

DISCUSSION GUIDE

for Educators, Librarians, and Book Clubs

SKATING WITH THE STATUE OF LIBERTY



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SKATING WITH THE STATUE OF LIBERTY



ABOUT THE BOOK

Skating with the Statue of Liberty

By Susan Lynn Meyer

Published by Random House Children's Books

Paperback ISBN 9780307929556 (4/17)

Hardcover ISBN 9780385741552

Library ISBN 9780375990106

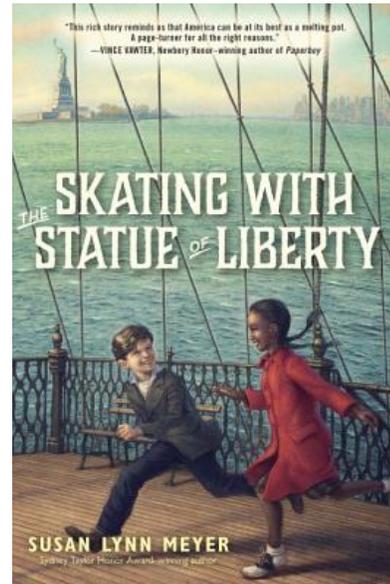
Lexile: 710L

Age Range: 8-12 Years

A Junior Library Guild Selection

A Sydney Taylor Notable Book

In this gripping and poignant companion to Sydney Taylor Honor Award winner **Black Radishes**, Gustave faces racism and anti-Semitism in New York City during World War II, but ultimately finds friendship and hope.



After escaping the Germans in Nazi-occupied France, Gustave and his family have made it to America at last. But life is not easy in New York. Gustave's clothes are all wrong, he can barely speak English, and he is worried about his best friend, Marcel, who is in danger back in France. Then there is September Rose, the most interesting girl in school, who doesn't seem to want to be friends with him. Gustave is starting to notice that not everyone in America is treated equally, and his new country isn't everything he'd expected. But he isn't giving up.

"Well paced with fully realized characters, this provides a textured look at race, refugees, war, and the process of creating a new life."

—*Booklist*

"The everyday details of the story guide readers, allowing them to enjoy following Gustave's entry into the United States and his growth toward appreciating all that's ahead for him in his new home...Strong historical content, rich descriptions, and smart subtleties about the links between history and current events."

—*School Library Journal*

"Readers may gradually start to think of the characters as close friends...The conflict might feel like it's happening to people the readers have always known. A sweet book that readers will find sneaks up on them."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

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ABOUT THE EARLIER NOVEL

Although **Skating with the Statue of Liberty** can be read as a stand-alone novel, readers can explore why Gustave and his family were forced to come to America in the award-winning novel **Black Radishes**. You can find a curriculum written for this novel by the Virginia Holocaust Museum at bit.ly/BlackRadishes.

Black Radishes

By Susan Lynn Meyer

Published by Random House Children's Books

Paperback ISBN 9780375858222

Hardcover ISBN 9780385738811

Library ISBN 9780385907484

Age Range: 8 - 12 Years

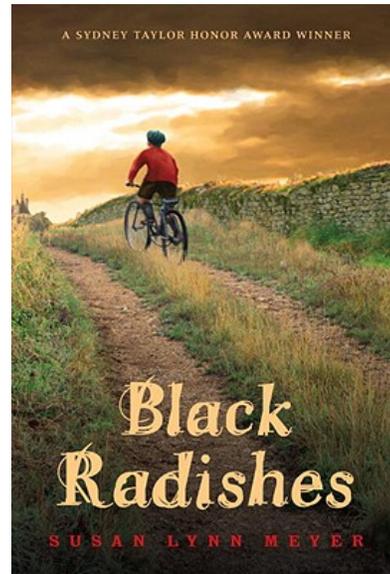
A Sydney Taylor Honor Award Winner

A Bank Street Best Book of the Year

An Instructor Magazine Best Book

A Massachusetts Book Award Must-Read Book

Gustave doesn't want to move from the exciting city to the boring countryside, far from his cousin Jean-Paul and his best friend, the mischievous Marcel. But he has no choice. It is March of 1940, and Paris is not a safe place for Jews.



When Paris is captured by the Nazis, Gustave knows that Marcel, Jean-Paul, and their families must make it out of the occupied zone. And when he learns that his new friend Nicole works for the French Resistance, he comes up with a plan that just might work. But going into Occupied France is a risky thing to do when you are Jewish. And coming back alive? That is nearly impossible.

"Full of tension, this coming-of-age story presents a picture of life during the early days of World War II." —*Bulletin*

"An excellent recent novel that can introduce readers to a wider world...Meyer builds the tension by using real-life events (detailed in an author's note) and creates in Gustave a very believable boy who behaves bravely when he must."
—*The Horn Book*

"Meyer shines light on the bravery of Resistance fighters, and her story...[is] a gripping read comparable to Marilyn Sachs's classic *A Pocket Full of Seeds*, Carol Matas's *Greater Than Angels*, and Norma Fox Mazer's *Good Night, Maman*."
—*School Library Journal*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Lynn Meyer novels were inspired by stories she grew up hearing about her father's childhood escape from Nazi-occupied France and his early years in New York City. She lives with her family in Massachusetts and teaches literature and creative writing at Wellesley College.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was produced by Curious City and written by educator Catherine Maryse Anderson. Find more guides like this at CuriousCityDPW.com.

