

The Book Thief Lessons, Ideas, and Resources

Lessons

[This lesson](#) compares the poem, "[Death Be Not Proud](#)," by John Donne to compare the figurative language with The Book Thief.

[This is a collection of discussions](#) on English Companion Ning which relate to The Book Thief. Many teachers have posted their lessons here.

(see Lessons attached)

Resources

The [author's official site](#)

Timeline of the Holocaust <http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/site/pp.asp?c=gvKVLcMVIuG&b=394669>

Lots of teacher resource materials <http://fcit.usf.edu/holocaust/resource/resource.htm>

As part of the Holocaust Museum's educational awareness, they loan out curriculum trunks. These are free and contain a ton of material in various forms. Check them out here and you can order on the same site.

<http://www.flholocaustmuseum.org/education/trunks/trunk-content.aspx>

<http://www.remember.org> is a Cybrary of Holocaust material. You can find practically anything related to Anne Frank and the Holocaust on this site. Here are some particularly interesting pages:

- An interesting slide show that includes art created by former prisoners and a comparison photo of that same location today. Then and Now. <http://remember.org/then-and-now/index.html>
- A bibliography and partial review of Holocaust material <http://remember.org/educate/anbib2.html>
- Very interesting first person accounts and witnesses to the Holocaust. <http://www.remember.org/witness>

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak

Pre Reading Activities

- Before reading the novel it may be a good idea to get your students to discuss or brainstorm their prior knowledge of WWII, the Nazi Party etc... as well as general discussion on the effects of war on innocent people, the economy, housing, employment etc...
- You may like to watch a film or selected excerpts from a film set during WWII or dealing with linked ideas. Some examples are *The Great Escape*, *Swing Kids* and *Schindler's List*. Ideas for linked fiction and/or non fiction texts are *The Wave* and *Hitler's Daughter*.
- View any one of a number of documentaries on WWII, the Nazi Party or the Persecution of the Jews. See someone in your S&E department for ideas.
- Set students some research topics. Divide the class into pairs or small groups and assign one topic per pair/group. Then get students to share their information with the rest of the class. Some topics could be:
 - WWII
 - Nazi party
 - Adolph Hitler
 - Persecution of the Jewish people/ The Holocaust
 - *Mein Kampf*
 - Effects of WWII on the German people
 - Hitler Youth
 - United German Girls
 - Allied bombing of Munich

ACTIVITY ONE: COLOUR AND POETRY

In the novel *The Book Thief* the narrator, Death, sees the world, people and events in colours.

The opening words of the novel, for example, are,

“First the colours.
Then the humans.
That’s how I usually see things.”
(Death, p 3)

- How do you see things in your life?

“People observe the colours of a day only at its beginnings and ends, but to me it’s quite clear that a day merges through a multitude of shades and intonations, with each passing moment. A single hour can consist of thousands of different colours. Waxy yellows, cold-spat blues. Murky darknesses.” (p5)

TASK:

Choose a significant or memorable day from your life and create a collage which focuses on colours to reflect the events, your feelings and emotions.

Then write a free verse poem which explains and describes your collage.

PROCESS:

1. Choose a significant or memorable day from your life. It may be memorable because it was a sad day that involved a funeral following the death of a relative or friend. Or perhaps it was a great day that brought you happiness and success through a competition or race.
2. Recall your chosen day by completing a mind map of events, people, feelings and emotions. Remember that you may have felt a range of feelings and emotions on the day, eg: nervous > worried > unsure > sad > lonely > OK.
3. Think about the colours you would use to describe these emotions.

You may already know some colours that are associated with certain objects or emotions. Look at the examples below, fill in the gaps and add a few of your own.



| OBJECT/EMOTION | ASSOCIATED COLOUR |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Death | black |
| peace | white |
| anger | |
| passion | Red |
| happiness | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

4. Next, choose some of your notes and ideas from your mind map of your memorable day and put them in a chart like the one above, choosing colours that are significant to you.

| OBJECT/EVENT/ FEELING/EMOTION | COLOUR |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

5. Now, using the newspaper, magazines and maybe even your own drawings, collect images that represent the events from your memorable day and create a collage as a visual representation of the events, objects, feelings and emotions involved.

Try to choose images that also reflect the colours associated with that day if possible. You can achieve this by your initial choice of image and its colour, colouring particular images using pencils, crayons, pastels, textas or chalk, or even doing a watercolour or dye wash over the top.

