

A Teacher's Guide for Is It Night or Day?

By
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Introduction

Is It Night or Day?, a work of historical fiction, recounts the immigration story of the author's mother, Edith Westerfeld, to the United States in 1938 and Edith's painful process of assimilation to her new American home.

In 1933, Adolf Hitler legally gained political leadership of Germany. His Nazi Party, which eventually would control the government, subsequently enacted laws that discriminated against and isolated German Jews, a small minority of less than one percent of the entire German population. These laws, which resembled the "Jim Crow" laws enacted by our own southern states against African-Americans, stripped German Jews of their rights, marking this minority as a despised people. The laws forbade Germans from speaking to a Jewish person or conducting business with Jews. Basically, these laws made Jews into a "non-people." Sadly, very few non-Jewish Germans spoke out against these racial laws.

Terrified by the prospects of living as second-class citizens, many German Jews sought to emigrate - to leave Germany. German Jews sensed that things would get worse, much worse. Leaving, however, was its own challenge. First, German Jews had to face a corrupt, prejudiced German bureaucracy that made the simple task of applying for an exit visa a degrading experience. Very few nations would accept Jewish emigrants, including the United States. Economically crippled by the Great Depression and burdened by its own traditions of anti-Jewish prejudice, the American government severely limited German Jewish immigration. Many elected officials, including members of Congress, openly admitted their dislike of Jews.

Given this background, Edith Westerfeld's parents showed exceptional foresight. Her mother and father fought quietly, but persistently, to gain exit visas for both of their daughters and to make arrangement for them to go to the United States; they did so knowing that in saving their daughters, they would likely never see them again.

Edith and her sister, Betty, were two of only 1,200 Jewish children to arrive on our shores between 1934 and 1944. The little-known “One Thousand Children Project” rescued these children. Once World War II began in 1939, the German government began to murder European Jews, a genocide that killed a staggering total of 6,000,000 people. Of that total, 1,500,000 were children. Had it not been for the courage, vision, and determination of Sigmund and Frieda Westerfeld, their daughters would have joined other child victims, including Anne Frank.

Fern Schumer Chapman’s ***Is It Night or Day?*** not only captures Edith’s childhood immigration experience and assimilation into our country. It also serves as a cautionary novel, since Edith became an “other” in both Germany and the United States. The book challenges today’s young people to stand up against wrong -- to confront bullying in schools, to speak out against degrading or demeaning comments against any individual, and to act with courage and compassion towards those who suffer.

Format

This teacher's guide contains a brief summary of each chapter and a series of questions and individual and/or classroom activities designed to stimulate higher level thinking skills and to engage in ethical decision-making. In addition, the guide describes enrichment activities that encourage students to synthesize and evaluate that which they have learned while reading the novel.

Chapter One: “Nobody Told Me Anything”

Summary: In 1938, aware of the menacing anti-Jewish atmosphere in Germany, the parents of Edith Westerfeld make preparations to send their youngest daughter to the United States, where Edith will join her sister, Betty, who had departed Germany the year before. The increased discrimination and isolation take a toll on the family, and the young Edith experiences the dual pain of prejudice and fear.

Questions/Activities:

Edith’s parents decide to send their daughters to the United States so that they may be spared what their parents perceived as a life-threatening situation. In your opinion, when a family faces grave danger, it should:

- a) Do whatever it can to save as many members as it can.
- b) Save the youngest members first.
- c) Split itself up, sending members to different locations to save at least a part of the family.
- d) It should remain together regardless of consequences.

In Stockstadt, faced with growing Nazi persecution, “the parents whispered, trying to keep details from the young” in order to shelter the children from the painful reality in their community. In your opinion, are parents obligated to explain a painful and frightening situation to their children?

- a) Parents should always talk honestly and directly with their children.
- b) Parents should not discuss some issues with their children.
- c) Parents should shelter children from frightening situations for as long as they can.

Edith accidentally discovers that her mother is about to hang herself in the attic of the family home. Her mother orders her to “Go away!” Edith refuses, surprising herself since she “wasn’t allowed to say no” to her mother. In terms of the parent-child relationship, a child should:

- a) Always obey what a parent says, regardless of consequences.
- b) Selectively obey what a parent says.
- c) Question a parent’s authority.
- d) Disobey a parent’s order when there could be harmful consequences.

Edith said, “We didn’t think of ourselves as Jews. We were Germans.” What does Edith mean by this statement? How would you describe your own identity?

While at the synagogue, Edith overheard the adults whispering, “trying to keep details from the young?” Have you ever kept a secret from your parents? Why did you not want them to discover what you were hiding?

How do your parents’ experiences define you? What obligations does a parent have to share painful life experiences with their children?

