

# Number the Stars

## Study Guide

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For the novel  
by Lois Lowry



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## Synopsis

Annemarie Johansen and her friend Ellen Rosen remember a time before the war, before the Nazis occupied Denmark. But Denmark has surrendered to Germany, and now German soldiers are seen on every street corner in Copenhagen. Although Annemarie and Ellen are frightened by the soldiers, Annemarie does not worry. She knows that there is a resistance movement fighting the Nazis, but Annemarie is an ordinary girl; she does not expect that she and her family will be called upon for courage.

But soon the Johansens receive word that the Nazis are planning to arrest the Jews of Denmark. The Johansens decided they must do what they can to help their Jewish friends, the Rosens. The Johansens take in Ellen and pass her off as one of their own children while a family friend agrees to hide Ellen's parents. Annemarie is still convinced that everyone will be safe, but she begins to see the seriousness of the situation when German soldiers come to their apartment late at night looking for the Rosens.

Putting their own lives in jeopardy, the Johansens formulate a plan by which they can help the Rosens and other Danish Jews to escape the Nazis. Although she does not know the details of the plan, Annemarie finds that she must put her courage to the test in order to help her friend Ellen, and other Jews, escape across the sea to Sweden and freedom.

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**Symbolism:**

Symbols are objects or events that have special meanings that go beyond their literal meanings. For example, in the United States, an eagle is not just a bird, it is also a symbol for freedom. When we see a red octagon, we think not only of a red shape, but also the act of stopping.

Identify the symbolic meaning of each of the following things:

1. the stars on the American flag \_\_\_\_\_
2. the cross \_\_\_\_\_
3. the Star of David \_\_\_\_\_
4. the swastika \_\_\_\_\_

Some things are symbolic only in certain stories. These things would not always have the same symbolism in other stories. For example, in Jesus' parable of the sower (Mark 4:2–20), the seed is symbolic of the Word of God. However, a seed does not always make someone think of the Word of God.

The following examples are symbols found specifically in *Number the Stars*. Think of what these objects might represent in the story.

5. Sweden \_\_\_\_\_
6. the coffin \_\_\_\_\_
7. the stars in the book's title \_\_\_\_\_

Can you think of any other symbolism in *Number the Stars*? Write your ideas below.

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6. Why do soldiers come to Uncle Henrik's house?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. The officer in charge notices that the casket is closed. Why does this arouse his suspicion?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. How does Mama keep from having to open the casket in front of the soldiers? What is the real reason they don't want to open the casket?

**Thinking About the Story:**

9. Who are the mourners that come to Henrik's house?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Why do you think no one talks openly about what is happening?



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The psalm Peter reads is Psalm 147. It is a psalm of praise which is meant to give glory and thanks to God. Read the entire psalm, and then answer the following questions:

14. In Psalm 147 we read that God “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” In *Number the Stars*, whose wounds need healing?

15. In Psalm 147, we read:

He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.

Which words from these verses tell you that God, who is so powerful and knowledgeable that He can count and name every star in the universe, is also powerful enough to care for us in times of need?

Which words tell you that the same God punishes those who do great wrong?

16. In *Number the Stars*, it is the Nazis who are doing a great wrong against the Jews. Why do you think we see no evidence that God is punishing the Nazis? Will they eventually be held responsible before God for what they do?



## *Number the Stars Study Guide Answer Key*

10. Answers may vary. She thinks about a story that she once told to Kirsti. She may be thinking about Ellen and the Rosens and others that she is helping. She might also be thinking about how she is helping her mother by delivering the package to Uncle Henrik.

### *Dig Deeper:*

11. Genesis 22—People: Abraham and Isaac. Situation: God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering. Response: Abraham obeys God immediately. The Bible does not indicate Isaac's response, but since there is no record of a struggle or flight, most likely Isaac also was obedient to God's will. Matthew 26:36–46—Person: Jesus. Situation: Jesus knows that the time of His death is near, and yet does not want to die. Jesus is feeling great sadness and distress. Response: Jesus prays to His heavenly Father that He will not need to make the sacrifice, but that He will if it is the only way to fulfill God's plan. When it becomes evident that He must die to do God's will, Jesus faces it with peace and continued love for the sinners who cause His death. Acts 7—Person: Stephen. Situation: Stephen is on trial before the Sanhedrin for "speaking against this holy place and against the law." (see Acts 6:13) His life was in danger. Response: Stephen speaks boldly and truthfully to the Sanhedrin about the wickedness he sees, and when he is about to die, he pleads for forgiveness for those who kill him. He stays loyal to Christ throughout his trial and death.

### *Chapters 16 & 17 and Afterword*

#### *Vocabulary:*

1. cautiously, carefully; 2. hidden; 3. surged, charged; 4. attack, overrun; 5. distressing, appalling.

#### *Questions:*

1. Bravery, according to Uncle Henrik, is thinking not about the dangers, but about what you must do.
2. Many Danes take care of the homes and possessions of the Danish Jews who have fled from the Germans.
3. Peter is captured by the Germans, and executed in a public square in Copenhagen.
4. Lise was part of the Resistance, and died when the Nazis raided a Resistance meeting. She ran into the street and was run down by Germans in a military car.
5. The handkerchief was saturated with a powder made of rabbit blood and cocaine. It temporarily destroyed the sense of smell of the dogs Germans used to sniff out hidden Jews.
6. Kim Malthe-Bruun wrote that Danes must dream of an ideal of human decency, not a narrow-minded and prejudiced one.

#### *Thinking About the Story:*

7. Answers will vary. If Annemarie had not brought the handkerchief to her uncle, the people hidden on his boat would most likely have been caught and arrested along with Uncle Henrik and probably the rest of the Johansen family.
8. Peter loved Lise and was engaged to be married to her. Together they worked with the Resistance, and both were killed because of this work. He wants to be buried next to her because he feels closest to her.
9. Most Danes must have felt that they needed to protect the Jews. King Christian X was put under house arrest when he refused to cooperate with the Germans by punishing Danish Resistance fighters, and nearly all of the Danish Jews escaped from the German round-ups. Those who did not escape were primarily those who did not heed the warnings given them. The Danes were largely successful in protecting the Jews from Nazi persecution.