and, if so, why did you choose this director? Adapt a small portion of the novel into screenplay form as part of your proposal.
7. Create a Web page for *Tell Me Another Morning*. Imagine this Web page as part of an online encyclopedia of works about the Holocaust. Provide a summary of the novel and a critique of it.
8. Research Holocaust poetry by such writers as Nellie Sachs. Find a poem that you feel makes a fitting companion piece to Berger’s novel. Explain why you chose the poem and how it relates to *Tell Me Another Morning*.
9. What does *Tell Me Another Morning* have to say to us, today? What lessons could today’s students learn from reading Berger’s novel? In what way is Tania a role model?
10. Research testimonials by survivors of the Holocaust—on film, on tape, in audio interviews online, on podcasts, in writing. Find a testimonial that reminds you of Berger’s novel, and compare and contrast the two accounts.

For Additional Information About the Holocaust

Other Books About the Experiences of Women and Girls

Alicia: My Story
by Alicia Appleman-Jurman

All But My Life: A Memoir
by Gerda Weissmann Klein

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank

Auschwitz and After
by Charlotte Delbo

The Cage by Ruth Minsky Sender

Clara's Story by Clara Isaacman
and Joan Adess Grossman

The Devil's Arithmetic
by Jane Yolen

*Five Chimneys: A Woman
Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz*
by Olga Lengyel

*From Ashes to Life:
My Memories of the Holocaust*
by Lucille Eichengreen

Hide and Seek by Ida Vos

*Hope Is the Last to Die: A Coming
of Age Under Nazi Terror*
by Halina Birenbaum

I Am a Star: Child of the Holocaust
by Inge Auerbacher

*I Have Lived A Thousand Years:
Growing Up in the Holocaust*
by Livia Bitton-Jackson

*Isabella: From Auschwitz to
Freedom* by Isabella Leitner

*A Jump for Life: A Survivor's
Journal from Nazi-Occupied
Poland* by Ruth Altbeker Cyprys

*The Last Seven Months of Anne
Frank* by Willy Lindwer

*Love in a World of Sorrow: A
Teenage Girl's Holocaust Memoirs*
by Fanya Gottesfeld Heller

*No Pretty Pictures: A Child
of War* by Anita Lobel

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

*O the Chimneys: Selected Poems,
Including the Verse Play, Eli*
by Nelly Sachs

Other People's Houses
by Lore Segal

*Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters
in Auschwitz*
by Rena Kornreich Gelissen

*Sala's Gift: My Mother's
Holocaust Story*
by Ann Kirschner

Smoke Over Birkenau
by Liana Millu

Sophie's Choice
by William Styron

Suite Française
by Irene Nemirovsky

Thanks to My Mother
by Schoschana Rabinovici

*To Tell the Story: Poems of the
Holocaust* by Yala Korwin

*Upon the Head of a Goat: A
Childhood in Hungary 1939-44*
by Aranka Siegel

Voices from the Holocaust
edited by Sylvia Rothchild

Yellow Star by Jennifer Roy

Other Recommended Literature

*Adam's Daughter: A Play in
Two Acts* by Ronald John Vierling

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

Everything Is Illuminated
by Jonathan Safran Foer

Fatelessness by Imre Kertész

Landscape in Concrete
by Jakov Lind

Life With a Star by Jiri Weil
The Drowned and the Saved and
Survival in Auschwitz
by Primo Levi

The Lost Childhood: A Memoir
by Yehuda Nir

Man's Search for Meaning
by Viktor E. Frankl

*Maus: A Survivor's Tale: My
Father Bleeds History* and *Here
My Troubles Began*
by Art Spiegelman

*The Night Trilogy: Night, Dawn,
The Accident* by Elie Wiesel

*On the Other Side of the Gate:
A Novel* by Yuri Suhl

*The Pianist: The Extraordinary
True Story of One Man's Survival
in Warsaw, 1939-1945*
by Wladyslaw Szpilman

Schindler's List
by Thomas Keneally

*The Sunflower: On the Possibilities
and Limits of Forgiveness*
by Simon Wiesenthal

Survival in Auschwitz
by Primo Levi

*Surviving Hitler: A Boy in the
Nazi Death Camps*
by Andrea Warren

The Tortoises by Veza Canetti

*This Way for the Gas, Ladies and
Gentlemen* by Tadeusz Borowski

Traces: Stories by Ida Fink

The Upstairs Room
by Johanna Reiss

Wartime Lies: A Novel
by Louis Begley

Holocaust Films of Interest (asterisks indicate R-rated movies that may be inappropriate for readers under 18)