From the time we are young, most of us receive instructions to obey the law. Yet, many of the laws in Germany were designed to humiliate Jews. How do you know whether or not to obey a law?

Design a brochure that the United States Department of State could send to other nations that would encourage people to come to America.

Chapter Two: All I Could See Was the Blue

Summary: With suppressed emotional anguish, Edith (“Tiddy”) departs from her parents on the cruise ship, the *Deutschland*. A “feeling of sadness” causes her to feel “heavy and dizzy,” Edith watches her parents disappear as she departs Germany. She recognizes that her childhood has ended.

Questions/Activities:

Imagine that your parents are about to send you to a different country and that there is a strong likelihood that you will never see them again. Create a dialogue and role-play the conversation between you and your parents. What would you tell them?

Learn what a “perspective drawing” looks like. Create a perspective drawing or series of drawing of what Edith saw as, in Edith’s words, the ship “picked up speed moving down the river, the space between us grew wider and I watched as my parents and Mina got smaller and smaller.”

Imagine yourself in Edith’s place. Your family has told you to pack as much of your personal belongings as you can in one suitcase, that you will use what you packed to start a new life in a new country. What items would you absolutely need to keep with you? What items that are important to you would you have to leave behind?

Imagine that your parents are about to send you to a different country and that there is a strong likelihood that you will never see them again. Create a dialogue and role-play the conversation between you and your parents. What would you tell them?

Chapter Three: But I Want to Go to the Zoo

Profoundly dislocated by the abrupt departure from her family, Edith attempts to adjust to life on the *Deutschland*. On board, she meets several children, one of whom will become a steadfast friend. One young boy, traumatized by the experience, cries out that he wants to visit a zoo instead of America. Julius, An older boy who is accompanying his family to America, exudes confidence but makes Edith all the more aware of her predicament. Gertie Katz, a “round, redheaded girl” with “freckles across her nose,” emerges as Edith’s confidante.

Questions/Activities

Describe a time when a decision your parent(s) made caused you confusion. What have you learned about that decision since your initial confusion?

Edith’s Grandmother, Oma Sarah, warns Edith, “You must be very careful when you spend time with boys.” Edith was a very young twelve years old when her grandmother gave her this vague warning. What was Oma Sarah really saying to Edith? Create a dialogue between Oma Sarah and Edith that you think would have more clearly stated the issue(s)?

Do you think Edith is emotionally ready to face her new life in America? Create a power-point presentation that lists your reasons.

What do you do to calm yourself when you are frightened or emotionally upset? Do your techniques always work?

Edith is troubled by her perception that her parents “left [her] alone.” She spends a great deal of time worrying that she may have done something to cause them to do so. Psychologists have commented that young people often blame themselves when bad things happen to their families. Why do you think this is so?

Chapter Four: Seasick

Edith's friendship with Gertie deepens as the two become practically inseparable on board the *Deutschland*. Suffering great existential despair, Edith suffers greatly when Julius inquires as to why her parents did not accompany her. "Reminded constantly of that hollow feeling," Edith turns away from the numerous lavish meals offered passengers but develops an insatiable craving for ice cream. An African-American passenger teaches the children a new dance, the "Lambeth Walk," an act that arouses suspicion from the Nazi stewards and a racist American woman passenger, who informs the children that racial intermingling is something "we don't do" in the United States.

Questions/Activities

The title of the chapter is "Seasick." Although many passengers suffer seasickness, Edith suffers a different type of "sickness." What do you think actually ails Edith?

Almost immediately, a group of immigrant children on the *Deutschland* become fast friends and spend as much time as they can with each other, exploring the ship and avoiding the painful memories of leaving their families.

- a) This is a healthy response. Children should try to be as happy and carefree as possible, without dwelling on painful feelings.
- b) This is a somewhat healthy response. Although children should seek out happy experiences, they are showing disrespect to their parents by ignoring their painful feelings.
- c) This is an inappropriate response. To seek happiness in the wake of a devastating loss is selfish and disrespectful.

On board the ship, Edith gorges herself on ice cream. What is your reaction to this?

- a) If a particular food helps ease her pain, she should eat as much and as often as she can.
- b) She should not eat in a manner in which her parents would disapprove. Whether Edith knows this or not, she is showing disrespect towards her parents.
- c) Edith should obey the other adults on the ship who are worried about her eating habits.
- d) This is a dangerous sign. Using or abusing food to avoid pain is a sign of a serious problem.

Do you know how to identify a person who has an eating disorder. Would you say that Edith is showing signs of an eating disorder?

Both Gertie and Edith admit to having "crushes" on a couple of boys. What is a "crush"? How is a crush similar to or different than being "in love"?

