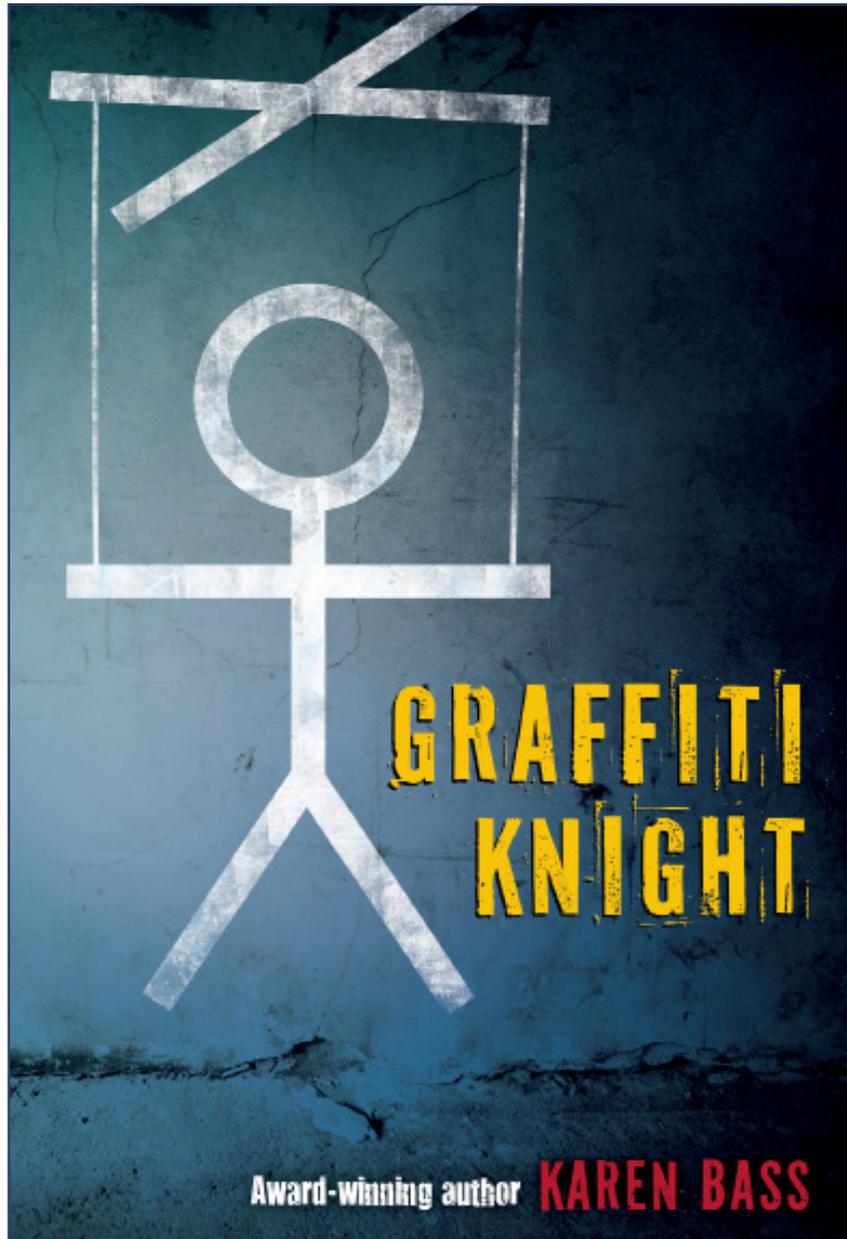


# GRAFFITI KNIGHT

Karen Bass

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Created by Erin Woods





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## STORY SUMMARY

After a childhood cut short by war and the harsh strictures of Nazi Germany, sixteen-year-old Wilm is finally tasting freedom. In spite of the scars World War II has left on his hometown, Leipzig, and in spite of the oppressive new Soviet regime, Wilm is finding his own voice. It's dangerous, of course, to be sneaking out at night to leave messages on police buildings. But it's exciting, too, and Wilm feels justified, considering his family's suffering. Until one mission goes too far, and Wilm finds he's endangered the very people he most wants to protect.

Award-winning author Karen Bass brings readers a fast-paced story about a boy fighting for self-expression in an era of censorship and struggle.

Karen Bass has been fascinated by World War II since she was a girl. *Graffiti Knight* is her fourth novel for young adults. Karen lives in Hythe, Alberta. You can learn more at [www.karenbass.ca](http://www.karenbass.ca).

