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# WHAT WORLD IS LEFT

## STUDY GUIDE

### ABOUT THE BOOK

A pampered child used to having her own way, Anneke Van Raalte lives outside Amsterdam, where her father is a cartoonist for an Amsterdam newspaper. Though Anneke's family is Jewish, her religion means little to her. Anneke's life changes in 1942 when the Nazis invade Holland and she and her family are deported to Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. Not only are conditions in the camp appalling, but the camp is the site of an elaborate hoax: the Nazis are determined to convince the world that Theresienstadt is an idyllic place and that European Jews are thriving under the Nazi regime. Because he is an artist, Anneke's father is compelled to help in the propaganda campaign, and Anneke finds herself torn between her loyalty to her family and her sense of what is right.

*What World is Left* was inspired by the experiences of the author's mother, who was imprisoned in Theresienstadt during World War II.

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Monique Polak** is the author of more than thirty books for kids and young adults and the two-time winner of the Quebec Writers' Federation Prize for Children's and YA Literature. In addition to teaching at Marianopolis College in Montreal, Monique is a freelance journalist whose work has appeared in *Macleans Magazine*, the *Montreal Gazette* and other Postmedia newspapers. She is also a columnist on ICI Radio-Canada's *Plus on est de fous, plus on lit!* In 2016, Monique was the CBC/Quebec Writers' Federation inaugural writer-in-residence. Monique lives in Montreal.

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### VOCABULARY

It may be helpful to introduce the following five terms to students before they begin to read *What World Is Left*.

1. **Prejudice:** opinions, usually against people from different backgrounds, that are not based on knowledge or experience.
2. **The Holocaust:** genocide that took place during World War II (1939 through 1945). The Nazis murdered six million European Jews. Jews were not the Nazis' only target; they also wanted to eliminate the Roma, communists, homosexuals, as well as people with physical or intellectual disabilities.
3. **Anti-Semitism:** hostility or discrimination against Jews.
4. **Nazis:** A political party that controlled Germany from 1933 to 1945. They were led by Adolf Hitler.
5. **Concentration camps:** A place where large numbers of people, especially political prisoners or members of minorities, are deliberately imprisoned in inadequate facilities. Prisoners in these camps are mistreated, malnourished, forced to do hard labor and sometimes executed. Many of these camps were established by the Nazis for prisoners in Germany and occupied Europe.
6. **Propaganda:** misleading information used to promote a political cause or point of view.

### RESEARCH AREAS

Working individually or in small teams, students can research some of the following areas. This exercise can be done before students begin to read *What World Is Left*, or while they are reading the novel.

1. When did anti-Semitism begin? Many people think anti-Semitism originated during the Holocaust, but anti-Semitism has been around for a lot longer. What can you find out about this subject?
2. What was going on in Germany that allowed Adolf Hitler to rise to power? We know Hitler was a powerful orator. But his success had a lot to do with socio-economic conditions in Germany at the time. What were those conditions?
3. Propaganda was an important tool for the Nazis. How were Jews depicted in Nazi propaganda? How might the use of propaganda have affected the average German citizen?
4. The urge to create survived in the concentration camps—and helped prisoners assert their humanity. Despite the horrific conditions, art was produced in the concentration camps—not only by professional artists, but by everyone, including kids. Look up the art produced by concentration camp prisoners. What can you learn from these drawings?

### BASIC READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions to make sure that students are keeping up with their reading.

1. What was the name of Anneke's little brother?
2. Why were Dutch Jews told to report to the Hollandsche Schouwburg?
3. What was the role of the Council of Elders in Theresienstadt?
4. What does the Dutch word "Opa" mean?
5. What was the name of the commandant of Theresienstadt?
6. What was the name of Anneke's closest friend in Theresienstadt?
7. Why did Anneke's little brother sleep in the bathtub?
8. Why was it so important that Anneke have her tonsils removed?
9. What was Anneke's father's job before the war?
10. What kind of work did Anneke's father do in Theresienstadt?

## MORE COMPLEX QUESTIONS

These questions can be considered after students have finished reading *What World Is Left*.

1. Explain how the Nazis used Theresienstadt as part of their elaborate propaganda program. How did Anneke's father contribute to the propaganda program in Theresienstadt?
2. Author Monique Polak has said that she does not trust a "black and white view of the world." She says she likes to write about "gray areas." Look for gray areas in this book. For instance, can you find a "good" character whose behavior is less than perfect? Or a "bad" character who demonstrates kindness?
3. The Nazis sought to dehumanize their victims. Yet in the concentration camps, the prisoners sought to assert their humanity. Can you find examples of ways in which the prisoners in this book assert their humanity?
4. How does Anneke's relationship with her father change throughout the story?
5. Author Monique Polak's mother, Celien, told Monique it was difficult to form friendships in Theresienstadt because no one seemed to stay for long in the camp. Look at Anneke's friendship with Hannelore. How does the friendship affect the two girls?
6. Where does the title "What World Is Left" come from? Discuss the significance of the book's title.

## CREATIVE ASSIGNMENTS

These exercises can be done after students have finished reading and discussing the novel.

1. Imagine that you are a non-Jewish child living in Broek, the town where Anneke lived in the Netherlands. Tell the story of what happened to your friend Anneke from your own point of view. You can focus on what happened after the Nazis occupied the Netherlands. Or you can focus on what it was like for you when Anneke returns—a very changed girl—after her experience in Theresienstadt.
2. Using Anneke's point of view, write a diary entry for her. You can choose any day you like. The day can be from before, during or after her imprisonment at Theresienstadt. Do not feel constrained by the events in *What World Is Left*. For example, feel free to add new characters or situations.
3. Author Monique Polak's mother kept the story of what happened to her in Theresienstadt a secret for more than sixty years! Secrets lie at the heart of many novels. Interview an older person—it could be a grandparent if you have one, or an elderly friend or neighbor. Ask them to tell you what was the hardest thing they ever went through as a child or teenager. Be sure to ask how they got through the experience. You can write this interview up in a question-and-answer format, or you can turn it into a story. If you do write a story, try telling it from the point of view of your interview subject when they were a child.
4. **WARNING! THE FOLLOWING IS A TOUGH QUESTION—PERHAPS NOT FOR EVERYONE!** In the novel, Anneke's father is forced by the Nazis to produce propaganda art. By doing so, he hopes to keep himself and his family alive. Invent a fictional character. Whom does your character love most? Now invent a situation in which your character is asked to do something they know is wrong in order to protect the person they love most.
5. Art plays a major role in *What World Is Left*. Make a drawing or collage that expresses what you have learned from the book. The lessons may have to do with history, but they might also have to do with feelings about subjects including war, prejudice, family, loss and love. If you prefer, try another art form—consider music, dance...or whatever else you can come up with.