Catherine Maryse Anderson has an extensive 15-year background as a public school literacy and humanities teacher in Portland, Maine. She spent two years as a literacy coach for Portland Public Schools and lead statewide symposiums on building educator capacity for cross-cultural competency in the classroom from early childcare through college. She was a runner up for the *Teaching Tolerance Educator of the Year*. Catherine has been involved in ongoing performing arts projects for twenty years and is a published poet and essayist.

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Look for additional background knowledge at:
<http://susanlynnmeyer.com/category/skating-with-the-statue-of-liberty/>.

Immigration Restrictions During World War II

Anne Frank, famous the world over for the diary and legacy she left behind, was born the same year as author Susan Lynn Meyer's father. Susan's father, the model for Gustave in the novel **Skating with the Statue of Liberty**, was granted refuge in America along with his family. Anne Frank and her family were denied. How does immigration policy in America in the 1930s and 1940s continue to have an impact on our culture?

To emigrate means to leave one's own country to settle in another country permanently. During World War II, more than 340,000 Jews were forced by the German Nazis to emigrate from Germany and Austria. Others fled or attempted to flee from countries the Nazis invaded.

The novel **Skating with the Statue of Liberty** opens in January of 1942. Gustave and his family are fleeing France, which is under partial German occupation. Gustave leaves behind his best friend Marcel, who he fears has been taken by the Nazis. (To learn more about Marcel and what Gustave's family faced in Nazi-occupied France, read Susan Lynn Meyer's earlier novel, **Black Radishes**.)

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Immigration Restrictions During World War II (cont.)

They sought to remove that contrived threat by any means necessary. Jews who fled their home countries because of this severe persecution and the threat of imprisonment in internment camps (camps the world would later learn were death camps) were refugees, or people seeking safety. The United Nations defines a refugee as someone who fled his or her home and country owing to “a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

Refuge is another word for safety. Are refugees always safe?

When Gustave and his family left France to live and practice their beliefs freely, they arrived in the United States as immigrants. An immigrant is someone who comes to live permanently in a foreign country. As a Jewish child, traveling to America from France during World War II, Gustave was, therefore, not just an immigrant, but also a refugee.

While a few families, like Gustave’s, were allowed into the United States, many more were denied entry. Already, by June of 1939, more than 300,000 Jewish immigrants had applied to enter this country. Most of them were not allowed in because a growing sense of xenophobia (fear of foreigners) led the United States to maintain low quotas for entering visas. The Great Depression and the scarcity jobs at home added to the growing concern that allowing displaced persons from abroad into the United States would be disastrous. The most tragic of these episodes was when more than 900 refugees fleeing Nazi Germany aboard The St. Louis were denied entry to Cuba and the United States. They were forced to return to Europe after President Roosevelt gave into exaggerated claims that Jewish refugees were potentially Nazi spies and would be putting United States citizens at risk. Many of the passengers later perished in the Holocaust.

Later, when the full extent of the Nazi regime’s crimes were acknowledged, more than 400,000 displaced persons from World War II were granted visas to enter the United States permanently between 1943 and 1945. More than 96,000 of these new Americans were Holocaust survivors.

Throughout history, people have immigrated by choice, or against their will as refugees from one country to another. *What are some examples of the immigrant experience that you are familiar with in your own family history, or that you have learned about in literature or the performing arts?*

Approximately 65.3 million people are displaced somewhere in the world today. 21.3 million of those people have registered as refugees. *What countries are people fleeing from? Why? What are the similarities and differences between this refugee crisis and the crisis of the Jews in the 1930s-1940s?*

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Immigration Restrictions During World War II (cont.)

Like Gustave, Susan Lynn Meyer's father was a Jewish refugee from France. *If Susan Lynn Meyer's family had not been given entry into the U.S., what could have been the impact? Would you be reading and sharing the novel Skating with the Statue of Liberty? What are some of the gifts that you and your family bring to your community that we would never know about if you were not allowed to live here?*

Sources & Additional Resources:

"Holocaust Encyclopedia: Refugees"

from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005139>

"Teaching Resources" from the UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency:

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/teaching-resources.html>

"Teaching About the Refugee Crisis and Making a Difference" from IAmSyria.org:

<http://www.iamsyria.org/teaching-about-the-refugee-crisis-and-making-a-difference.html>

United Nations "World Refugee Day":

<http://www.un.org/en/events/refugeeday/>

Anne Frank: Center for Mutual Respect:

<http://annefrank.com/>

Ten Myths About Immigration from *Teaching Tolerance*:

<http://www.tolerance.org/immigration-myths>

Meet Young Immigrants:

http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/immigration/young_immigrants/

Anti-Semitism in the U.S. in the 1940's

Susan Lynn Meyer's novel **Skating With the Statue of Liberty** opens in 1942 on board a transport ship bound for America. Gustave and his family are on that ship to escape the persecution of Jews in their native France. As has been the case for immigrants and refugees arriving to the United States throughout history, their expectations and the reality of life in the United States differ. Gustave expects he is leaving anti-Semitism and prejudice behind in Europe.