On board, Edith befriends an adult African-American doctor who teaches her a new dance called the “Lambeth Walk.” Using the internet, learn about this dance. Find a classmate with whom you would be willing to demonstrate its steps.

When Edith learned how to do the “Lambeth Walk,” she learned that both the Nazis and even some Americans considered that dance (and jazz music) as “degenerate.” What does the word “degenerate” mean? In the United States today, what forms of art do some parents consider “degenerate”? Why do kids tend to like “degenerate” creative expressions? What does this tell you about art?

After Edith has learned the “Lambeth Walk,” a smartly dressed American woman bristled, “You should know, we don’t do that in America.” Given this information, Edith should:

- a) Stop dancing immediately, given the fact that Edith will soon be an American.
- b) Stop dancing the “Lambeth Walk” in public, but continue to practice the dance with her friends in a place where she won’t be noticed.
- c) Stop dancing, but confront the American woman by asking, “Why not?”
- d) Keep on dancing!

Chapter Five: This is “Goodbye”

The *Deutschland* arrives in New York City, and many passengers find themselves deeply moved by the Statue of Liberty and the impressive skyline. Edith meets a stunningly beautiful and confident Jewish chaperone who accompanies the children on a whirlwind three-day tour of the city. Amidst this excitement, Edith must say farewell to her shipboard friends as they disperse themselves across America to new homes. The most painful goodbye is saved for Gertie, who embarks on a cross-country train trip to “Zay-attle.”

Questions/Activities

Describe a time that you have heard and/or seen a person (it could be yourself) misuse an expression or behave in a manner than marked them as “not quite American.”

In either a power-point or self-made project, describe the origins, purpose, and significance of the Statue of Liberty.

Discover who Emma Lazarus was. Memorize several lines of “The New Colossus” and recite them to your class. How does Edith’s story fit Emma Lazarus’ idea of what the United States means to the world?

When Edith and the passengers on the *Deutschland* first see the New York City skyline, many are “stunned into silence. Some of the grownups began to cry, falling to their knees on the deck.” Do some research and learn what the skyline of New York City looked like in the late 1930s. Create your own visual representation of what you have discovered. Have you ever been in a place that caused a similar reaction? Where was it, and why do you think people behaved as they did?

Just before arriving in the United States, Julius tells Edith that “America is my country now.” Edith asks herself, “How could he suddenly be an American when he hadn’t even set foot on her yet?...Germany was still my country. Abandoning it would be like disowning my own family.” Which of the two characters most closely resembles your attitude towards immigrants becoming American?

- Julius is right. An immigrant should cut off all past ties and embrace the new country.
- Edith is right. An immigrant cannot become an American simply by wishing to become one. An immigrant should never forget his or her roots.
- Neither is right. It takes a long time to become an American, but once you become one, you do lose your former ties and identity.

d) Neither is right. An immigrant should focus on developing a “dual” identity. In this case, Julius and Edith should hope to become “German-Americans.”

While in New York City, Edith goes to a theatre and watches a feature Disney cartoon, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. She was not prepared for the negative reaction she experienced. Have you ever seen a film that was designed to make you laugh but instead caused you great worry and/or fear? How is it possible for something designed to be lighthearted to result in sadness?

Chapter Six: *Wilkommen in Amerika*

Edith boards the *20th Century Limited*, a train that carries her to her ultimate destination of Chicago. Awkward, frightened, and acutely aware of how out-of-place she appears, Edith spends time wondering who will meet her at the station. There, she sees her *Onkel Jakob* -- Uncle Jack -- an older version of her father. It is a difficult meeting, and Edith cannot hide her disappointment that her sister Betty and her aunt Mildred did not join Jack. Jack gently insists that she remove her identification tag (#108), but that simple act is wrenching, symbolizing another sundering of relationships, this time with her shipboard friends.

Questions/Activities

What feelings does Edith experience during the train ride from New York City to Chicago?

Create two lists. The first list contains Edith's hopes for her life in Chicago. The second list contains the fears she is feeling.

In what ways does Uncle Jack remind Edith of her father?

Tag # 108 has symbolic importance to Edith. Create an artistic project that demonstrates your understanding of the symbolism of Tag # 108.

