**The Book Thief**

# The Book Thief by Markus Zusak book cover.jpgThe power of words and literature as opposed to the brutality of war



**The Book Thief is a historical novel by Australian author Markus Zusak, and is his most popular work.**

**Published in 2005, The Book Thief became an international bestseller and was translated into 63 languages and sold 16 million copies. It was adapted into a 2013 feature film of the same name.**

**Plot**

**Narrated by Death, a male voice who over the course of the book proves to be morose yet caring. The plot follows Liesel Meminger in Nazi Germany during World War II. After the death of her younger brother on a train to the outskirts of Munich, Liesel arrives at the home of her new foster parents, Hans and Rosa Hubermann, distraught and withdrawn. During her time there, she is exposed to the horrors of the Nazi regime, caught between the innocence of childhood and the maturity demanded by her destructive surroundings. As the political situation in Germany deteriorates, her foster parents conceal a Jewish man named Max Vandenburg. Hans, who has developed a close relationship with Liesel, teaches her to read, first in her bedroom, then in her basement. Recognizing the power of writing and sharing the written word, Liesel not only begins to steal books that the Nazi party is looking to destroy, but also writes her own story, and shares the power of language with Max. Through collecting laundry for her foster mother, she also begins a relationship with the mayor's wife, Ilsa Hermann, who allows her to first read books in her library, and later, steal them.**

**Themes**

# Mortality

**The book is introduced by the character/narrator Death, which underlines that mortality is very present in the lives of each character. Throughout the novel, the deaths of prominent characters reaffirm the presence of mortality. Because the novel takes place during World War II, death and genocide are nearly omnipresent in the novel.**

**Death is presented in a manner that is less distant and threatening. Because Death narrates and explains the reasons behind each character's destruction, as well as explains how he feels that he must take the life of each character, Death is given a sense of care rather than fear. At one point, Death states "even death has a heart," which reaffirms that there is a care present in the concept of death and dying.**

# Language, reading and writing

**Throughout the novel, language, reading and writing are presented as symbolic elements of expression and freedom. They provide identity and personal liberation to those characters who have, or who gain, the power of literacy: "the true power of words". And they provide a framework for Liesel's coming of age. At the beginning of the story shortly after her brother's funeral, Liesel finds a book in the snow, one she is unable to read. Under tutelage by her foster father Hans, she slowly learns to read and write. By the end of the novel, her character is largely defined by her progress in reading and writing. The development of Liesel's literacy mirrors her physical growth and maturing over the course of the story.**

**Literacy skills also serve as social markers. Wealthy citizens in the story are often portrayed as literate, as owning books and even their own libraries, while the poor are illiterate and do not own books.**

**The Nazi burning of books in the story represents evil incarnate. Symbolically, Liesel's repeated rescues of books from Nazi bonfires represent her reclaiming of freedom and her resistance to being controlled by the all-pervasive state.**

# The kindness and cruelty of humans/Hope

**The Book Thief looks at the terrible cost of violence, bearing witness to our compassion and offers us a believable, hard-won hope. That hope is embodied in Liesel, who grows into a good and generous person despite the suffering all around her, and finally becomes a human even Death can love. The hope we see in Liesel is unassailable, the kind you can hang on to in the midst of poverty and war and violence.**

# Love

**In the midst of the damage that war, death, and loss have caused Liesel and the other characters in the book, love is seen as an agent of change and freedom as love is the only way of forming a family. Liesel overcomes her traumas by learning to love and be loved by her foster family and her friends. In the beginning of the novel, Liesel is traumatized not only by the death of her brother and her separation from her only family, but also by the larger issues of war-torn Germany and the destruction wrought by the Nazi party. As Liesel's foster father Hans develops a relationship with her, this relationship helps create healing and growth. This pattern is reflected in the relational dynamic between the Hubermann family and Max. In a society ruled by governmental policies that presume to stand in judgment of who is truly human, the Hubermanns' relationship with Max defies the Nazi regime. Further, the love that Max and Liesel develop through their friendship creates a strong contrast to the fascist hate in the backdrop of the story.**

**The theme of love also intertwines with the themes of identity and language/reading because all of these themes have the purpose of providing freedom and power in the midst of chaos and control.**

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| **morose****distraught****withdrawn****regime****deteriorate****mortality****prominent****reaffirm****genocide****omnipresent****literacy****incarnate****all-pervasive****bear witness****unassailable****agent****wrought****wreak****presume** **defy****in the backdrop of****intertwine** | **σκυθρωπός****τρελός,** **broken-hearted****αποτραβηγμένος****καθεστώς****χειροτερεύω****θνησιμότητα****διακεκριμένος****επαναβεβαιώ****γενοκτονία****πανταχού παρών****γνώση γραφής****ενσαρκώνω****παντού διάχυτη****φέρω μαρτυρία****απρόσβλητος****μέσο****κατειργασμένος, που επέφερε****cause something harmful; afflict****υποθέτω****προκαλώ,αψηφώ****στο φόντο του****πλέκω, become mutually involved** |