Watch the book trailer at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WMzYciZU48](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WMzYciZU48)

## PRE-READING LESSON

### POST-WAR GERMANY

1. As a class, come up with a point-form list of things the students know about World War II.
2. Ask students what they know about life in their own country right after the war. How about life in Europe?
3. If the students have not learned anything about post-World War II Europe, ask them to imagine what the effects of a war of that scale might be. Discuss disruptions in crops, the male workforce, trade, politics, infrastructure, housing, etc.
4. Explain that, since Germany started the war, the countries that had fought against it decided Germany would pay for as much of the damage as possible. Set the scene for *Graffiti Knight* by describing some of the decisions made at the Potsdam Conference on behalf of post-World War II Germany:

- a. The German people were not allowed to control their own national government or their own economy.
- b. The country was divided between the nations that helped subdue it: the Soviet Union, the United States, France, and Britain. Eventually the American, French, and British zones were combined to form the Federal Republic of Germany (often called West Germany) while the Soviet-occupied zone (often called East Germany) became its own country controlled by the Soviet Union.
- c. Any industry that could be used for military purposes was dismantled.
- d. Any teachers or judges thought to have been influenced by the Nazis were removed
- e. Each of the occupying nations was allowed to take money made in its own zone to help pay for war damages. The Soviets were also allowed to take industrial equipment from both the east and the west.
- f. A large chunk of German territory was given to Poland in exchange for land that country lost to the Soviet Union. Poland and several other countries that bordered Germany forced their German-speaking minority populations to leave.

5. Ask students to infer what effect these reparations and restrictions may have had on post-World War II Germany.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before reading this book, did you know very much about what happened in Germany after World War II? Do you think it is important to know? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think the Soviets treated the German people the way they did?
3. Imagine you were forced to join a group whose principles you don't agree with, like the Hitler Youth. How might you feel?

4. If your country had been at war for a large part of your childhood, how would you feel when the war was over? What expectations might you have for the future?
5. Why did Karl and Georg stop Wilm from helping his father? What might have happened if they had let him go? (10)
6. When you found out that Anneliese often hid in her room instead of helping with the dishes, what did you think of her? If you were in Wilm's shoes, do you think you would have complained? (13)
7. Why do you think Wilm's father made him mend his own trousers? (13-15)
8. Have you ever felt, like Wilm, that getting good marks in school is a waste of time? Can you think of some strong arguments for this point of view? Can you think of some strong arguments against it?
9. On page 35 Wilm thinks, 'Holding this pistol made me feel powerful. Was this what freedom felt like?' If Wilm asked you that question, how would you answer?
10. When Wilm performed his first act of sabotage, slashing the truck tires in the market square, what did you think of him? Was it a good idea? Was it justified? Explain.
11. "Destroying things is easier, but building things is much more satisfying." What do you think Otto was talking about? (65)
12. Why do you think Wilm feels drawn to spend time with Otto?
13. Otto explains that Wilm's father might have become an angry and resentful man as a result of feeling helpless. Does understanding this help Wilm get along with his father? What could Wilm have done to reduce their conflicts?
14. Talking to Wilm about her relationship with Ernst, Johanna says, "I knew I needed protection. If I had the protection of the right man, then my family wouldn't starve." (94) Do you think she is, to use her own words, "using Ernst"? Under the circumstances, is protection a good base for a relationship? What do you think you would do in Johanna's situation? In Ernst's?
15. Why did Wilm choose to wage a war of embarrassment against the police? How might Wilm's kind

of embarrassment be an effective weapon?

16. Wilm calls reparation payments "A polite phrase for the Soviets taking our food and factory goods to pay for the war, for the pain and suffering we had caused them" (144). Do you think it was a good system to pay for the damages the war caused? Why or why not? Can you think of another solution?
17. When Ruth suggests the Soviets might be taking the Germans' food because their people are even worse off, Wilm doesn't want to accept the idea. "I preferred them as monsters," he thinks. Why would that make the reparation payments easier to bear? (182)
18. Wilm insists that he is nothing like his father. Is he right? How are they different? How are they alike?
19. Why would Anneliese prefer to risk the dangerous journey with Wilm than to stay in Leipzig?
20. Why did Wilm and his father find yelling "easier than saying goodbye"? (223)
21. *Graffiti Knight* has a lot to say about fear, and about power. How are the two connected? What did Wilm learn about them both by the end?

## BEHIND ENEMY LINES (PHYSICAL EDUCATION)

**Preparation:** If you have a wooded area to play in, there is no setup for this activity. If you are playing indoors, you will want to fill the space with obstacles behind which kids can hide.