6. After completing your collage stop and think about how it visually represents your significant day. Then, using your collage as the stimulus, write a free verse poem which explains your day, the images, your feelings, emotions and the colours of your day.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY USING COLOUR AND POETRY:

For lower school students, you may want to choose one of the alternative activities.

- Choose a theme that features in the novel such as FRIENDSHIP, LOVE, RELATIONSHIPS, FAMILY OR DEATH.
- Create a collage of images that illustrate the chosen theme.
- Think of associated feelings/emotions and colours of this theme
- Write a free verse poem on the chosen theme

OUTCOMES:

- ✓ WRITING
- ✓ LISTENING AND SPEAKING
- ✓ VIEWING
- ✓ READING

ACTIVITY 2: VISUAL REPRESENTATION

When you read, whether it is a novel, short story or poem, you have your own internal movie reel or video that turns the words on the page into images in your mind.

Authors use a variety of different written techniques to bring their written words alive for the reader. Some of the literary techniques that Markus Zusak employs in *The Book Thief* are **simile, metaphor and personification**.

DEFINITIONS:

SIMILE: when the subject is compared to another subject, using the words like, as or such.

METAPHOR: describes a direct comparison between two or more seemingly unrelated objects.

PERSONIFICATION: Gives animals and objects human traits and qualities. These may include sensations, emotions, desires, gestures, expressions and powers of speech.

TASK DESCRIPTION:

Use a quote from the novel (examples provided) and interpret it creatively from the image in your mind's eye onto paper.

Then, write a description (half a page in length) of your picture and use this to present your ideas to other students in a small group situation.

PROCESS:

1. Read the quotes and choose one that you like.
2. Draw your visual representation/picture
3. Write a half page description
4. Move into groups of 3 or 4. Present and share your thoughts and ideas by talking your group through your picture.

QUOTES from *The Book Thief*

"I travelled the globe as always, handing souls to the conveyer belt of eternity."
(Death, p23)

"I do not carry a sickle or scythe. I only wear a hooded black robe when it's cold. And I don't have those skull-like facial features you seem to enjoy pinning on me from a distance."
(Death, p329)



"Five hundred souls. I carried them in my fingers like suitcases. Or I'd throw them over my shoulder." (Death, p359)

"This time, his voice like a fist, freshly banged on the table. (p136)

"The soft spoken words fell off the side of the bed, emptying onto the floor like powder. (p67)

"Everything was so desperately noisy in the dark when he was alone. Each time he moved, there was the sound of a crease. He felt like a man in a paper suit." (p152)

"When the train pulled into the Bahnhof in Munich, the passengers slid out as if from a torn package. (p25)

OUTCOMES:

- ✓ Writing
- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Listening and Speaking
- ✓ Viewing

ACTIVITY 3: VOCABULARY LIST

You may find some of the vocabulary from *The Book Thief* difficult. Create a list of words from the novel that you either learnt while reading or that challenged your prior knowledge. This list could assist other students in their own reading of the novel. Write as many challenging words that you come across as well as the meaning of each, in your own words.

Here are a few to get you started with some blanks for you to fill in too!

| Word | Meaning (in your own words) |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| vehement | angry |
| prolific | Lots/ a lot/ many/ numerous |
| communist | |
| schimpfen | Arguing, complaining |
| economy | |
| heil | A kind of salute or greeting |
| identity | |
| bittersweet | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

OUTCOMES:

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing

ACTIVITY 4: DEBATE OR ESSAY

“Some crunched numbers.

Since 1933, ninety percent of Germans showed unflinching support for Adolf Hitler. That leaves ten percent who didn't. Hans Hubermann belonged to the ten percent.” (p65)

- Consider this quote from ***The Book Thief*** in relation to the one below from a novel called ***The Magus*** by John Fowles.

“The human race is unimportant. It is the self that must not be betrayed.

I suppose one could say that Hitler didn't betray his self.

