

THE END OF THE LINE

by Sharon E. McKay • Lesson Plan prepared by Marla Conn, MS Ed.

Genre: Fiction

Themes: Historical novel; war; World War II; Holocaust; courage; decision making; right vs. wrong; prejudice; tolerance

Suitable for: Grades 3–7

Summary

Five-year-old Beatrix looks on in horror as the soldier forces her mother off the tram. It is 1942 in Amsterdam, and everyone knows what happens to Jews who are taken away by the Nazis. The soldier turns his attention to Beatrix, when suddenly, the ticket-taker, Lars Gorter, blurts out that she is his niece. With his brother Hans, the tram conductor, they manage to rescue the child from the same fate as her mother.

The two elderly brothers realize that they are now in charge of the little girl. They are at a loss—after all, neither one has ever married, let alone has children. They know that harboring a Jew could cost them their lives, but in desperation, they turn to a neighbor, Mrs. Vos, for help. But even these kindly rescuers cannot shield Beatrix totally from the horrors of war.

Based on real events, this suspenseful novel vividly portrays the fear, uncertainty, and terror of the Nazi occupation in Holland. It is a story that reflects both the worst and best of humankind. A worthy addition to children’s books about the Holocaust, *The End of the Line* will leave young readers to ponder how the most dreadful conditions can lead ordinary citizens to perform the most heroic acts. People like Lars, Hans, and Mrs. Vos, who risked their own lives to save Jews in wartime Europe, were later recognized and honored as “Righteous Gentiles.”

Common Core standards are noted throughout.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

The following activity ideas are only a start. There are many possibilities for helping students construct meaning from text.

Comprehension activities:

- help readers to extend their general knowledge from prior experience
- develop reading strategies for comprehension
- bring relevance to the act of reading
- foster discussion and reflection through response to the text

BEFORE STARTING THE BOOK

Activities to build the context and introduce the topic of the book, and to establish prior knowledge and interest and develop predictions of what the text will be about.

1. What can we learn from reading historical fiction? **SL.5.1**
2. What is the Holocaust? Why study it? What can such a tragic event tell us about human nature? **SL.5.1**
3. Do you think such a thing could happen again? **SL.5.1**
4. Discuss the roles people play in controversial and confrontational situations, including victim, perpetrator, bystander, resister, and rescuer. Have the students relate this to a personal circumstance. **SL.5.1,3,4**
5. Why is it important to reflect on the theme of a piece of literature? **RL.5.2**
6. What does this statement mean to you: “Prejudice has had a long history and is still alive today”? **RL.5.4**

WHILE READING THE BOOK

Activities to check on comprehension, stimulate interest, involve readers in reflection as they read, and encourage consideration of other readers’ reactions.

1. How is the Holocaust defined in the reading? **RL.5.1/ SL.5.1**
2. How did the 1942 Nazi invasion of Holland affect the social, religious, political, and economic freedoms of the characters in the story? Give specific examples of each. **RL.5.1,2,3**
3. Describe the thoughts, words, and actions that identify the characters as victim, perpetrator, bystander, resister, or rescuer. **RL.1,2,3**
4. What did you find surprising about the victims? **RL.5.1,2,3**
5. What do you think makes some people resist and others obey authority? What would you do under these circumstances? Write an opinion piece. **W.5.1,1a,1b,1c,1d**
6. What do you think the young German soldier meant when he told Beatrix, “God be with us”? **RL.5.1,4/ L.5.5b**

7. Where does one draw the line between obeying the law or obeying one's conscience? Find examples from the story where characters struggled with this question. **RL.5.1,2,3**
8. Find examples of figurative language and discuss how they impact the meaning and tone. For example, "Their eyebrows looked like wings about to take flight." **L.5.5a**
9. Analyze this quote from the story: "The realization had spread across his face like a rash." **L.5,5a**
10. Explain how Mrs. Vos's actions contributed to the sequence of events. **RL.5.1,2,3**
11. Describe the relationship between Beatrix and Lieve. Explain why they had a special connection. **RL.5.3**
12. How did the characters show acts of human courage? Use evidence from the text. **RL.5.1,2,3**
13. Discuss with the group: As you were reading the story what were some of the questions you were asking yourself? Did you find answers? **SL.5.1,1c**
14. What did Mrs. Vos mean when she said, "And if it were not for your girl, I would not have found my purpose. And what is life without purpose?" **RL.5.1,2,3/L.5.5,5b**
15. Find synonyms from the story. For example, street car/tram, confused/befuddled. Work in small groups. **L.5.5,5c**

AFTER READING THE BOOK

Activities to inspire continued reflection and response to the text, bring conclusion to the experience of reading this particular text, and stimulate further extensions.

1. How did the characters— Lars, Hans, Mrs. Vos, Lieve, Mother, and Beatrix—change from the beginning to the end of the story? **RL.5.1,2,3**
2. Create a timeline summarizing the important events in the story: fall 1942, spring 1943, winter 1944, spring 1945, summer 1960, spring 1973. **RL.5.2,5**
3. Explain how the chapters fit together to provide the overall structure of *The End of the Line*. **RL.5.5**
4. What are the theme(s) of *The End of the Line*? **RL.5.2**
5. What can the theme teach you about your own life? **RL.5.2**

6. What did apples symbolize in the book? Find examples from the beginning, middle, and end of the story. **RL.5.1**
7. How can horrific conditions lead ordinary people to perform heroic acts? Describe the heroic acts of a character in the story and what he or she risked to save another human being. **RL.5.1,2**
8. Research and prepare a speech on “Inhumanity in Today’s World,” and what this generation can do to ensure that tragedies like the Holocaust will never happen again. **W.5.7,8,9/ SL.5.4,5,6**
9. Why is *The End of the Line* considered historical fiction? **SL.5.1**
10. Compare and contrast *The End of the Line* with another historical fiction novel on their approaches to the Holocaust. **RL.5.9**
11. What do you think Sharon McKay means by “the end of the line”?
12. How did the book affect you personally? **RL.5.1**
13. Research “righteous gentiles.” Write an explanatory text on a hero who was recognized for saving Jewish children during WWII. Introduce the topic clearly; provide a general observation and focus; include formatting (e.g. headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension. Use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of the topic. Recall relevant information from reading *The End of the Line* and gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources. **W.5.2,2a,7,8,9**

Visit: www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/about.asp