**Aimée and Jaguar* (1999)
Au Revoir, Les Enfants (1987)
 **Black Book* (2006)
A Day in the Warsaw Ghetto (1991)
The Diary of Anne Frank (1959)
 **Downfall* (2004)
 **Europa, Europa* (1990)
Exodus (1960)
 **The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* (1970)
Judgment at Nuremberg (1961)
The Last Days (1998)
The Long Way Home (1997)
Music Box (1989)
The Nazi Officer's Wife (2003)
Night and Fog (1955)
The Pawnbroker (1964)
 **The Pianist* (2002)
Rosenstrasse (2003)
 **Schindler's List* (1993)
The Search (1948)
 **Seven Beauties* (1975)
Shoah (1985)
The Shop on Main Street (1965)
Sophie Scholl—The Final Days (2005)
 **Sophie's Choice* (1982)
The Sorrow and the Pity (1969)
Terezin Diary (1990)
 **The Tin Drum* (1979)
 **Truce* (1997)
Uprising (2001)
Voyage of the Damned (1976)

The following Web sites provide valuable information on topics relating to the Holocaust

Anne Frank Center USA
<http://www.annefrank.com/>
 Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies,
 University of Minnesota
<http://www.chgs.umn.edu>

Dallas Holocaust Museum
<http://www.dallasholocaustmemorialcenter.org/>
 Facing History and Ourselves
<http://www.facinghistory.org>
 Florida Holocaust Museum
<http://www.flholocaustmuseum.com/>
 Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies
<http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/>
 History Place Holocaust Timeline
<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html>
 Holocaust History Project
<http://www.holocaust-history.org/>
 Holocaust Memorial, Miami Beach, Florida
<http://www.holocaustmmb.org/>
 Holocaust Museum Houston
<http://www.hmh.org/>
 Holocaust Survivors
<http://www.holocaustsurvivors.org/>
 Holocaust Teacher Resource Center
<http://www.holocaust-trc.org>
 Jewish Historical Museum
<http://www.jhm.nl/collection.aspx?ID=7>
 Mazal Library
<http://www.mazal.org/>
 Museum of Jewish Heritage
<http://www.mjhnyc.org/index.htm>
 Museum of Tolerance
<http://www.museumoftolerance.com>
 Nizkor Project
<http://www.nizkor.org/>
 Remember.org: A Cybrary of the Holocaust
<http://www.remember.org/>
 Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education
<http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/vhi/>
 Simon Wiesenthal Center
<http://www.wiesenthal.com>
 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
<http://www.ushmm.org/>
 Women and the Holocaust
<http://www.theverylongview.com/WATH/>
 Yad Vashem
www.yadvashem.org

Paris Press Interview with Zdena Berger, author of *Tell Me Another Morning*



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Author Zdena Berger

Many powerful books, both fiction and nonfiction (and in-between) have been written about the Holocaust. What is most unique about *Tell Me Another Morning*?

The relationship between the three girls coming of age in the concentration camps is very unusual.

What would you say was your primary purpose for writing this book?

To share the experiences that we went through—not only I but thousands of others. To make a truthful and powerful statement about the life in concentration camps from the perspective of a teenage girl—which had not been done.

I wanted to convey growing up in that atmosphere—the maturing of the character within that framework of the concentration camp, and the relationships between the three girls—which is at the core of the story. I’ve always thought that none of us would have survived if we didn’t have each other.

Why did you write the book as a novel rather than a memoir?

I would not have been able to write a memoir. I wanted to tell the story in a way that would let a reader feel and see what we did, and fiction made it possible for me to do that. Fiction allowed me to focus on the small details of our daily life.

Truth is not only in facts. There is truth in fiction, emotional truth. Fiction is an extension of memory. In reality Ilse is based on two girls. I felt that one personality would not have been as strong as the composite of the two. This illustrates the difference between the “factual” and the “creative fact.”

The friendships—the interrelationships between the three girls is at the core of the story. They survived—we survived—because of each other.

I needed to present my story in as honest a way as possible. By calling this new edition “an autobiographical novel” we are now meshing the two true aspects of the book.



*Zdena Berger in 1961
when the first edition of
Tell Me Another
Morning was published.*

How much of the book is autobiographical? What is a specific episode that you can point to and say, “It happened just like that”?

All events in the book are based on facts—some that I experienced and some that I witnessed. I did not make up anything.

How do you feel about the decision to write a novel rather than a memoir when you reread the book 45 years later?

I do not regret choosing the form of a novel—fiction—rather than memoir.

How much is the protagonist, Tania, like you?

She is like me. I tried to have an objective view about her at the time that I wrote the book. Looking back on her now, I find her very passive. I was reading the section “The Circle” last night and thought—I don’t understand her. Why didn’t she try to persuade the mother? I became almost angry at her. Did she fail in some way to protect her mother? By not taking a stand.