Chapter Seven: You Bathe on Tuesdays and Thursdays

Edith's introduction to her aunt Mildred does not go well. Disdainful of Edith's inability to speak English, Mildred's first words to Edith are: "You bathe on Tuesdays and Thursdays." Edith is further wounded by Mildred's casual dismissal of a letter written by Edith's parents, Frieda and Siegmund Westerfeld. Even her sister Betty, whom Edith finally sees after a month's wait, appears different, somehow magically Americanized. Sharing nothing in the present, "it was too painful to speak of the past." Edith gradually adjusts to her servant-like status in Uncle Jack and Aunt Mildred's cramped apartment, and Edith suffers the additional indignity of being labeled a "greenhorn." Sadly, Edith recognizes that "no one at Aunt Mildred's wanted me." The only solace Edith creates for herself occurs before she goes to sleep; she imagines every detail of her former home, desperately trying to picture her previous life.

Questions/Activities

Create a drawing of Aunt Mildred. Your artwork should not only capture what Aunt Mildred looked like, but it should also try to show Aunt Mildred's emotional state.

What is your first impression of Aunt Mildred?

Aunt Mildred insists that Edith speak in English and not in her native tongue, German. In your opinion, an immigrant should:

- a) learn to speak only English as soon as possible and stop using an immigrant's native language.
- b) learn to speak English as soon as possible, but continue to speak the native language at home and with friends from the same language background
- c) not worry about learning to speak English since you can get by without using English in the United States.

Aunt Mildred treats Edith cruelly, criticizing her clothing and her inability to speak English. As you know, adults in authority positions can be cruel to children, unfairly ordering them to do things. If an adult in an authority position unfairly demands that you perform a certain task, you should:

- a) do it. The last thing you want to do is to anger someone like Aunt Mildred, who may threaten even more severe punishments. (In Edith's case, Edith may fear she would be sent back to Germany.)
- b) do it, but after performing the task, insist that the adult give you a reason why.
- c) do it, but deliberately do a less than perfect job.
- d) don't do it. In America, nobody has the right to order anyone to do anything if the person doing the ordering is acting unfairly.

Edith and her sister Betty have an awkward first conversation. With a classmate, create your own dialogue between the two sisters and perform the dialogue in front of your class.

Describe your reaction to the letter Frieda and Siegmund Westerfeld wrote to their American family.

Create a project in words and art that demonstrates your understanding of the term “greenhorn.”

Chapter Eight: Baby Bear's Chair

For an immigrant child, attending public school is the principal means by which he/she gains Americanization and assimilation. In Edith's case, Chicago's O'Keefe Elementary School was a source of alienation, isolation, and humiliation. With her inability to speak English, school officials place the bewildered Edith in a first-grade class, where she sat on a "tiny chair made for six-year olds." While in school, Edith experiences great moral ambivalence when required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and her sense of not belonging increases, rather than decreases, as she rapidly moves up in grades as her proficiency in English increases. Forever the outsider, Edith feels that "none of the chairs felt just right." Adding to her misery is the constant bombardment of verbal taunts, ranging from "Dirty Kraut" to "Dirty Jew." On a daily basis, Edith is the focus of the school bullies. Edith refuses to complete a school project on family history, and the sensitive intervention of a compassionate teacher leads to Uncle Jack giving her his German camera, a Leica. Aunt Mildred quashes any hopes Edith has for friendship with a genuine American girl, Helene Smith, by ridiculing Edith's lack of physical development and impugning the virtue of Helene. Edith takes solace in the public library, where she feels "safe" and the characters in her books don't "tease" her.

Questions/Activities

How long do you think it takes for an immigrant child to become fluent in English?

The principal of O'Keefe Elementary School places Edith in first grade even though she is twelve years old. He has an attitude that immigrants should "sink or swim," that the best thing that could be done for a non-English speaker is to place him/her in an English only environment and not allow any special considerations for that child. What is your opinion of that philosophy?

What is the symbolic significance of the German "school cone"?

What programs does your school have for immigrant students who lack the ability to speak and write English? What programs and activities do you think American schools should offer immigrant students so that they may more easily make the transition to their new country?

What do you do when a new immigrant student, who has an unusual accent and dresses in a manner different from most of your classmates, joins your class, but doesn't seem to fit in?

- a) Invite the student to join your circle of friends.
- b) Ignore the student. At least you are not teasing him or her.
- c) If your friends make fun of the new student, join in. If you don't join in, your friends may turn on you and accuse you of being too friendly.
- d) Be kind and open to the new student. After all, your actions reflect the entire country.

Research the origins and changes made to the "Pledge of Allegiance." In a power point or written project, discuss and/or describe what you have learned. What are your feelings about requiring students to recite the "Pledge of Allegiance?"

Every day, Edith's class began with the reciting of the "Pledge of Allegiance." This made Edith uncomfortable since she didn't understand a word of it and the students' upraised arms looked very much like the Nazi salute. What do you think an immigrant student should do when asked to stand and say the "Pledge of Allegiance?"

