“Elegant. . . Thoughtful [and] affecting.” —Kirkus Reviews
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Discussion Questions

Discussion Questions for pages 1 through 54

Are Jews different than other people? I wonder (5).

- What is your opinion regarding Odette’s thought?
- Considering basic needs and simple pleasures, list ways that all people are alike.
- Considering basic needs and simple pleasures, list ways that some people are different.
- Considering emotional and spiritual needs, list ways that all people are alike.
- Considering emotional and spiritual needs, list ways that some people are different.
- Why is it troublesome to be considered different than others?

“The heart is like an apartment,” Madame Marie tells me.

“Every day you must clean it and make it cheerful... If you make your apartment extra nice, God will come to visit you, too (8).”

- A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing serves as a symbol for another. Explain how the physical living quarters of an apartment can symbolize a person’s heart.
- Do you think that Madame Marie is referring only to the physical, blood-pumping heart? If not, what kind of heart is she referring to?
- What are some of the ways a person can clean their hearts, and make them cheerful?
- Explain why Madame Marie suggests that God will come to visit. Why is this a good thing?

Now I know a new way of solving problems...with secrets (13).

- If Odette feels that Madame Marie would not be angry that Odette’s doll is missing, explain why she is being secretive in this scene.
- Explain why Mama is willing to help Odette solve this problem in a secretive way.
- Do think there are times when solving problems in a secretive way are a good thing to do? Explain your answer.

“What makes us Jews (14)?”

- Cite the line in this section that states the reason why Odette and her family are considered to be Jewish.
- Explain why Odette’s mother would not want the crèche in their apartment.
- If Mama and Papa don’t believe in religion, why would having the Baby Jesus in the apartment be troublesome?
- Is Madame Marie a Christian or a Jew? Explain your reasoning.
- What difference does it make if a person is a Jew or a Christian?

I see my father march past.

“Papa!” I cry out.
He turns toward my voice.
Then a rifle butt slams into his back (27).

- Explain why the soldier stuck Papa with the butt of his rifle. What did Papa do to deserve such abuse?
- Do you think Odette might feel responsible for Papa’s beating? How so?
- Earlier Odette said that her father bought her toys and read books to her. How has life changed for Odette and her family since the war?

Finally, Aunt Georgette and Sophie can’t take it anymore.
They have Christian relatives in the country.
They write a letter asking to stay with them (30).

- Why are these Jewish people asking for help from Christians?
- Why does it take a dangerous situation such as bombings and buildings collapsing for Aunt Georgette and Sophie to ask for help?
- What would happen if the Christian relatives refuse to help?

“All right then,” she says, “clean up the mess in your heart.
Take a good look at what needs to be done (37).”

- Odette secretly skipped school to play with a Jewish boy named Jakob. Afterwards, when she arrived at Madame Marie’s early, her secret was discovered. Explain why Madame Marie was upset with Odette.
- Explain what Madame Marie meant by “clean up the mess in your heart.”
- What did Odette learn from this situation?
- Explain why this secretive situation is different than the others she’s asked to participate in?

Saint George is looking after Papa (42).

- Saint George is a Christian saint. How can this patron saint of soldiers protect Papa, a Jew?
- Do you think that Madame Marie believes that a Christian saint should protect a Jew? If so, why?
- Predict what Mama would think about the patron saint of soldiers watching over Papa?
- Why do think the Odette finds peace in knowing that a holy medal is stitched on Papa’s blanket?

“You must never tell anyone about our visitors,” says Mama (49).

- Mama is becoming a warrior in her own way. Do you think she should have a holy medal sewn on her blanket for protection, too? Would she be receptive to this? Explain your answer.
- Consider the earlier metaphor of the apartment being like a heart. In what ways does Mama’s finding safe homes for children show her heart?
- What is Odette’s response to the notion that she may have to leave her mother?
- Image the fear and uncertainty Odette must live with at all times. Do you find it remarkable that
she is able to carry on in a somewhat normal fashion? Explain why you think she is able to do so.