### Directions:

1. Choose one person to be the guard. She will stand in the middle of the room, close her eyes, and yell, "Camouflage!" before counting down loudly from twenty.
2. While the guard counts down, the other players scatter around the playing area. Their goal is to hide themselves as much as possible while still keeping the guard in sight at all times (hence "camouflage").
3. When the guard finishes her countdown, she opens her eyes and looks for players who are visible. She cannot move both feet, but she can turn on the spot and take a step out with one foot at a time before returning that foot to its place. If she spots someone, she must be able to name him or describe his clothing to call him out. Players who are caught are out until the next round.

4. Once the guard has caught everyone she can see, she can call one of several commands:

- a. “Fifteen-second raid!” While the guard closes her eyes, holds out an arm, and counts down from fifteen, each player must leave his hiding spot, touch the guard’s hand, and hide again. When she reaches “zero,” the guard opens her eyes again.
- b. “Fifteen seconds to move in!” While the guard closes her eyes and counts down from fifteen, each player must move to a new hiding place that is closer to the guard than before. When she reaches “zero” the guard opens her eyes again.
- c. “Number check!” The guard, keeping her eyes open, holds up any number of fingers she chooses. Since players are hiding all around her, she must swivel around to show them all. Players are obligated to call out the number of fingers they see—otherwise it proves they cannot see the guard.

5. The guard can continue to use these commands, reducing the number of seconds she gives players to complete a) and b), until she has located every player. The last one to be caught may play the guard in the next round.

**Bonus:** To play in a confined indoor space, eliminate the commands that require running and allow the players to hide completely (unable to see the guard) unless she gives the command “Number check,” at which point they must risk taking a look.

## EXPOSITION (WRITING, HISTORY)

In writing historical fiction, one of the most important challenges the author faces is introducing the reader to the book’s setting in a way that feels natural within the narrative. In this activity students will write their own first chapter of a work of historical fiction.

**Materials:** Graffiti Knight, lined paper, pencils, pens, word processor (optional)

### Directions:

1. Ask students to read the first chapter of *Graffiti Knight* again (or read it aloud).
2. As a class, brainstorm a list of information you just learned about life in Leipzig in 1947.
3. Discuss:
  - a) Imagine the book opened with a paragraph or two describing Leipzig and what it was like to live there at this time. Would it be interesting? Why or why not?

b) What techniques does the author use to inform the reader about the setting? Why are they effective?

**Note:** Some possible answers are: embedding facts inside conversation, using Wilm’s memories, describing the city around Wilm at this moment, and showing, from the characters’ responses, that acts like police beatings are not unusual.

4. Ask students to research a historical time and place in which they will set the first chapter of a novel (they do not have to write the whole novel!). You may wish to have them focus on a time and/or place covered by your grade’s curriculum.

5. Using their research, have students write a few paragraphs describing their chosen time and place—both the physical setting and the social and political realities of living there.

6. Now ask students to come up with a brief plot outline for a historical novel set in their chosen time and place. They should also outline their main character(s).

7. Drawing from their paragraphs, plot outline, and character outline(s), students can now write the first chapter of their novel. Challenge them to work in as many relevant setting details as possible—without overwhelming the plot.

8. Have students exchange their work for peer editing, but don’t limit their focus to spelling and grammar. They should also suggest to each other ways in which their scene-setting can be made more smooth.

9. Ask students to complete a final draft and hand it in.



## THE OTHER SIDE

(HISTORY, WRITING)

**Materials:** Chalkboard or whiteboard, lined paper, pencils

**Directions:**

1. As a class, brainstorm a list of historic wars or political struggles the students remember studying.
2. Working in small groups, have students write a brief narrative from the perspective of an ordinary person living through one of these events. Challenge them to do this using only the facts they already know.
3. Now ask the groups to write another narrative from the perspective of an ordinary person on the “other side” of the conflict they have just written about. Again, have them do this without research.
4. Discuss:
  - a) *Where did you learn the information you used to write the first narrative? The second?*
  - b) *Did you know more about one side of the story than the other? Why?*
  - c) *What consequences, if any, do you think there might be to only knowing one perspective on historical events?*
5. Give the groups time to research their chosen events and re-write their narratives with fuller historic detail.

## A NEW POTSDAM

(POLITICS, HISTORY, ORAL PRESENTATION)

**Preparation:** Familiarize yourself with the events of the Potsdam Conference

**Materials:** Research materials, chalkboard or whiteboard

**Directions:**

1. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a European country. Be sure to include England, Germany, the Soviet Union, and an assortment of large and small countries from the war zone.
2. Have each group research their country to learn how the war affected it in terms of politics, population, physical damage, and economy. Have them create a list of possible solutions to their problems and prepare a persuasive speech outlining these solutions.
3. Acting as mediator, have each group present its grievances and solutions in turn. On the blackboard or whiteboard, maintain a running list of the actions and reparations requested by all the groups.