- a) Proudly stand and say it to the best of your ability. This will show your teacher and classmates that you truly want to become an American.
- b) Stand and pretend to say the "Pledge." Nobody will notice that you don't know the words. Even though you may not understand or believe the "Pledge," at least nobody will be angry with you.
- c) Stand, but do not put your hand over your heart. Standing shows you respect America, but you should not pledge anything to a country you still do not understand.
- d) Refuse to stand and sit quietly at your desk. This will have negative consequences, but at least you are being true to yourself.

Create a project around the theme of "bullying." Your project should include a definition of a bully. Why do some students become bullies? What programs should a school have about bullying? What are the differences (if any) between verbal, physical, and electronic (internet, for example) bullying?

As you have read, Edith is a victim of bullying. Her classmates regularly call her cruel names and make fun of her. What should Edith do?

- a) Nothing. Ignore the bullies and hope they stop. After all, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

b) Say or do nothing to the students who bully. However, go to your teacher or some other adult in the school for help.

c) Fight back as hard as you can. You may lose the fight, but you will gain self-respect. There is nothing a bully hates more than being confronted since most bullies are cowards at heart.

Have you ever been in a situation where you simply could not complete an assignment your teacher gave you? Why could you not complete the assignment? How did your failure to complete the assignment make you feel about yourself? How did your teacher and family react?

Uncle Jack gives Edith his treasured German camera, a Leica. What does the camera symbolize?

Describe a time when your parents or guardians made you feel embarrassed about one of your friends. How did you resolve the situation? How much power should parents or guardians have over what kinds of people you choose to befriend?

Every person needs a place where he or she can feel at peace. For Edith, that place was the library. What special place gives you a sense of peace or solace?

Design a dictionary of words and phrases American teens use that you could give to an immigrant teen to help him or her become American.

Close your eyes and try to picture what a typical American looks like. How close is this mental picture to the picture you have of yourself?

Chapter Nine: Step on a Crack

Edith has a difficult time making the transition to her new home. Constantly aware of her parents' absence, she becomes superstitious, convincing herself that if she engages in certain behaviors, her parents would be able to emigrate from Germany. She tries to sell things door-to-door, but the Great Depression has caused practically all of her neighbors to politely refuse her entreaties. Edith describes her growing affection for baseball, particularly the Chicago White Sox. One Saturday afternoon, Dorothy invites Edith to accompany her friends and her to the movies. There, during a newsreel, Edith, in horror, watches the German pogrom called *Kristallnacht*. In a quiet act of compassion, Dorothy drops several coins into Edith's German Immigration Fund jar. An ominous letter from Edith's mother arrives. In it, Frieda informs Uncle Jack that Edith's father has been taken to the Sachsenhausen Labor Camp. Frieda is becoming more and more desperate as she pleads with her American family for help.

Activities/Questions

Create a multi-media project that defines or discusses the theme of superstitions. What does it mean to be superstitious? Do you have any particular superstitions? Why are people superstitious even though there is no scientific evidence to support such behavior?

Have you ever done chores in your neighborhood for money? What work did you perform and how much did you charge for your services?

Investigate *Kristallnacht*. In a project, describe the event and discuss its significance. What do you think the United States should have done in response to *Kristallnacht*?

Where is Sachsenhausen? Learn what happened to prisoners who were sent there before World War II.

Make a list of your greatest fears. Which of these fears would you be willing to tell your friends?

Chapter Ten: Don't Call Me Julius!

Edith receives a letter from Peter. In it, he describes life in the American South. In it, he admits being perplexed by Jim Crow laws, which remind him of the pervasive anti-Jewish laws in Germany. Half out of curiosity and half out of her not-forgotten crush on Julius, Edith sets out to visit him. She roller-skates six miles to her destination, a beautiful home in one of Chicago's nicer neighborhoods. Dressed in the latest American fashion, Julius is chagrined to see Edith and perturbed at her insistence on using German. He bristles at her, "Don't call me Julius. I'm Jerry now." In his words, "I don't need to think about the past. I'm an American now." Stunned, Edith bids Julius farewell in German. Upon her return to the empty apartment, Edith feels a profound existential loneliness. "I grasped that I was truly on my own. I could depend on no one." She sadly concludes that though she lives with her Uncle Jack, Aunt Mildred, and Cousin Dorothy, Chicago is not her home.

Questions/Activities

William Shakespeare asked, "What's in a name?" What do you think Shakespeare meant by that question?

Create a visual project that focuses on your name. What does your name mean? How did you come by your name? Does anyone else share your name? What are your feelings about your name? Do people ever mispronounce or otherwise show disrespect towards your name? Have you ever thought about changing your name?