He turned. You are right. He did not. But millions of Germans did betray their selves. That was the tragedy. Not that one man had the courage to be evil. But that millions had not the courage to be good.” (***The Magus***, p132)

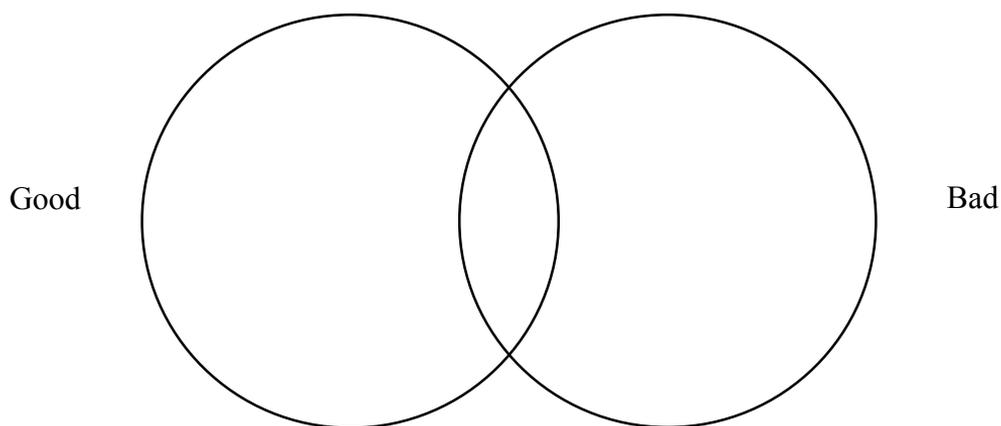
What is your opinion? Are people naturally and inherently good...or bad?

TASK:

Discuss your opinion of the topic 'People are inherently good / bad' as a class debate or as an essay.

PROCESS:

1. Read the quotes carefully and spend some time thinking and forming your opinions and ideas.
2. Complete a Venn diagram to record your information.



3. Using your notes, discuss the topic 'people are inherently good/bad' as a class debate or an essay.

OUTCOMES:

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing
- ✓ Listening/Speaking

ACTIVITY 5: A JOURNEY

An integral element of the novel is the journey that many of the characters undertake during the course of the story: they are all very different people at the end of the novel than they were at the beginning. The notion of a journey is not only physical thing, but can also be emotional or spiritual. There is no question that the characters are emotionally stronger at the end of the novel even though they were physically weaker through hunger, starvation and plain hard work.

Another element that was true of Liesel and Max in particular was the sense of belonging that they both came to feel in their 'adopted' home: both were 'displaced people', foreigners in their own country, their identity and their family heritage cruelly snatched from them due to political circumstances.

Think of those people in our own community and broader society who have been forced to flee their homeland, their lives and their families due to war, political reasons, famine or tragedy and undertake a huge journey of some kind. These people include refugees from places such as Vietnam, Sudan and Afghanistan.

DISCUSSION:

Describe in detail the characters of Liesel and Max at the beginning of the novel to the people they were at the end. Which people and events shaped and changed them throughout the course of the novel?

TASK: Plan and conduct an interview with someone about a journey they have completed. Then, write this up as either a report or a biographical narrative

OR

Write a creative story about someone's life changing journey.

PROCESS:

1. Find someone within your family, wider circle of friends or your local community who has experienced a journey of some kind that effected change. It may have been a physical journey from one country to another or one career to another, an emotional journey due to illness, birth or death OR a spiritual journey as the result of religion or a change in lifestyle.
2. Write a set of interview questions that try to find out as much as possible about
 - the journey itself
 - the events that precipitated the journey
 - the decisions involved
 - the people affected
 - difficulties encountered
 - feelings and emotions involved
 - challenges and changes



3. Remember to use open ended questions as well as closed questions to try to elicit and generate as much information as possible, because the information that you gather will form the basis for your report or biographical narrative.
4. Interview your subject and take notes, video or tape the interview.
5. Type the transcript of the interview.
5. Using relevant information and the knowledge you have gained about the person and their unique journey from the interview, write either a report or a biographical narrative.
 - Alternatively, you could write a creative story about a fictitious character's life changing journey.

OUTCOMES

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing
- ✓ Listening and Speaking

ACTIVITY 6: RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NOVEL

Another important theme that *The Book Thief* explores is relationships and what constitutes 'family'.

While there are many important characters in the novel, there is no question that Liesel is the central character and the person whom all relationships in the novel revolve around and generate from.

Create a 'diagram' which explores the character of Liesel, as well as her relationship with other important characters in the novel. You also need to think about what made each of these relationships unique.

1. Choose one of the following diagrams.
2. Write Liesel's name in the centre circle.
3. Write the names of other important characters in the other circles, as well as a detailed character analysis of each one.
4. Comment on the relationship between Liesel and the second character and what made the elements that made their relationship unique.