4. As a class, discuss the solutions listed and identify which, if any, could have been accomplished in post-World War II Europe. Talk about where resources would come from, how they would be moved from one place to another, and who would oversee the process. Ask students to look for pitfalls where the process might break down.

5. Share a list of some of the solutions the actual Potsdam Conference came up with (some are listed in the Pre-Reading Activity in this guide). Discuss the merits and failings of those decisions. Why were they chosen? Would the international community be likely to make the same decisions again?

## GRAFFITI/LOGO

(ART)

In *Graffiti Knight*, Wilm uses a stickman puppet as his graffiti signature because he wants to remind everyone of his message: the police are puppets of the Soviet army. Today, graffiti artists design tags that communicate something about their persona to those who see their work. Companies also design logos to make the public remember who they are. In this activity students will design tags or logos that express something about themselves.

**Note:** The instructions for this activity cover the basic steps students will take to complete the project. You can extend the value of the assignment by using it as an opportunity to study color theory, symmetrical and asymmetrical balance, lettering, and/or a particular artistic medium.

**Bonus:** If your community has a place where “legal” graffiti can be displayed, learn about it and consider using it as a launching point for a discussion about the potential harm and potential value of graffiti.

**Materials:** Paper, pencils, scissors, other art supplies

**Directions:**

1. Have students brainstorm elements they might choose to include in their logo or tag by writing words and sketching symbols on a piece of paper. Have them think about “branding”—what do they want people to understand about them when they see these words or images?

2. When they have settled on some words and symbols they might like to use, students should write/draw them cleanly, cut them out, and place them in various positions on a new piece of paper. By experimenting in this way they can determine the most effective layout.

3. Logos and tags should be visually effective whether they are five feet high or shrunk down to an inch. They should also be easy to see clearly from a distance. Have students experiment with this by drawing their tag/logo in various sizes and by taping it to the wall to view from across the room.

4. When they are satisfied with the design of their tag or logo, have students create a final copy to hand in.

**Bonus:** If your school has access to graphic design software, this activity is a good opportunity to explore vector images.

**SOCIAL ACTION**  
(CITIZENSHIP)

**Materials:** Lined paper, pencils

**Directions:**

1. Discuss:  
.....  
a) Wilm engaged in illegal activities to protest the wrongs being done to the people in his city. Was he right to do this?  
.....  
b) Is it ever okay to break the law?  
.....

2. Give students time to research other young people who have spoken out against political injustice. Have them share their findings and discuss:  
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- a) What was the most interesting story you found about a young person who had taken a stand against injustice? What did they do?
- b) Could you do something similar in their situation?
- c) Can you think of any issues in today's world that you would like to speak out against?
- d) What safe, legal means are available to you to go out and make a difference?

3. Working in small groups, have students select an issue they are passionate about and brainstorm ways to raise awareness about it.

4. Have each group create an action plan to address their issue either in your community or through an Internet campaign.

5. Offer an incentive for groups to go out and implement their action plans.

**BOOK TRAILER**  
(MEDIA, COMMUNICATION)

**Materials:** Computer and/or projector to show video, scrap paper, pencils, white paper or Bristol board, video editing software (optional)

**Preparation:** Stream the book trailer from YouTube at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WMzYciZU48](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WMzYciZU48)

**Directions:**

1. As a class, watch the book trailer for *Graffiti Knight*.  
2. In pairs, have students discuss the trailer and answer the following questions:  
.....

- a) What elements (graphic, audio, textual) does the trailer incorporate? Why do you think they were each chosen?
- b) What else might the trailer designer have included? Why do you think those things were left out?
- c) What does the trailer communicate about the book?
- d) If you had watched the trailer before you read the book, would it have made you want to read it? Why or why not?

3. Still working in pairs, have students brainstorm ideas for their own book trailer.

4. Have each pair prepare a storyboard of their trailer, drawing a series of frames that show each element of their trailer in order. These should include each line of text and each image. If they plan to use a voiceover, they should write the script above the frames it would overlap. See the partial image below for an example.

5. If your school has access to video editing software (for example, iMovie or Adobe Premiere Pro), have students create their trailer and present it to the class. If not, you may ask them to make their storyboards large enough to present effectively at the front of the class.