Edith discovers that her shipboard friend Julius has changed his name to Jerry. Should an immigrant change his or her name?

- a) Yes. An unusual name invites teasing and a sense of being foreign. After all a name is just a bunch of letters strung together. What is important is what you feel about yourself inside.
- b) No. Your name is your identity. If Americans are too ignorant to understand that not all people have names that can be pronounced easily, that is their problem, not yours.

Edith feels almost invisible at the end of the chapter. What does it mean for a person to feel invisible?

Edith longs for her mother and father to arrive in America. Do you think this is a healthy wish or an unhealthy longing for something that may not happen? Write a letter to Edith that explains your point of view on this issue.

Chapter Eleven: Hankus Pankus

Edith attends her first major league game, at Comiskey Park in Chicago, and has the opportunity to watch her hero, Hank Greenberg of the Detroit Tigers. It is an extraordinary experience, as Edith savors the unique sights, sounds, and smells of watching a major league baseball game. While some fans taunt Greenberg with anti-Semitic insults, others unabashedly cheer for him. To Edith, Hankus Pankus is much more than a ballplayer. Contrasted to her aunt and uncle's relative indifference to being Jewish, "Greenberg was proud to be a Jew and he wasn't afraid to stand up for who he was." When Greenberg connects for a homerun, Edith joins the cheering crowd, sensing for the first time the possibility of being both Jewish and American.

Questions/Activities

Watch the documentary, "The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg," and create a movie review of the film. How many "stars" would you give the film? In your review, make sure you describe some interesting facts about Hammerin' Hank.

Why do you think Edith takes such a deep interest in Hank Greenberg?

How important are sports to immigrant children? In what ways do sports help immigrants learn how to become American?

Do you have a sports hero? a musical hero? an actor or actress who is your hero? Create a project that focuses on your hero.

There has been a lot of debate as to whether sports stars should be "role models" for children. What is your opinion on that topic.

Edith notes that Hank Greenberg "wasn't afraid to stand up for who he was." What does that mean?

What specific insults have you heard about racial/ethnic/religious minorities? How did you react to them?

Edith finds inspiration and comfort in the Jewish baseball hero, Hank Greenberg. In your opinion, who is worthy of being identified as a "hero?"

- a) Anyone with special talent who makes you feel more hopeful about your own life.
- b) Anyone with lots of power or money who can make other people do what they want them to do.
- c) Any person who has sacrificed him or herself for others.

d) Family members who do not get much recognition for being good people, but whose lives are admirable.

Create a power point or multi-media presentation on the theme of “being a hero.” Consider the following questions as you create your project: Who are your heroes? What makes a person into a hero? What qualities do we value in those individuals? How does a person become a hero?

Chapter Twelve: I Took You In

The tension between Aunt Mildred, Dorothy, and Edith reaches the boiling point when Edith returns from Comiskey Park and Mildred orders her to clean up the house after Dorothy's birthday party (to which Edith had not been invited). After Dorothy deigns to invite Edith into her room in order to show off her presents, Edith snaps and says, "I'm not here to clean up after you....I have feelings, too." Overhearing Edith's protest, Aunt Mildred upbraids Edith, mocking her lack of physical development and her apparent lack of gratitude. Then, she unleashes a thunderbolt: Mildred, after commenting on the lack of other German immigrant children in the community, defends herself. While others are "pretending you people don't even exist...I did something...I took you in." As Edith deconstructs Mildred's sentence, Edith receives a startling epiphany. Despite Mildred's haughty disdain and emotional coldness, Edith acknowledges that Mildred "*had* done more than most." This causes Edith to reconsider her own definition of family. Eventually, in an act of atonement, Dorothy welcomes Edith into her bedroom and apologizes for her own indifference and cruelties. The two share a meaningful reconciliation.

Questions/Activities

For months, Aunt Mildred has required Edith to act as a servant in the house. Why does Edith pick this particular moment to protest her condition?

What is the importance of the following sentence: "I took you in."

Have your feelings about Aunt Mildred changed since you first met her? Why or why not?

What is an "epiphany?" What epiphany does Edith have in this chapter? Describe an epiphany you have had in your own life. How did it occur? Did your life change as a result of it?

In a research project, investigate the United States' policy towards German Jewish refugees during the 1930s.

Consider the word "family." In a power point or multi-media project, describe the idea of "family." Use the following questions to help you develop your ideas: What exactly is a family? Do members of a family have to be related by blood? In what ways is your family special or unique?

Create a power point or multi-media presentation about your family and its history.

Dorothy recognizes that she has mistreated Edith and tries to apologize. What do you think is the best way to say you're sorry?