DIAGRAM 1

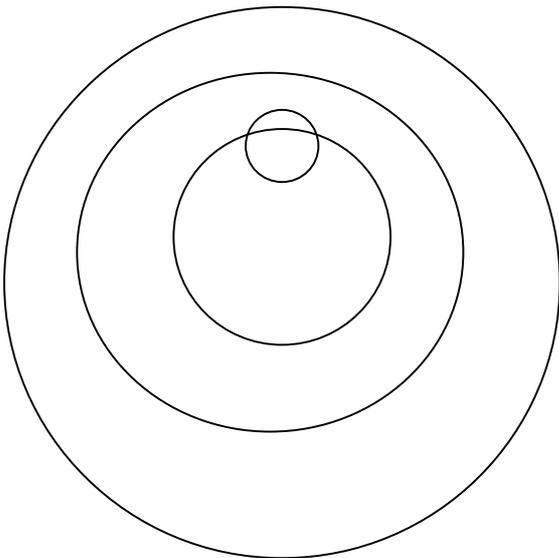
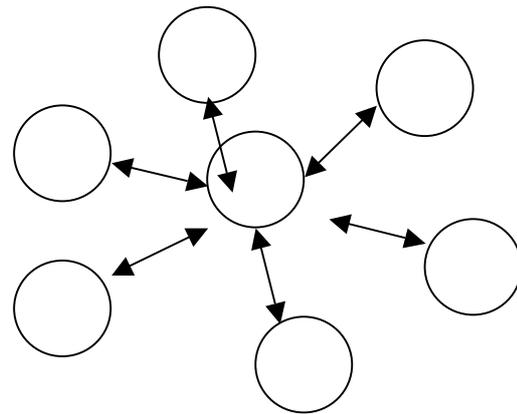


DIAGRAM 2



OUTCOMES:

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing

ACTIVITY 7: BOOK REVIEW

Read a number of different book reviews from different sources such as The West Australian newspaper, magazines, journals and text books.

Try to identify the key points that form the framework of a successful review.

These points include:

- Plot summary
- Description and discussion of characters
- Information about the settings
- Explanation of the themes
- Style and type of Language
- Your personal response to the book
- A recommendation and rating (usually a mark out of ten, star rating or a grade, eg A+)
- You may also like to provide information about the author

TASK: Write a book review of *The Book Thief* for publication in the West Australian Newspaper, your school newspaper, or a journal of teenage fiction.

OUTCOMES

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing

ACTIVITY 8: STORYBOARD

The Book Thief is a very visual novel rich in image and metaphor.

- Can you imagine this novel as a film?

Think of significant events and settings in the novel. Some of these may include:

SETTINGS:

- The basement where Max was hidden
- The library in the Mayor's house
- The street in Molching where Liesel and Rudy lived
- The kitchen

EVENTS:

- Max arriving on the Hubermann's doorstep
- The German soldier searching the house
- Liesel speaking to Max in the town square
- Hans giving the piece of bread to the Jewish prisoner

Imagine that your job is to write a proposal to a film company who are interested in turning **The Book Thief** either into a major film or a mini series on TV.

Firstly, write your proposal. You will need to give your reasons as to why you think this novel would translate well into film, why you think people would want to either pay to see it at the movies or watch it on TV.

Secondly, chose a scene from the novel and make notes regarding the important details.

Thirdly, prepare a storyboard to illustrate how you think one scene could be adapted for film.

OUTCOMES

- ✓ Writing
- ✓ Viewing
- ✓ Reading

ACTIVITY 9: THE STANDOVER MAN

The pictures and stories that Max draws and writes during his time in the Hubermann's cellar are an important part of the novel. They helped to keep him alive by passing time, providing him with a mental and creative release, as well as proving to be vitally therapeutic in making sense of the many thoughts, feelings and emotions he experienced as a result of his confinement.

1. Before reading *The Standover Man* in the novel, look at the drawings only (minus the accompanying text).

- What story do you think the pictures are telling?
- Who are the two characters?
- What is their relationship?
- What are they talking about or discussing?
- What is the significance of the last page?

(At this point you may want to look at a few examples of other famous works that marry images and words together simply yet profoundly. Two examples are Michael Leunig (any of his work) and *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibrain).

2. Discuss your ideas in a group or whole class discussion

3. Write your own text to accompany the drawings.

4. Now read the text to *The Standover Man* that Max wrote. How does your text compare to the original? What are the similarities and differences between each one?

5. What was the message that Max was trying to make?

6. Write and illustrate your own story similar in style to *The Standover Man*. Choose a theme or a message, write a simple text and draw accompanying pictures in your own unique style.