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Anti-Semitism in the U.S. in the 1940's (cont.)

Anti-Semitism, or hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group (Source: Merriam Webster), has plagued the world for more than 2,000 years. Jews arriving in the United States in the 1940s found that America was not free of this blight.

Gustave's family encounters anti-Semitism in both subtle and overt ways. On their very first train ride to New York, Gustave's hope of living without racial and religious prejudice is shattered:

“Refugees,” Gustave heard a man say. Then from behind him, he heard a woman utter a one-syllable word. It was the first time he had heard the word in English, yet somehow he knew what it meant. He knew that tone of voice. It was the same tone of voice in which he had heard certain people in France hiss “juifs,” the same tone of voice in which Germans spat out “Juden.” He hadn't thought he would hear that particular mixture of repulsion and smug superiority here in America. But he had. The woman had muttered “Jews.”

—**Skating With the Statue of Liberty**, p. 28.

As you are reading the novel, notice when the author depicts other anti-Semitic encounters. *Is such prejudice exhibited at Gustave's school or in the family's search for housing? Have you experienced subtle or outright hostility directed at your cultural background or religious beliefs? If you haven't had that experience, how does the author help you to understand what it feels like?*

While the origins of racism and prejudice are deeply complex, anti-Semitism in the U.S. in the 1940s was fueled by unjust propaganda from Europe. For example, after World War I, the German government claimed that the Communist Jews, acting as spies, caused the Germans to lose the war. The Germans warned that the Jews, and thus Communism, could take over Europe. This fear of the spread of Communism (a form of government that was considered a great threat to democracy) was echoed by xenophobes in the United States. Anti-communism fed anti-Semitism.

Others in America feared that Hitler's mad conquest of Europe would expand to an attempted takeover of the United States. Propaganda and rumors were spread that Jewish refugees in the United States were acting as German spies in exchange for protection of their families in Europe. Anti-German feelings fed anti-Semitism.

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Anti-Semitism in the U.S. in the 1940's (cont.)

Other Americans believed, as they have with every new population of refugees, that the new arrivals would take away housing or jobs from long-term Americans. Anti-immigration feelings feed anti-Semitism.

Looking back, it is hard to believe that anti-Semitic Americans were not jolted out of their xenophobia in the face of the extreme anti-Semitic atrocities being committed against the Jews in Europe. In the early 1940s, however, many Americans did not know about the Holocaust.

In 1942 the United States Department of Justice withheld a report from the World Jewish Congress about the Nazis' threat to annihilate the Jews. Fearing that this horror could be only a rumor and that the United States would have no success in a large-scale rescue attempt, the government did not act and did not inform citizens. It was not until 1944 that President Roosevelt, under pressure from his own government and the American Jewish community, took public action to rescue European Jews.

If the U.S. government had shared the information from the World Jewish Congress with the American people in 1942, do you think the U.S. would have acted sooner to aid the Jews? How would this information have changed the perception and welcome of refugees like Gustave and his family? How does their experience compare to that of those seeking asylum in the United States today?

How can extreme expressions or acts of prejudice make people reassess their own views? Have you ever shared an opinion with someone, but changed your opinion when you saw that person do something you did not like or respect?

Sources & Additional Resources:

Antisemitism Bibliography from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
<https://www.ushmm.org/research/research-in-collections/search-the-collections/bibliography/antisemitism>

“Antisemitism” from Holocaust Encyclopedia of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005175>

“The United States and the Holocaust” from Holocaust Encyclopedia of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005182>

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Anti-Semitism in the U.S. in the 1940's (cont.)

“United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1941-1952” from Holocaust Encyclopedia of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007094>

“Photo Exhibit ‘PM New York Daily: 1940-48’ Rediscovered one of NYC’s Lost Newspapers” from Untapped Cities
<http://untappedcities.com/2016/01/22/photo-exhibit-pm-new-york-daily-1940-48-rediscovered-one-of-nycs-lost-newspapers/>

“Antisemitism in History: World War I” from Holocaust Encyclopedia of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007166>

The French Resistance

Black Radishes, the novel that precedes **Skating with the Statue of Liberty**, offers readers a look into the everyday people who risked their lives for the French Resistance. Readers of both books will marvel at the bravery and cleverness of Gustave’s friend Nicole, who, with her father, helps move Jews and others out of France’s Nazi-occupied zone.

The French Resistance movement is an umbrella term which refers to numerous anti-German resistance movements that were based within France during World War II. While groups and individuals had different strategies and leadership, they were all opposed to the installation of the collaborative Franco-German government in Vichy France from 1940-1944 and sought to end German occupation of France and beyond.