- a) Tell the person "I'm sorry if you feel that way." You are not responsible for their feelings.
- b) Avoid confronting the person and hope the situation blows over.
- c) Tell the person, "I'm sorry" and ask how you can repair the situation.
- d) Don't use words. Do something that shows how badly you feel. Talk is cheap; actions speak louder than words.

Chapter Thirteen: Change!

Still pre-pubescent, Edith has a significant conversation with her sympathetic social worker, Mrs. Goldstein. Well aware that she is the “smallest girl” in her class and still has not experienced her monthly period, Edith painfully acknowledges that she looks “like a child among adults.” She agrees with Mrs. Goldstein’s suggestion that Edith begin hormone treatments. Edith confesses her admiration of Hank Greenberg to Mrs. Goldstein as well. After the 1940 World Series, Greenberg registered for the newly instituted military draft, instituted by President Roosevelt. Greenberg’s enlistment causes Edith to feel both great pride and dread. In order to keep Hank close to her, Edith decides to ask Dorothy if she could wear her mother’s Jewish star. Comforted, Edith feels the Star of David next to her heart. The hormone treatments take effect, and Edith suddenly has “mountains” on her chest, a discovery that Edith hopes will stop the merciless teasing she has received about her appearance. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Hank Greenberg returns to active military duty, and Edith receives an official notice that she is to report to the post office and register as an “enemy alien.”

Activities/Questions

In a letter, Edith tries to explain baseball to her mother, who has never seen the sport being played. Have you ever tried to explain an activity that you enjoy to a person who knows nothing about it? Were you successful in your explanation? Try writing a letter about the Internet to a person who has no knowledge of computers.

A doctor recommends that Edith receive hormone treatments to get her “growing...and fast.” Should a girl who is underdeveloped receive these treatments?

- a) Only as a last resort. If she doesn’t reach puberty by the age of fifteen or sixteen, then these treatments are necessary.
- b) No. Find other ways to make yourself appear more developed.
- c) Absolutely not. You should be satisfied with who you are and how you appear, regardless of your age and physical development.

We live in an age where people can change their appearance with relative ease (through over-the-counter products as well as surgical procedures). What is your opinion about this?

Edith feels very uncomfortable undressing before her physical education class. She senses that all eyes are on her, and this makes her feel all the more isolated and ridiculed. Have things changed much since Edith’s time in school?

Hank Greenberg is “drafted” into the military. In a power point or multi-media project, research the history of military drafts in the United States. Make sure you present your opinion about a draft. Do you feel that everyone who lives in America should be required to serve the country for a period of time?

Where is Pearl Harbor? What happened there on December 7, 1941, that changed the course of American history?

In the last paragraph of the chapter, Edith contrasts her status to that of her hero, Hank Greenberg. In an artistic project, depict the different self-definitions.

Chapter 14: Labeled

Edith comes to grips with her status as an “enemy alien.” In Germany, the Nazi government required her family to register as Jews; now, in the United States, Edith must register as an “enemy alien.” Her sister, Betty, tries to explain the various restrictions that limit both of them. Preparing Edith’s documents at the post office becomes an ordeal for Edith and Uncle Jack, who has accompanied her. An officious postal clerk insults Uncle Jack by questioning his nationality and insists that Jack turn over his Leica camera. As Uncle Jack helps Edith complete the required forms, Edith sees Julius. They glance at each other, and then Julius quickly averts his eyes in shame. Edith has matured and recognizes that Julius feels even greater shame than she. “It must be especially hard on Julius, who was so determined to be an American. I wondered what he wrote in the box that asked for his name: Julius or Jerry?”

Questions/Activities

What is an enemy? What is an alien? In your opinion, what exactly is an “enemy alien?”

In a power point or poster project answer the following question: What policies should the United States follow towards “aliens” whose country may be at war with the United States.

After 9/11/2001, American schools reported many acts of discrimination against students of Islamic background. Research this period of history and create a report that not only describes the types of discrimination Islamic students endured but attempts to answer why American students would react with such hostility.

In a research project, investigate what occurred to American citizens of Japanese ancestry during World War II.

The United States classified Edith (who was fourteen years old) as an “enemy alien,” a person living in the United States whose citizenship is that of a country at war with the United States. What is your response to this labeling?

- a) No response. It is the truth. Edith was a German; Germany was at war with the United States. Therefore, Edith is an “enemy alien.”
- b) It is not fair to label a child of fourteen as an “enemy alien.” The United States should have developed some other term for those too young to pose an actual threat to the country.
- c) It is absurd. Labeling does nothing but cause hurt, shame, and pain for those whose only crime is that he or she is a citizen of an enemy country.