Yes, she was like me and she is a young girl—and I tried to remember how I acted and what I thought at that age when I was writing the story. I see her as introspective and timid and she becomes strong as she goes along. She grows up rather fast.

What, to you, are the most powerful scenes in the book? Is there one episode in particular that you feel stands out?

Over 60 years after my life in the camps, it is “The Safety Pin.” It still brings tears to my eyes. That’s the one that holds the most emotion for me.

Why did you write the novel in English? Did you think of writing it in one of the other languages you knew?

I changed languages as I changed countries. I was very fluent in French but had begun to learn English in Prague when I was a young girl—12, 13, 14. I was then taken away in 1941, when I was 16. When I moved to Paris in 1948, I developed my basic knowledge of French, which I had begun in school, and then perfected my knowledge of English while working in an office at the American School. Once I moved to California, English was my language—and it never occurred to me to write in either Czech or French.

How long did it take to write the novel?

It took me between three and four years. I started it the first year I arrived in the U.S. I was employed as a keypuncher, and would return home in the evenings and work on the book.

Can you say a bit about your writing process—especially as it pertains to this book?

It’s such an innermost process. I would remember an incident and start working on it. The writing comes from inside, it is not thought out in an analytical way. There is an urgency and desire to express the feelings surrounding the particular incident, to share it.

Who have been your favorite writers throughout your life?

Gustave Flaubert, Honoré Balzac, Emily Dickinson, Ernest Hemingway, Anthony Powell, Iris Murdoch, Elizabeth Bowen, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Albert Camus, Colette, Ford Madox Ford.

How do you feel about the book coming back into print?

Honored and surprised—I cannot quite believe that this is true. There is something beautiful in the fact that this is happening while I am still alive—that it is a validation of what I tried to do, the story I needed to tell.

Students may study this book, and readers in book discussion groups will talk about it. What do you hope will stay with these readers after reading your book?

I hope readers understand that it was possible to survive with dignity. And that the friendship between the girls was truly saving—there was tenacity and there was tenderness between them, and they know they have to support each other without ever talking about it.

Elie Wiesel talks about bearing witness; he says “Never forget.” Simon Wiesenthal said, “For evil to flourish, it only requires good men to do nothing.” Anne Frank said, “In spite of everything that has happened, I still believe that people are really good at heart.” What do you say?

One has to believe that people are basically good because otherwise you would not be able to go on. There is a constant battle between the forces of good and evil. We have to have hope that the good will prevail eventually.



Photograph copyright © George Price

Zdena Berger on a street in Prague in 1992.

What the Critics Say About

Tell Me Another Morning



“A rediscovered masterpiece of Holocaust literature, first published in 1961 and now lovingly, and vigorously, resurrected. Anne Frank died in the camps, of typhus; Zdena Berger, a Czech girl of about the same age, somehow survived. And, with *Tell Me Another Morning*, triumphed. Read, breathe, recover, then place on the shelf with Frank, Levi, Wiesel.”

—*The San Diego Union-Tribune*

“As the three friends’ journey into darkness progresses, Tania’s language grows pure and strong in the best style of Hemingway.... *Tell Me Another Morning* is luminous yet modest, rooted in the last century’s worst reality, yet without rancor. Who could make up such miracles?”

—*The Los Angeles Times*

“This haunting autobiographical novel retraces Zdena Berger’s experiences in Terezin, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.... Berger’s heart-wrenching novel is an early eyewitness account of the Holocaust, and this welcome reissue deserves a wide audience, particularly in high school and college curriculums.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“I read this little book over 40 years ago, and I thought it was wonderful then. After re-reading it, I have come to the conclusion that it is a classic. I love this book from beginning to end. It is a classic, and I hope it never goes out of print ever again.”

—**Ernest J. Gaines**, author of *The Autobiography Of Miss Jane Pittman* and *A Lesson Before Dying*

“Words for the unimaginable. Clear-eyed, strong, terrifying, and finally, somehow, hopeful.”

—**Nicole Krauss**, author of *The History of Love: A Novel*

“An immediate and moving history of women’s lives together under Nazi control.... Now, in an era where there are fewer and fewer survivors to tell their story, Zdena Berger’s autobiographical novel is an important testament to both the brutality of Nazi fascism and the tenacity of the human spirit to overcome.”

—*ForeWord Magazine*

“How do we understand it—the men in green who destroy everything that once meant family, community, education, love? This young girl’s journey through the demonic madness of then, is much needed now—as men in green occupy and destroy our understanding about what is just, decent, human. Written from a poet’s heart across all divides, *Tell Me Another Morning* is a profound and lyrical reflection upon agony, survival, healing, and hope.”

—**Blanche Wiesen Cook**, author of *Eleanor Roosevelt, vols. 1 & 2* (vol. 3 forthcoming)