Resistance members were men and women of all faiths and economic backgrounds. They maintained underground newspapers, provided safe houses and transport for Jews, delivered valuable information to the Allies, and interfered with the Nazis’ ability to communicate and disperse supplies.

Children like Nicole did play a role in the Resistance. Jean-Jacques Auduc, celebrated as France’s youngest Resistance member, carried messages in the handlebars of his bicycle starting when he was 11 years old. His whole family played a role in the Resistance. Even Jean-Jacques’ grandmother was a traveling radio

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French Resistance (cont.)

operator for the movement. By the time Jean-Jacques was 12, he was actively spying and committing acts of sabotage.

In **Skating with the Statue of Liberty**, Gustave writes letters to France not only to maintain his friendship with Nicole, but also in hopes of discovering news of his Jewish friend Marcel, whose fate is unknown. Gustave asks his father, “Nicole’s father is in the Resistance...They helped us, so why couldn’t they help Marcel?” (p. 41) Gustave is haunted by the news coming from Europe. He is terrified that Marcel is among those captured, imprisoned, and possibly murdered by the Nazis.

At the close of the novel, Gustave receives a cryptic letter from Nicole that reads, “our friend, you know who I mean, he is playing hide-and-seek. He is very good at hiding. Robert is drawing something on the pavement...” (p. 282). When Gustave figures out the riddle, he realizes that this is “a secret message, hidden from the Nazi censors, from the prying eyes that would look over the letter before it left Occupied France. ‘He is very good at hiding.’ She was telling him that Marcel was in hiding! Marcel was alive!” (pp. 282-3)

According to Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, “approximately seven thousand Jewish children in France were saved during the Holocaust due to the courageous efforts of various groups, and brave individuals too many to mention.” From individual families who took in a single child to heroes like Madame Germaine Chesneau of Chateau de Peyrins, who housed 108 Jewish children, citizens across France helped children escape, obtain forged papers and form new identities, and hide throughout the war.

As the war raged on, the Resistance movement gathered momentum and resources. They mounted attacks against the Germans, helped Allied airmen get to safety, and provided increased intelligence to Allied forces that eventually led to victory. The world owes a great debt to these men, women, and even children who risked their lives to protect Jewish neighbors and to defeat the Nazis through stealth, intelligence, and fortitude.

Do you think you would have been as brave as Nicole to share stories written in a secret way to share information? How do you think that Nicole’s efforts helped Gustave and Marcel? What are other ways that you know of that people have been part of resistance movements either in history or in stories? What are some of the common themes of resistance?

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French Resistance (cont.)

Sources & Additional Resources:

“Hidden Children in France During the Holocaust” from The International School for Holocaust Studies, Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center
http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/newsletter/24/hidden_children.asp#!prettyPhoto

Messages in Handlebars: the Youngest Resistance Fighter by Kendrick Kirk (Author), Jean-Jacques Auduc (Narrator), Claire Kirk (Translator). Published by Kendrick Kirk, 2011.

The Butterfly by Patricia Polacco. Published by Penguin Random House, 2000.

“The French Resistance” from The History Learning Site (UK)
<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/world-war-two/resistance-movements/the-french-resistance/>

“Non Jewish Resistance” from the Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Memorial Holocaust Museum
<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007332>

Video: “French Resistance” from the History Channel
<http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/world-war-ii-history/videos/french-resistance>

Double V Campaign

Today we are surrounded by logos and slogans designed to capture our attention, draw us to a product, or encourage our participation in a group or movement. Shoes and other items of clothing often have a symbol instead of a name, and phrases like “Yes We Can” or “Kinder Gentler Nation” are associated with presidential campaigns.

In **Skating with the Statue of Liberty**, we learn about the Double V through September Rose and her brother, Alan. The Double V as a symbol and slogan was started in 1942 by the , one of the era’s most prominent African American Newspapers, also known as “The Black Press.” Regional and national newspapers today feature stories about all the people in the region and the country, but in 1942, the United States was still a very segregated country. As a result, African American communities relied on the Black Press to ensure their news was told and shared.

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Double V Campaign (cont.)

In World War II, great numbers of African Americans were asked to fight for freedom against the “Axis of Evil” abroad, only to return home to a country still very much in the grips of fundamentally racist Jim Crow-era beliefs. Despite risking their lives for this country, when they returned home, they did not have the ability to make the same kinds of choices about their lives as their fellow white soldiers did. In the spirit of naming this bind, and trying to help African Americans write themselves into their country’s history in a patriotic and emboldened way, James G. Thompson, a 26-year-old African American man, introduced the Double V concept in a letter to the editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*. His voice is considered one of the main sparks of the Double V campaign.

In it, Thompson wrote: “Being an American of dark complexion and some 26 years, these questions flash through my mind: ‘Should I sacrifice my life to live half American?’ ‘Will things be better for the next generation in the peace to follow?’ ‘The V for victory sign is being displayed prominently in all so-called democratic countries, which are fighting for victory...Let we colored Americans adopt the double V for a double victory. The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies from within.’”