7. Share your story with other students.

OUTCOMES

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing
- ✓ Speaking and Listening
- ✓ Viewing

ACTIVITY 10: CREATIVE WRITING

Near the end of *The Book Thief* there is a big gap in time between Liesel and Max reuniting at the end of the war to Liesel's death in Sydney.

What do you think the rest of Liesel's life turned out to be like? Do you wonder about the effect that her experiences during the war had on her personality, her values and her family life? Do you think she ever returned to Germany, or would this have been too difficult for her to face?

1. Write another chapter in the life of Liesel. This could be:

- Just after she and Max reunite
- The events and decisions that lead her to leave Germany
- Who she married and how they met
- Anything else of your choice

2. Imagine that Liesel did return to Germany for a visit as an adult. Write either one diary entry or a series of diary entries from the time that Liesel made the decision to return to her homeland, the trip itself and her return to her home in Australia.

You may like to consider:

- What events and decisions lead her to return to Germany?
- Did she travel alone or with her family?
- Who and where did she visit?
- What feelings, emotions and memories were evoked before, during and after her visit?

- Alternatively, your class could break this task up into a small group activity and write a 'Group Diary'.

i) Move into groups of about four.

ii) Assign a part of Liesel's journey to each group member. For example:

Group Member No 1: Write about her decision to return to Germany for a visit and the trip over.

Group Member No 2: Reflect on a day visiting with old friends

Group Member No 3: Reflect on a day taking her two children to significant landmarks in Molching

Group Member No 4: The trip home to Australia and her feelings on her return.

OUTCOMES

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing
- ✓ Speaking and Listening

ACTIVITY 11: OBITUARY

One way that our society honours and respects those who have died is to write an *Obituary* in the newspaper.

An **Obituary** is different to a **death notice**. A death notice is usually placed in the newspaper by the family, friends and acquaintances of the deceased. There is a whole section in The West Australian Newspaper dedicated to the Births, Deaths and Marriages of West Australians. These are usually very personal messages and are not too long in length or detail.

An Obituary is like a tribute to the life of the deceased. It too is usually found in the newspaper and is usually commissioned by the newspaper, rather than being written by relatives. Therefore, an obituary is usually written for someone notable or who has achieved some notoriety in their lifetime. An Obituary may include information such as the announcement of the person's death, information regarding their cultural origins, important biographical information, survivors, religion and burial information.

- Look at some examples of death notices and Obituaries in the West Australian Newspaper. You may also find it interesting to search the internet for someone famous who has died and read their Obituary.
- Then, choose a major character from the novel. Compile a detailed character profile of them, their life and their achievements.
- Write an Obituary for your chosen character. Make sure you include information such as:
 - Place of birth
 - Age
 - Survivors
 - Biographical details
 - Comment on their strength of character and personality
 - Community service
 - Organisations/memberships

Your written Obituary should be half – one and a half pages in length.

OUTCOMES

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing

ACTIVITY 12: The reader as a 'Book Thief.'

Books have always been a valued and valuable part of history, society and education. As children we are taught to treat books with respect: not to throw them and not to draw in them for example. Some people's lives are devoted purely to their love of books, reading and the written word. These may be authors, illustrators, librarians or even book collectors.

An important thread that runs through the course of the novel, and which gives it its title of ***The Book Thief***, is the extraordinary lengths that Liesel will go to, and the risks she is willing to take, in order to fuel her love and passion of books, reading and learning. Other characters, such as Hans Hubermann, Rudy Steiner and Ilsa Hermann, were also conspirators in not only Liesel's quest for books, but also their love and devotion to Liesel herself.

"He continued down to the water's edge, showing her the book's location. 'Over there!' he stopped and pointed and ran further down, to overtake it. Soon, he peeled off his coat and jumped in, wading to the middle of the river.

Liesel, slowing to a walk, could see the ache of each step. The painful cold.

When she was close enough, she saw it move past him, but he soon caught up. His hand reached in and collared what was now a soggy block of cardboard and paper. '*The Whistler!*' the boy called out." (p326)

Some of us are born with an innate sense of the love of books and reading, while for some it grows and strengthens as we mature.

- If you were a 'Book Thief', which book do you love enough to go to extraordinary lengths to secure?
- Alternatively, what do you hold dear? What is it, and what would you be prepared to do in order to ensure its safety and safekeeping?
- Also, to what lengths would you go to save or rescue something of value to your best friend?

Write your response or discuss your ideas with other students in your class.

OUTCOMES

- ✓ Reading
- ✓ Writing
- ✓ (Speaking and Listening)