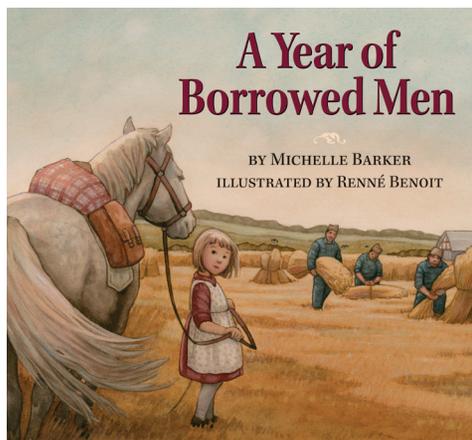


For Older Readers



STORY SUMMARY

When World War II “borrows” the men in seven-year-old Gerda’s family, the German government sends them three new men in return: Gabriel, Fermaine, and Albert, French prisoners of war who must sleep in an outbuilding and work the farm until the war is over. Gerda knows they are supposed to treat the men as enemies, but it doesn’t seem fair. Can’t they invite them into the warm house for one

meal? What harm could it do to be friendly?

World War II was a time of great suffering in Europe and beyond. Millions experienced the horrors of the Holocaust, the carnage of battlefields, the devastation of invasion, and many other atrocities. In *A Year of Borrowed Men*, author Michelle Barker shares one true story of the tenacity of humanity and friendship in a time of suspicion and fear.

WORLD WAR II AND PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMANY

The issue of forced labor in Germany during World War II is fraught, as many populations were subject to dehumanizing and deadly slavery conditions. Prisoners of war from France, the British Commonwealth, and the United States, called *Militärinternierte*, fared somewhat better. They were considered to be under the governance of the 1929 Geneva Convention, which mandated that non-officer prisoners of war could be used for labor if their working conditions were supervised by the Red Cross. There was also an understanding that if prisoners were maltreated, the other Geneva Convention signatories would retaliate against German prisoners in their care. In 1944, nearly two million prisoners of war were recorded as performing forced labor in Germany. The experiences and well-being of those individuals varied widely.

LEARN MORE THROUGH THESE RESOURCES:

Experiencing War: Prisoners of War

Stories and primary-source documents from The Veterans History Project
www.loc.gov/vets/stories/pow-germany.html

Forced Labor Under the Third Reich

An economic study used to determine the compensation paid by the German government to a fund for forced laborers in 2000

<http://www.nathaninc.com/resources/forced-labor-under-third-reich>

Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War: Geneva, 27 July 1929

<https://www.icrc.org/eng/who-we-are/history/I50-years/index.jsp?rdpage=/eng/who-we-are/history/I50-years/timeline/timeline-1929.htm>

Farming life in Germany, 1940s - Film 3290

Footage of women and girls harvesting and preparing flax

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgczwbpkA3A>

Michelle Barker has published short fiction; nonfiction; a fantasy novel, *The Beggar King*; and a book of poetry. She has lived and travelled in many places with her husband and four children, settling most recently in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Renné Benoit is living her childhood dream of being an artist. Trained in graphic design, she is the award-winning illustrator of more than 15 books for children. Renné lives in St. Thomas, Ontario.

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Friendship and Enmity, Compassion, World War II, Germany

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JNF025070 JUVENILE NONFICTION / History / Europe

JNF053060 JUVENILE NONFICTION / Social Issues / Friendship

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Discussion Questions

- Gerda and her family took a huge risk in befriending the prisoners of war, one that could have landed Mummy (a single parent) in jail, potentially for months. Was the risk worth it? Why, or why not?
- Have you ever tried to communicate with someone who doesn't speak the same language as you? How did you find a way to bridge the gap?
- Why do you think the Russians liberated the farm animals?
- How would this story change if it was told in the narrative voice of an older woman looking back on her childhood?
- Do you think the analogy of borrowing is a good one? Why do you think the author chose this?
- How did you feel about encountering history on a personal level? Do you think that's a useful way for people to learn about history, or does it introduce bias in some way?
- Books can be a great springboard into meaningful discussion. What do you think about the notion of introducing children to serious issues through picture books?
- This book is based on a true story which required research into family history. What might some of the hazards be in writing a story like this? What are some of the advantages?
- The author has chosen to tell a World War II story from the point of view of a German child. How would the story be different if it was told from the perspective of the prisoners? What are the relative merits/pitfalls to either side? Why is it risky to tell a World War II story from the German point of view?

FAMILY HISTORY PROJECT

Think about events in your own family history that you would like younger generations to know about. Prepare and conduct interviews with older family members who remember the event.

Discuss:

What are the benefits of personal interviews when reconstructing a historical event? What are the disadvantages?

Can you think of any consequences for basing a story on misremembered information?

How can you verify and support the memories of your interviewee?

Gather any available documents about the time period and/or event that you are researching. These might include primary sources such as photographs or journal entries, or secondary sources such as newspaper articles. Information on climate, gender roles, geography, popular culture, media, etc. from the time period in question will help you create an accurate, immersive depiction.

Discuss:

What is the difference between a primary source and a secondary source? Can you classify the sources you have gathered?

Is one kind more valuable than the other? Why or why not?

What is a tertiary source? Why might it be useful?

Using the testimony gathered from your interviewee(s), write an outline of your story. You might choose certain incidents or moments of emotional development to focus on in order to give your story a satisfying structure. Even a short story needs a narrative arc that includes an inciting incident, climax, and conclusion. As you write your story, use the information you gathered in your other research to include true-to-life sensory details and an accurate historical setting. Keep in mind your audience: will this story be read to a young child? Will an older child read it independently? An adult?

Have your drafts read over for accuracy by your interviewee(s) and by others with expertise on the time period you are depicting. If you decide to seek publication for your story, you can find submission guidelines on the websites of most publishers.

Celebrate your story!