—James G. Thompson, 1942, Source: Learner.org

[**Historical Note:** The term “African American” was not used to describe people of color until the 1970s. In the 1940s, Black people most often described themselves as “Negro” or as “colored.”]

Shortly thereafter, other African American newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, *The Baltimore Afro-American*, and *The New Amsterdam* in New York City carried stories brought into focus by the Double V campaign. Stories expressed outrage about the treatment of African American soldiers abroad and citizens at home.

The Double V campaign aimed to change the way African American soldiers were seen and celebrated both at home and abroad. Each week Black Press newspapers featuring the Double V image would relate stories about African American war heroes and African American war effort volunteers at home and would encourage readers to buy war bonds. Often papers included endorsements by political figures and celebrities to call more attention to the cause. Double V Clubs were formed to gather items to send to soldiers overseas; to meet with businessmen about nondiscriminatory hiring practices; and when conversation failed, to organize demonstrations, as Alan and his contemporaries did in **Skating with the Statue of Liberty**. But on the other side of this was a growing frustration that not enough was being done fast enough. Tension in African American communities began to mount, leading to large-scale riots in Chicago and New York.

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Double V Campaign (cont.)

Interestingly, the Black Press was often caught in the middle, fearing that if they did not condemn the riots or protests, then all African Americans might be seen as taking away attention and resources from the United States to defeat of the Axis powers abroad. But what the Double V campaign gave way to was a deepened sense of purpose and voice in many communities, leading to Freedom Rallies in the late forties and several long-term changes, like the breaking of the color barrier in sports like baseball in 1947 with Jackie Robinson and President Truman's Executive Order to desegregate the Armed Forces in July, 1948.

What is a cause or movement that you believe deeply in? What was it about the slogans or logos they employed that caught your attention or helped you to understand their message?

*What is it about the Double V campaign that may have particularly appealed to Alan in **Skating with the Statue of Liberty**? What is it about being part of this movement that might have felt dangerous to September Rose's grandmother? Have you ever wanted to participate in a cause or movement that someone else did not want you to be part of? How did you handle that? Do you think Alan made the right choice?*

Sources & Additional Resources:

TeachNYPL: World War II and the Double V Campaign (Gr. 10-12)
<https://www.nypl.org/blog/2013/11/12/classroom-connections-wwii-double-v-campaign-gr-10-12>

"The Double V Campaign in NYC" by Hannah Lee, The History of NYC
<http://hannahlee.web.unc.edu/2014/10/09/the-double-v-campaign-in-nyc/>

"The Double Victory Campaign and the Black Press: A Conservative Approach to 'Victory' at Home and Abroad" by Haley D. O'Shaughnessy, *Inquires Journal*
<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1001/the-double-victory-campaign-and-the-black-press-a-conservative-approach-to-victory-at-home-and-abroad>

"What Was Black America's Double War?" by Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Root*
<http://www.theroot.com/what-was-black-americas-double-war-1790896568>

"Democracy: Double Victory at Home-Abroad," American History in the Making
https://www.learner.org/courses/amerhistory/resource_archive/resource.php?unitChoice=19&ThemeNum=3&resourceType=2&resourceID=10106

"The Tuskegee Airmen at a Glance," The National WWII Museum: New Orleans
<http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education/for-students/ww2-history/at-a-glance/tuskegee-airmen.html>

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Tin Can Drive

In the final chapter of **Skating with the Statue of Liberty**, Gustave and September Rose get “into a long line of kids carrying crates and bags full of flattened cans” (p. 285). When they reach the front of the line, they are thanked for “helping our boys overseas.” Like the characters at Battery Park that day, Americans of all ages took part in a massive campaign to support the war effort. Citizens saved and collected metal scraps to “become bombs to defeat the Axis of Evil abroad!”

Gum wrappers; tin foil balls; metal cans; and copper, iron, and tin scraps were all in demand. Children would go from door to door in urban and rural communities asking everyone for contributions. Who didn’t have an old broken rake, a garbage pail lid, or a baking dish to add to the cause? Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops were often leaders of the drives. No one was too young to do their part!

It is not entirely clear how many munitions, bombs, weapons, tanks, planes, or naval destroyers were actually fabricated from these collected metals. Regardless of their physical utility, the drives had an undeniable psychological purpose — gathering scrap metal increased morale. By giving people at home a sense that they were contributing to the war effort, they felt a deeper commitment to the war and the citizens fighting abroad. Recall when September Rose’s grandmother in **Skating With the Statue of Liberty** pulled down her beloved metal bird sculptures and gave them to September Rose to donate as a “way to bring Dad home” (p. 287). Her son’s safe return was entirely out of her hands, but the successful metal drive propaganda made September Rose’s grandmother feel like she was truly assisting.