*Mama pins back her hair and puts on lipstick.
*She locks the door when we leave.*

*We both pretend
*it's just another day (54).*

- In the poem entitled “The Raid,” soldiers brutally break into their home in the dead of night and threaten to imprison Mama. Describe how you think Odette felt during this scene?
- Mama is uncharacteristically stunned. Describe what you think is going through her mind at this moment.
- Madame Marie bravely comes to the rescue and confronts the soldiers, and they listen to her. Consider ways that Madame Marie is the much like the Saint George, the patron saint of soldiers.
- And yet, in the morning, there was no mention of the violence that had occurred the night before. Mama and Odette carry on about their morning rituals as if nothing had happened. Explain how keeping their true feelings secret helps them survive.

**Discussion Questions for pages 55 to 108**

*So I tell Charlotte, but I tell her to keep it a secret.
*Charlotte is good at it, and so am I (58).*

- Imagine the restraint Odette must practice to keep from telling her mother about the abuse she’s experiencing at school. Describe the loneliness, fear, and shame she must be feeling. Perhaps do so as a metaphor for her real feelings.
- Why do you think Odette compares her secret-keeping skill to that of a lifeless doll? Is there a way that Charlotte can be considered a metaphor for Odette’s emotional being?

*The soldiers are scary,
the alley is dirty,
my cousins’ apartment is dark and crowded.
But when we’re together,
nothing can stop us from having fun (63).*

- Consider Madame Marie’s metaphor of an apartment being like a heart. Though Odette’s cousins’ apartment is far from clean, are there ways that it is like a heart? Explain your answer.
- Explain how the family manages to enjoy each other’s company even though so much sadness and danger surrounds them.
- Explain how being together makes them happy, even under this horrible situation.

*“Wonderful!” says Madame Marie.*
“Those Jews have taken our jobs and money for too long.”
Then she offers them a drink... to toast their courage, she says (71).

- The title of this poem is “Lies.” Explain how Madame Marie’s words and behavior belong in this section.
- Is Madame Marie lying in this poem, or is she telling the truth? Does she hate Jews? Is not, why is she acting this way?
- Is there a difference between a lie and a secret?
- In this situation, why is it important for Madame Marie to keep her secret friendship with Odette and Mama by telling a hurtful lie?

My godmother sounds insulted.
“Me? Do I look like a friend of Jews (72)?”

- Even though Madame Marie is not speaking the truth, describe how you think Odette feels when she hears these words coming from her godmother’s mouth.
- Define the word ‘insulted’.
- Who do you think should be insulted at this moment? Madame Marie? The soldiers? Mama? Odette?

“Look at your feet,” Monsieur Henri says softly, when the soldiers are far enough away.
“If anyone calls your name, don’t answer (82).”

- Remember Odette called her father’s name when he was marching with the other prisoners of war? Describe the consequences of this action.
- How is this situation in which Odette is escaping to Chavagnes-en-Pailers similar to Papa’s imprisonment (25-27).
- How are these two situations different?

“One thousand years of the Third Reich.”

- The word ‘reich’ means realm, kingdom, or empire. The Third Reich is another term for Nazi Germany, ruled by a man named Adolph Hitler. Hitler envisioned that Nazism would rule for 1000 years (Wikipedia). Can you imagine how defeated and helpless Jewish people felt at that time? Try to describe how these people felt.
- Think about Mama’s decision to send Odette away to live with in the Vendée with Christians. Can you see why she decided to send Odette away, even though she does not practice the Christian religion, or any other religion, for that matter? Explain this situation, from Mama’s perspective.

I know it will be easy for me.
I am used to keeping secrets.
Madame Raffin opens the door (91).
• Why does Odette say that keeping secrets is easy for her?
• Explain how secrets and lies are similar things in this situation. The old clock in the Gare du Nord where Odette met her friends before leaving for the Vendée.
• At the end of this stanza Madame Raffin opens the door. Could this act serve as a symbol or metaphor for something? Is so, describe it.

