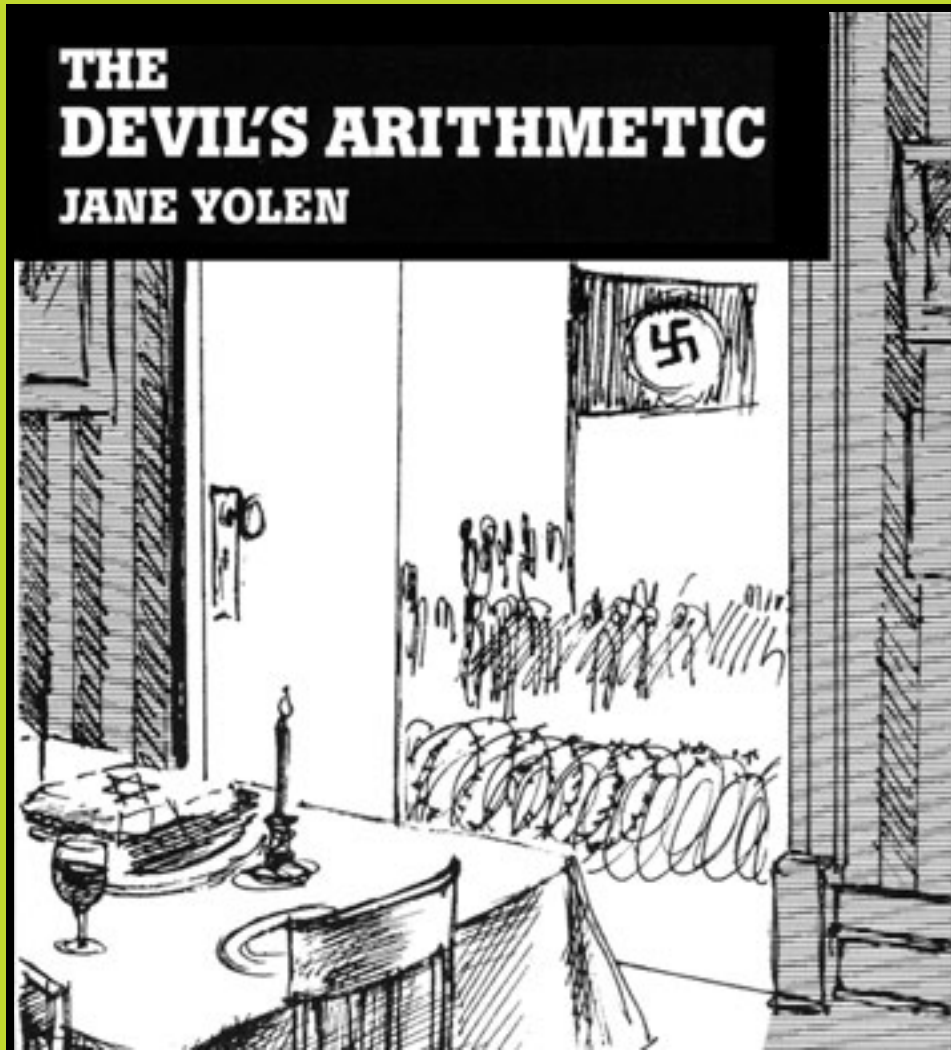


Novel·Ties



A Study Guide

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LEARNING LINKS

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For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide to use in conjunction with the novel *The Devil's Arithmetic* consists of lessons for guided reading. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel at its own reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for reading development by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits, formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques, will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Holocaust

The Devil's Arithmetic has as its primary setting a German concentration camp in the early 1940s. While the particular camp is fictional, it is drawn from factual accounts of concentration camps during that period.

The Holocaust refers to the systematic extermination of the Jewish people in Europe during the years that Adolf Hitler and the Nazis were in power in Germany (1933–1945). During that period, six million of Europe's nine million Jews were murdered, most of them in the infamous gas chambers and crematoria of the death camps.

Hitler, who had a pathological hatred of Jews, came to power in 1933 during a time of high unemployment and economic chaos. Using the Jews as a scapegoat for Germany's problems, he roused the people with a virulently anti-Semitic program and a plan to build a German "master race," pure and superior.

Hitler's craving for power and domination led to his invasion of European countries. As world war ensued, Hitler put into action his plan for the "Final Solution," the extermination of all Jews. The first death camp began operating at the village of Chelmno in December 1941, and soon other camps were built. Some camps existed only for killing entire trainloads at a time. Others, such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, were death and labor camps, with a small percentage of the people kept alive as slave labor. At Auschwitz, two thousand people at a time could be killed in the large gas chambers, and almost five thousand bodies could be burned in the ovens in one day. Valuables and precious stones were taken from the prisoners to be sent to Germany and gold was melted down. Camp barbers shaved their hair, which was then sold to German companies for use in coat linings and as mattress stuffing.

It wasn't until Germany's defeat in 1945 and Hitler's demise that the incredible atrocities of the Holocaust came fully to the world's attention. To this day, it is still difficult to comprehend the enormity of this terrible human tragedy.

The Yiddish Language

The primary language spoken by the Eastern and Central European Jews at the time of the Holocaust was Yiddish, a language that can be traced back over eight hundred years. The language developed from an old German dialect, and at the peak of its popularity in the 1930s, it consisted of approximately 70% German, 20% Hebrew, and 10% Slavic words. In *The Devil's Arithmetic*, Yiddish is the language spoken by the prisoners at the concentration camps, and a number of Yiddish words and phrases are used in the dialogue.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Preview the book by reading the title and the author's name and by looking at the illustration on the cover. What do you think the book is about? How does the title set the mood of the book? Have you read anything else by the same author?
2. Read the Background Information on page three of this study guide and do some additional research on the Holocaust. With your classmates discuss the conditions that could prompt humans to be so cruel. What are some of the lessons that can be learned from the Holocaust? Why is it important that everyone today learns about these atrocities? What can individuals and groups do to prevent this from happening again?
3. **Social Studies Connection:** World War II was one of the costliest and most destructive wars in history. Work with a cooperative learning group and do some research on the following topics:
 - causes of the war
 - war in Europe
 - war in the Pacific
 - end of the war
4. What role do religious holidays, such as Passover or Easter, play in helping people "remember" their past? Why are these remembrances important? Discuss your individual experiences with religious holidays and rituals which symbolize historic events or ideas.
5. Have you ever read a book or seen a film in which a character stepped back in time or moved into future time? How did the author or filmmaker create this time change? Why do you think these jumps in time were made, rather than having the story told in a more usual chronological fashion?
6. Choose a time in history that is significant to you and imagine what it would be like to live at that time. Write your impressions of an event that occurred at that time as though you were part of the scene.
7. Bring into class a copy of a Passover Haggadah, the book read by participants at a Seder describing the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Discuss the narrative and the significance of the rituals that are described. What is the major theme of the Haggadah? With your classmates, discuss how it is relevant to our lives today.