In addition to scrap metal, patriotic Americans were encouraged to collect and donate rubber, to conserve fuel by carpooling, and to plant “victory gardens” to feed their families and save resources. Each of these efforts were thought to contribute to the Allies’ chances of victory abroad.

How do current school and home recycling programs help students feel like they are working toward a greater cause? How has the modern school gardening effort taught students about self-sufficiency and healthy eating? What drives have students contributed to in times of crisis? How could classrooms and readers help their communities and the larger world through action?

Sources & Additional Resources:

“Scrap Metal and Rubber Drives” from School Library Education Consortium
<http://uwsslec.libguides.com/c.php?g=416691&p=2839329>

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Tin Can Drive (cont.)

“Rationing & Scrap Drives” from Farming in the 1940s
http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life_08.html

“Girl Scouts and WWII” from The National WWII Museum, New Orleans
<http://www.nww2m.com/2012/03/girls-scouts-and-wwii/>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

The author immediately establishes that the story begins on the Atlantic Ocean in 1942 on a ship, in the middle of a nightmare. In your own words, retell the story within the nightmare of Marcel and the narrator. What is it that Marcel is trying to hand to Gustave? Why do you think this would be so important for him to hold onto?

Of all the characters who are introduced in the first chapter, which ones do you think will become integral to the story? Which characters do you think will not follow Gustave past the boat’s landing in America? Explain your thinking.

Why are Gustave and his family on this ship? What have they left behind, and what are they hoping for when they arrive here?

What do Marcel’s parents believe America will be like for all of them? What promise does America hold?

Chapter 2

Why do you think people were looking at Gustave in a way that made him feel not welcomed? Do you think his assessment of the meaning behind the looks is accurate? Why might this be the case in Baltimore in 1942?

At the end of Chapter 2, Gustave learns that he went into the “wrong” bathroom, even though he went into the men’s room. Explain why Monsieur Benoit brought this to attention.

Chapter 3

Why did the sight of soldiers in the train station make Gustave nervous?

Why is Gustave trying so hard NOT to remember Paris? Is it working? Recall a time that you really wanted to forget something. Were you able to?

Why do you think the discovery of Mr. Benoit’s hidden gold under the black paint might cause the FBI to get involved?

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Chapter 4

What was Gustave's mother's strategy for evading the agents' need to pat her down? What was she hiding from them? Did she succeed?

Now that Gustave's family has reunited with other family members in America, do you think they will continue to face hardship? What indication do you have that it will be easy or difficult for Gustave and his family to start a new life in America? Try to give one example of each.

Chapter 5

In chapter 5 the author juxtaposes the protest march with the opportunity the boys will have to get library cards once they have an address, even though they will not yet be American citizens. Explain why the author might be offering these two ideas at the same time. Is America the land of opportunity that Gustave believes it is? Is it the land of opportunity for everybody equally?

Note: On pp. 300-301, in the "Author's Note," author Susan Lynn Meyer explains that the racial terms "Negro" and "Colored" used in the novel are "the terms that were used in the 1940s, which the characters would have been familiar with, not those used in the present day."

Chapter 6

Describe the apartment they have agreed to live in. Why aren't they able to get an apartment as nice as the one they lived in in France? Describe how it felt from each character's point of view.

What did the real estate agent mean when she said: "You people like to live together?" Why did Cousin Henri leave that part out of his translation? What did the agent say about African Americans in the building? What do these comments reveal about her and about the times?

Chapter 7

Based on Gustave's letter home to his friend Nicole, what is it about New York that he does like?

What is the significance of his discovery of Joan of Arc to Gustave at this moment? Explain why he drew a "Cross of Lorraine" on the base with water.

Chapter 8-9

Describe the most memorable parts from Gustave's first day in his new school. How did different teachers help Gustave to feel welcomed, or not? How did the students treat him? Did anyone in particular stand out in terms of how they were treating him? Compare it to your own recollection of a memorable beginning (in a new class, on a team, in a new town or country). What about yours and his was similar? Different?

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Find the metaphor in the beginning of the chapter 9 used to explain Gustave's experience at that moment. What is it, and it is effective? Why or why not?

Pick three words that best describe Gustave's character today. Give one example for each.

Chapter 10

Have you ever wanted an item of clothing, or something else, so very badly, but you or your family was not in a position to get it at that time? How did you handle the disappointment? What do you think Gustave will do?

Why did the author include the two different grocery store experiences that Gustave's mother had shopping at the end of the chapter? What did they reveal about the times, and what does it help us learn about his mother?

Chapter 11

Think about the story of your name, or someone in your family. What do you know about its significance? Does the name have any religious or cultural significance? What does it reveal about the teacher's feelings toward Gustave and his background that she chose to "Americanize" his name to Gus?

Teacher Activity: Play a recording of the French National Anthem, "La Marseillaise," and look at the translation. Have students return to the passage in the book where Gustave explains his reaction to the meaning of the words today, standing in this classroom in America. Imagine you were trying to comfort him after music class. What might you ask him, to build a deeper understanding of the war he left behind? What is something about your country of origin that you feel as strongly about?