Create a power point or multi-media project around the theme of “labeling.” What “labels” have you had in your life? Have you ever labeled someone else? What purpose(s) does labeling serve? Imagine that Edith has written a letter to you. She has described what happened to her in the post office. She is still very confused why the United States has labeled her as an “enemy alien.” Write a letter to Edith in which you try to answer her questions.

Describe the symbolic significance of Uncle Jack turning over his Leica camera.

Why does Julius turn away from Edith in the post office? Should Edith have walked over and spoken with him?

Chapter Fifteen: What Did You Expect?

On a beautiful spring day in 1942, Edith returns to the apartment and opens a letter from Mina. The contents stagger Edith. In the letter, Mina tells Edith that her grandmother and parents have died in concentration camps. Mina concludes her letter with the gentle advice: “To honor their memory, Tiddy, we must live.” This news causes Edith to moan “like an injured animal’s cry.” Aunt Mildred acts irritated when Edith shares this devastating news, responding with the curt, “What did you expect?” That evening, Uncle Jack shares her grief, confessing his own guilt in not being able to save his brother. Later, Edith considers removing her mother’s Star of David, but in an act of great sympathy, Dorothy insists that Edith continue to wear it. With the telephone receiver “heavy” in her hands, Edith speaks with her sister Betty, who tries to comfort Edith by reminding her that their parents did the very best they could by sending the two daughters to America, where they could survive and ultimately thrive. Edith senses a profound existential loneliness with the loss of her parents.

Questions/Activities

Imagine yourself as a classmate of Edith. You have just learned of her parents’ deaths in German concentration camps. Write a letter of condolence to Edith. Before you write, make a mental list of the most important things you want to say to her.

Explain what Mina means by telling her friend Edith, “We must live.”

What is your reaction to Aunt Mildred’s response to Edith?

In a power point or multi-media project, depict your response to death. Your project could answer some of the following questions: In what ways have you experienced death? What are some responses to death? How should people respond to those who have suffered the death of a close one? Are some types of death “worse” than others? What attitude should people adopt after losing a loved one?

Create a chart that explains how each of the characters in the chapter responds to the death of the Westerfelds.

What is the symbolism of the Star of David necklace?

Chapter 16: We Must Live

Edith mourning is filled with shock, anger, and guilt. Emotionally exhausted, Edith is angry with her father for breaking his promise but even more disgusted with herself for not doing enough to save him. Haunted by Lake Michigan, Edith remembers that her father sought solace along the banks of the Rhein River, but she is unable to bring herself to sit on Lake Michigan's shoreline. Initially, water held the promise of reunion; now "it separated the present from the past," resonating an irrevocable loss. One Saturday, Edith hears the "terrible cries" of a woman who has received word of her son's death from two Army officers, and the emotional impact of this event shatters Edith. Bereft and frightened, she imagines hearing her father's voice, advising her that "water always calms me." There, by the waters of Lake Michigan, Edith recognizes that her private suffering is but a part of an even greater hurt, one experienced by all who are fighting against the prejudice that decimated Edith's family. She understands that thousands of Americans "were fighting to stop Hitler, fighting so that no more Westerfelds would be murdered. And not one of them even knew my family." This hard-earned knowledge permits Edith to give voice to her heartache, to verbalize her losses. As twilight settles on the Chicago skyline, Edith wonders if what she is seeing is night or day, "an ending or a beginning." Regardless of the answer, she resolves to live.

Questions/Activities

In a power point or artistic project, demonstrate your understanding of "Blue and Gold Star Families."

How do you think the United States should honor soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in service to our country?

What is Edith's epiphany when she observes the mourning of a family that has learned of the death of one of its sons?

Edith has to bear the burden of surviving without her parents, who were murdered by the Nazis. What is the best response to this devastating situation?

- a) Try to put it behind you as quickly as you can and face the future with optimism and hope. It doesn't do any good to dwell on past sadness.
- b) Give yourself plenty of time to understand what has happened to you, even if it means that some of your friends and family may become impatient with you.
- c) Seek out other people who have had similar experiences so that you may support each other.
- d) Never forget what has happened and make sure that your children know about this painful loss as well.

Research the history of the Veteran's Administration. Are there any Veteran's Administration hospitals in your area? If so, would you consider visiting one and speaking to some of the patients?

Edith recalls her rabbi telling the congregation, "He who acts to save a single life acts to save an entire world." Learn more about this phrase from the Jewish Talmud, and in a power point or multi-media project describe what you think this statement means.

Edith's rabbi says that Jews "value life above all else." What does that phrase mean?

The title of the novel is: Is It Night or Day? How does the title capture Edith's journey?

Is the conclusion of the novel hopeful or not? What reasons would you give to support your opinion?