*It’s because here,
I am not a Jew (103).*

• Is being a Jew something Odette can choose whether to be or not? Explain your answer.
• What do you think might happen if people in the Vendée find out that Odette is, in fact, a Jew?

Discussion Questions for pages 109 to 160

“If’s not fair!” I say.
“We always do it (112).”

• Enjoying the candy tossed after a baptismal party is a normal occurrence in the village, yet Mama finds this tradition to be inappropriate. Explain how Odette is caught in a confusing situation.
• Mama then cleans the piece of candy in holy baptismal water. Explain how her action is also inappropriate.
• Describe Odette’s response to Mama’s demands. Mama, who is so good at so many things, is clumsy at prayer (125).
• Do you think that there may be a reason why Mama is ‘clumsy’ at prayer? If so, what is it?
• Do you think that, perhaps, Mama feels insincere in the act of praying? How so?
• List some ways in which Mama might struggle with living the false life of being a Christian.

*I knew those people were lying,” says Simone.
“You’re too nice to be Jewish (134).”

• Odette is forced to deny her true identity. Describe how you think she must feel.
• Do you think that Odette is becoming skilled at lying and keeping secrets? If so, describe situations in which she has done well.
• Simone insinuates that Jewish people are not ‘nice’, yet she has been enjoying a delightful friendship with a Jew. Explain how this situation is confusing and unfair.

*Forgive me for my lies.
My mother made me promise
never to say that we are Jews (142).*

• In this scene, Odette is praying before the statue of Our Lady of Mercy. Odette is afraid and alone. Explain why praying to Jesus’ mother a logical thing for her to do.
• Explain why praying, in a way, is an odd thing for Odette to do.
• List her other options for help, in this situation. Are there any?
• Odette has been obedient to her Mother’s wishes by lying about her heritage. Should she be punished for her lies? Explain your answer.

*Poetry is stronger than the Nazis,*
*stronger than the war (149).*

• All the anger and sadness built up inside Odette has caused her to lose her voice. Do you think that this might be because, without a voice she cannot tell lies? Explain your answer.
• Explain how poetry can be stronger than the Nazis.
• Explain how poetry can be stronger than the war.

*Mama’s eye flash.*
“I didn’t raise you to be a liar,” she says, “or a thief (156)!”

• Explain how Mama’s words contradict her behavior.
• Have there been times that Mama has been a liar? A thief? Were there good reasons for her to do so? Explain your answer.
• Why do you think Mama is so quick to lash out at Odette?

**Discussion Questions for pages 161 to 212**

*We listen, and at last we understand.*
*She is pounding out the beat of “La Marseillaise,”*
*the French national anthem.*
*We begin to pound our desks, too.*
*We’re going to pound out the enemy soldiers,*
*pound out the sound of their song (162).*

• Compare this moment with the one in which Odette found her voice through poetry. List ways that the two scenes are similar.
• The anthem seems to have a unifying effect on the class. Explain how this song is binding the group together in purpose and intent.
• In what ways are things changing for Odette?
• Are there ways that Odette changing, too? Is her perception of life altered?

*How can I live without freedom,*
*in a place I don’t belong (167)?*

• By saying this, is Odette saying that she found freedom in her country home? How could this be? Explain your answer.
• Is she saying that she feels as if she belongs in her country home, even though bad things have happened to her there? Explain how this could be true.
• France and the allies are winning the war. How could Odette live without freedom in France? What kind of freedom is she referring to?
• Where is Odette’s true home? Where does she feel best? Where does she belong?
Matzoh’s not allowed in my home.
It’s connected somehow to religion... I have no idea how (188).

- Matzoh is symbol of redemption and freedom in the Jewish faith, yet Odette has no awareness of this. Explain why this is so.
- Explain why is it contradictory that Odette knows everything about the Christian religion, of which she does not identify with, and yet she knows little to nothing about the Jewish religion.
- Are there other ways for Odette to identify with the Jewish people? If not in religious tradition, how?