Chapter 12

Would you say that Gustave is acclimating well to his new school, or that he is still more of an outsider? Select evidence from this chapter to support your thinking.

Pick three character traits you would use to describe Gustave today. Are they the same or different from the ones you chose to describe him after his first day?

Chapter 13

Compare the ocean metaphor in this chapter to the one you identified in chapter nine. Is this one more or less effective in your opinion? What new information does it reveal about Gustave?

In your own words, explain what happened to the letter Gustave received, prior to it arriving in his mailbox. What is censorship? Why was Nicole careful with what she wrote to Gustave?

What part of Gustave's family life can you relate to? How is it alike or similar to how things look where you live?

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Chapter 14

Why did Gustave dive under the bush in the park? What was he hiding from? Recall another character in a story you have read who overcame an equally frightening moment.

Chapter 15

What is it about Gustave that September Rose seems to delight in when they spend time together? Do you think their friendship is going to become integral to the story? Why or why not?

Enrichment: Who is Josephine Baker and why might September Rose want to be like her when she grows up? Find a picture and lyrics to a song of hers in addition to three to five factual details about her in 1942.

How does the correspondence between Gustave and Nicole help to move the story along? How could what he writes in the letter possibly endanger Nicole?

Chapter 16

What is Gustave preparing himself for at the end of the chapter? Why hadn't he considered this before now?

Make a prediction about Jean-Paul and Gustave's friendship. Do you think it will continue on its own, or just be something they tolerate because they are cousins? Explain your thinking.

Chapter 17

Would you have asked for the job as quickly as Gustave did? What is his impetus for taking the job? Would you have done the same thing? What might be some difficulties he encounters while working for Mr. Quong?

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 ends: "And for the first time since arriving in America, he felt supremely happy." What is it about his experience with Jean Paul and the others that leads to this realization on Gustave's part? Find specific details from the chapter to support your thinking.

Recall a moment when you noticed the way you felt about something had significantly changed for the better or the worse.

Chapter 19

What is it about Gustave's appearance that the other students continue to tease him about? Have you ever endured this type of teasing? How did you handle it? September Rose's grandmother welcomes Gustave into her apartment, because she wants to learn more about her granddaughter's new friend. What does she learn about Gustave? What does he learn about her? What was the most surprising part of his visit to Granma?

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Make a prediction about what is going to happen between Gustave and Alan. What evidence do you have to support your thinking?

Chapter 20

Up until this chapter, the treatment of African Americans in New York has been on the periphery of the story. What are Alan and his youth group trying to call attention to? Why does Gustave think to himself that their struggle feels familiar? Do you agree or disagree that the treatment of Jews in Germany was similar to the treatment of African Americans in the United States at this time? Give explicit evidence from the book.

Have you ever had a sibling or friend act protectively towards you around a friendship you had in or outside of school? Do you think Alan is correct that September Rose could get harassed or worse for being friendly with Gustave outside of school?

At the end of the chapter, what does September Rose tell Gustave that makes him feel so good? Recall a time when you felt the same way about a new friendship.

Chapter 21

Imagine coming home from school and learning that your parents had decided that you were all going to stay in the new country you thought you were just visiting temporarily. If this has been your experience, how does it compare to Gustave's reaction? If you have always lived where you are living, how does his experience make you think differently about other students who have recently come to the United States?

What has Nicole's latest letter revealed about life in France that is new information? How did she communicate to Gustave her "secret act of patriotism"? Why was this important to her and Gustave? Have you ever invented a secret code? How did your code work?

Chapter 22

Gustave's reaction to the newsreel indicates that he is still feeling deep concern for his friend Marcel, who disappeared before they left France. What connection is he drawing between Marcel and Mowgli at the end of the chapter? Does it seem accurate? Why or why not?

According to Cousin Henri: "Coca-Cola is the taste of America" in 1942. Write down a list of five foods or beverages that you think would be used by an author to describe the "taste of America" today. If you have experience living elsewhere, you can choose that country to make a list about instead.

Is Marcel a major character in the story? Can someone who isn't in the narrative in "real time" be considered a major character? Why or why not? Is there anyone in

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your life who you don't ever see or even hear from who is of great importance in your life?

Chapter 23-24

Has Gustave arrived at a new awareness of his best friend's possible fate? What is that fate?

Have you ever lost someone very close to you? What was similar about how Gustave described his grief, and how you experienced yours? If you haven't, recall a character in a story you have read before who also suffered a significant loss. How was their experience alike or different to Gustave's?

How could the moon be "trying to tell him" something? What is the message Gustave wants to hear?

Chapter 25

When Gustave returns home from his walk, he decides not to tell his parents why he took off and what he was so upset about. What does he mean when he says, "But talking about Marcel would make it real"? Isn't it real anyway? Explain.

What exactly is Rabbi Blum trying to get Gustave to consider? Is he trying to prove to Gustave that Adonai exists? Use the text to support your thinking.

What do we learn about Marcel at the end of the chapter? What does this also reveal about Gustave?

Chapter 26

What does Gustave finally get in this chapter, and what other surprises come with it?

Why won't Seppie tell Gustave what the boy on the bicycle shouted at her? When she gets home, she learns her brother has been attacked in some fashion. What kind of fight do you think he got in? Why is Granma so concerned?

How would you have felt if you were Gustave and Seppie had gone to such great lengths to get you a Butterfinger bar?

Chapter 27

On the hike to the mansion on the Boy Scout camping trip, Jean Paul offers an apology to Gustave. Does Gustave accept it? What important realization does Gustave have about the dynamics of a true friendship? Have you ever had an experience where you didn't share the same opinion about something really important with a best friend?

Prediction: What happened to the mansion, and what will the Boy Scouts do now that it is gone, and they have no tents to sleep in, and it is almost nightfall?

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Chapter 28

Why weren't the boys in the troop able to be served at the restaurant? What do you think Father Rene and Rabbi Blum when they said it must be a "restricted" hotel? How is what is happening at the restaurant in New York similar to what is happening in France?

By the end of the chapter, are Jean-Paul and Gustave friends again? How do you know?

Chapter 29

Wearing his new pants to school, Gustave notices that, "It felt great and not quite real at the same time, as if he were wearing a costume." (pg 219). Is he referring to his clothing only? Or is this a commentary on something else?

Chapter 30

In your own words, describe September Rose's audition for the Victory Choir. According to the story, who are we led to believe will be chosen for the solo? Is the outcome different than you expected?

Is there reason to believe that September Rose was not chosen because of the color of her skin? When have you experienced racism in your life, if you are not white, or when have you witnessed what you believe is a choice being made that overlooked the potential of a person of color because they were not white?

Chapter 31

What indication do we have that Mrs. Heine may have decided not to choose September Rose because of her appearance? At the end of the chapter, Gustave is attacked by a person with white skin and blond hair out of nowhere with very little explanation. What conclusions is Gustave beginning to draw about the experience of people of color in the United States at this time?

Chapter 32

Describe the first time you got your own library card, if you have one. If you don't, do some research to find out what it would take for you to obtain one.

Identify one or more moments of rising action in the story up to this point. (They could have occurred before or during this chapter.)

Prediction: Make a prediction about one thing that will happen at the Victory Rally and/or at the "Negro Youth Group." Make sure one of them is connected to the rising action you identified above.

Chapter 33

Why is Gustave worried that the Boy Scout scarf might have not been a hand-me-down? Why is the idea of charity shameful to him? Have you ever had a similar experience?

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Chapter 34

What was the first thing that came to your mind when Gustave stood up to recite his report? Were you nervous for him? Have you ever been in his shoes and forgotten everything you were going to share? Who or what helped him get through it?

Take a moment to write down three new character traits for Gustave and Seppie. Notice how your perception of them is changing in small or large ways.

What do you think will happen to Alan at the protest picket line of the Baumhauer's Department Store? To Seppie and Gustave?

Chapters 35 and 36

Imagine you are a newspaper reporter covering the protest. Explain to your readers what exactly happened. Include why the protest was taking place, who was involved, and what happened to the protestors.

Why was Seppie at first relieved and then horrified by the arrival of the police? Why would the police be aggressive toward the protestors?

What was Gustave's role in the event? What might have happened to Seppie if he hadn't been there? How do you know?

What led Gustave to Chiquita?

Chapter 37

Falling Action: In these last few chapters, several of the parallel stories in **Skating With the Statue of Liberty** have had surprising twists and revelations. Pick one or more of these narrative threads to talk about in terms of the falling action, or the moment in the story after a major conflict has been resolved.

Why is Alan seemingly uplifted after the protests and not discouraged? What does he tell his sister that helps her to not feel as worried about his court case? What role has the press played historically in civil rights movements?

What did Gustave do to change Alan's perception of him? How do you know this is the case?

What is the significance of the yellow feather in the story? What does it symbolize to Gustave?

Chapter 38

The final chapter brings all of Gustave's peers together at the rally, to meet and interact and leave the reader with a sense of what American students were contending with and reacting to at this moment in American history in New York City. Try to picture yourself there in line behind Seppie, Gustave, and their friends.

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In the first person tell us why you are there, what you are hopeful about by being there, and what happens on the skating rink from your perspective, when the young man and woman who were in front of you in line were skating together holding hands. Include as many explicit details as you need to capture the day for your reader.

Pick one word to describe Seppie, and Gustave at the story's completion.

Fast Forward: Write the opening paragraph for the sequel to this story. Where will it be set? Would you pick the same narrator? Which characters will have integral roles in the next story?

Take a moment to reflect on how this story has made you think about racial, cultural, or religious segregation today compared to 1942. What are a few questions that come up for you? How have things changed? How have they stayed the same? Back in the first chapter, as Gustave's family arrives in Baltimore Harbor, Maman says that America is "the land of freedom, where 'all men are created equal.'" Does the story show that Maman is right about America?