“They survived, but are still suffering.
If you speak to them, speak gently (194).”

- Explain how those who have released from concentration camps continue to suffer.
- Though Odette suffered in the Vendée, how did her trials compare with those in the concentration camps? Cite the phrases that describe the differing experiences.
- Like the unifying bond of music or poetry, can sympathy for suffering unite a group of people? If so, how?

Now that I am back in Paris, I must be a Jew again.
Being a Christian would make me a bad Jew.
I want to talk to God about this problem.
I want to ask him what I should do.
But even though God lives with many Jews, he doesn’t live in my home (198).

- Consider Odette’s comment in the light of the apartment metaphor Madame Marie stated on page 8. Do you think that God will not visit her home because she is a Jew? Explain.
- In what ways is Odette confused about her own heritage? Her sense of belonging?
- Explain why Odette feels that she cannot talk to God about her problem.
- Why does she think that being a Christian makes her a bad Jew?
- Does it make her a bad Jew?
- What is a bad Jew?

But, more than these,
my heart tells me now
I’m a child of my people.

I am a Jew.
I’m sure of it (205).

- Explain what Odette means by saying that she is a ‘child’ of her people.
- How does this statement connect with those that are suffering and yet are considered to be survivors?
- How does this statement connect with the pounding of La Marseillaise on the classroom
desktops?

• What does her experience of being a lost-and-found daughter have to do with this statement?
• What does this statement have to do with the apartment as a heart metaphor?
• Can you see how, though Odette does not practice the Jewish faith, she identifies with the Jewish people?

“And I had poetry.”
He says,
“reading poems helped me survive (209).”

• Tell of times in this story when people found strength in poetry and song?
• Tell of times when people felt courage and strength in poetry and song.
• Tell of times when people felt empowered through poetry and song.
• Do you think that is why the author, Maryann Macdonald, chose to write this book in free verse? Why or why not?

Interview with Maryann Macdonald, author of Odette’s Secrets

04/09/2013 on the hopefulheroine.wordpress.com

Hey guys! I am so excited about today! Back in February, I reviewed a fabulous MG, holocaust story, Odette’s Secrets, and since April is National Holocaust Awareness month (among other things), I’m excited to have the author, Maryann Macdonald stop by to talk about her story! Yesterday was Holocaust Remembrance Day and this whole week is a week of Remembrance. I don’t know why exactly, but I have always been emotionally invested in the Holocaust. It is one of those times in history I always wanted to talk about in class (and I hated History class) and even today, I’m so humbled when I read literature on the subject–especially when the stories are based real people as Macdonald’s story is. Before we get to chatting, here’s a little bit about her new novel!

Summary

“Odette is a young Jewish girl living in Paris during a dangerous time. The Nazis have invaded the city, and every day brings new threats. After Odette’s father enlists in the French army and her mother joins the Resistance, Odette is sent to the countryside until it is safe to return.

On the surface, she leads the life of a regular girl—going to school, doing chores, and even attending Catholic Mass with other children. But inside, she is burning with secrets about the life she left behind and her true identity.

Inspired by the life of the real Odette Meyers—and written in moving free-verse poetry—this is a story of courage, of determination to survive, and of a young girl forced to hide in plain sight..”

-Summary from Bloomsbury

Published: February 26th, 2013 | Publisher: Bloomsbury USA Children’s
Genre: Historical Fiction, Poetry | Pages: 240

And now what you’ve all been waiting for….
Inspiration behind the story...

1. How do you know what stories to tell, especially with Odette?

When I have a passion for a story, when I can’t know enough about it, when I am totally consumed by it, then I know I’m ready to write that story, to “love” it into existence. I felt that way about Odette’s story from the moment I first read it. I wanted to know everything about her life and what she experienced as a Jewish child hiding in plain sight in WWII France. I wanted to see what I could of her wartime world, to learn whatever I could about her life. I visited the places where she had been. I talked to people who had lived through the war in France. Then I sat down to write, to share her story with other readers who I thought might love it, too. And I’m pleased to say, I’m hearing from lots of them who do!

2. Was it hard to write her story, considering the time she lived in?

No one really wants to read about people whose lives and times that are easy. Odette had a difficult childhood. She lived in dangerous times. Sad things happened to her. But she met those challenges with her own individual kind of courage and resilience. And she developed a compassionate heart as a result. Telling a story like hers is an honor and a privilege, however difficult it may be.

3. What did poetry bring to her story that the prose form could not?

Odette loved poetry. She thought it’s beauty was one of the things that helped her survive her wartime ordeals. She grew up to marry a poet, and wrote poetry herself. So when I wrote the
book, I tried to capture her childhood voice, that of a poet-to-be. That is why the story is told in verse rather than prose.

4. What is your hope for readers as they turn the final page of the book?

I hope readers will remember and appreciate Odette’s struggle to save herself, both body and soul.

The Writer in me has to ask...

5. What made you decide to become a writer?

I wanted to be a writer from childhood on. The trouble was, I just couldn’t figure out how it was done! No one I knew growing up in the suburbs of Detroit was a writer. So I went on reading and reading and writing my own stories, just for fun, for quite a few years.

Then one day I met a friend of my uncle’s, Mary O’Neill. She was a poet, and had written the well-known children’s book *Hailstones And Halibut Bones*. I was thrilled to see that Mary O’Neill was a real person. She loved parties and people! She baked great chocolate chip cookies! So it seemed to me then that it was possible to be a real person and a writer, too. I began writing for my school newspaper. I went to college and studied journalism. I worked in publishing after I graduated. And after my own daughter was born, I began writing for children myself.

And for a little fun...

6. What was your favorite book as a child? Is it still a favorite today?

When I was a child, I read nearly every single book in my local library on pioneers. I loved their dangerous adventures, and I was fascinated by how they lived so differently from me. I fell in love with the *Little House* books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. *On the Banks of Plum Creek* was one of the first books I ever owned. It will always be a favorite of mine.

7. And finally, who is a heroine that inspires you?

I was very much inspired by Mary Lou Williams, the subject of *Little Piano Girl*, a book that I wrote a few years ago with my sister, Ann Ingalls. Mary Lou Williams was born into a very poor family. She was a talented pianist, but women were not accepted as instrumentalists in the world of jazz. But Mary did not allow that to stop her. When she felt sad, she just “played it out,” on her piano keys. And she got better and better, eventually becoming one of the most respected female names in jazz. She was known as the “Queen of Boogie Woogie,” but didn’t like that title because she could play in any style.

Wow! **Thank you so much** Maryann for stopping by The Hopeful Heroine today! I love hearing about the inspiration behind your story….and I especially love knowing that you “love” your stories into existence! What a great way to explain you passion.

Odette’s Secrets: A Geography Foldable

**Objective:** To understand the geography of Odette’s journey and heritage.

**Materials:**
- A print out of page 15
- Scissors
- Glue stick or tape
- Answer sheet found on page 16

**Procedure:**
- Print map and labels found on page 15.
- Cut out word labels.
- Trim around the diamond-shaped border framing the map.
- Using the Answer Sheet found on page 16 as a guide, find where the geographical labels belong on the map. Using the glue stick or tape, secure them in the proper location.
- Fold the triangle border shapes toward the center of the map in an envelope-like fashion.
- Glue the labels reading North on the top flap, South on the lower flap, East on the right flap, and West on the left flap.
- Spend some time discussing the map and the foldable in relation to the story, such as:
  - Consider the distance Odette had to travel when she lived in the Vendée.
  - Consider how removed Papa was from his daughter while he was a prisoner.
  - Notice where Poland, the land of Odette’s Jewish roots and the location of the Jewish death camps, is located in relation to Paris, France.