STUDY GUIDE

THE BOOK THIEF

October 16 – November 9, 2012

Based on the novel by Markus Zusak
Adapted by Heidi Stillman
Directed by Hallie Gordon

Steppenwolf for Young Adults’ 2012/13 programming is dedicated to Now Is The Time, a citywide initiative to stop youth violence and intolerance.
DEAR TEACHERS:

We are engaging with the Chicago Public Library, Facing History and Ourselves and other theaters and cultural organizations for a season-long partnership against youth violence and intolerance.

In recent years, violence towards youth has become overwhelming. As theater artists working in schools we see the effects violence can have on youth. As teachers working in the classroom every day, you are aware of the challenges of teaching students who may be scared to play outside, scared to travel to school, scared because they face torment at school from bullying. We have a unique opportunity to inspire young people to make positive change in their communities and give voice to this epidemic.

In collaboration with the Chicago Public Library’s One Book, One Chicago, Markus Zusak’s The Book Thief looks at the terrible cost of violence, bearing witness to our compassion and complicity, and empowering each of us to examine our own unique ability to effect change in our communities.

We hope you and your students will be inspired in your study of The Book Thief to contribute content about making positive change in our communities. The Now Is The Time website, nowisthetimechicago.org, is in collaboration with the Chicago Public Library’s One Book, One Chicago.

We look forward to welcoming you to Steppenwolf and to joining together to inspire students to take action. Now Is The Time.

—Hallie, Megan & Lauren

Artistic and Educational Director
Hallie Gordon
Education Manager
Megan Shuchman
Education Assistant
Lauren Silvak

ACCESSIBILITY
Audio-Description Performance and Touch Tour, with Young Adult Council Scene event to follow SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27 AT 3PM
Open-Captioned Performance
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28 AT 3PM
American Sign Language-Interpreted Performance
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4 AT 3PM

STUDY GUIDE CURATED BY
Megan Shuchman

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EDITED BY
Hallie Gordon

We were lucky to work in partnership with the Chicago Public Library in creating content for this guide. Please use the activities, questions for the classroom, designer notebook and cast photos we have provided in complement to the rich material provided in the One Book, One Chicago guide.

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REFERENCE:

Reference the following sections from the One Book, One Chicago guide for further information:

1. BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE BOOK THIEF AUTHOR, MARKUS ZUSAK
   —OBOC guide, p. 2
2. INTERVIEW WITH ZUSAK, AND ADAPTOR OF THE PLAY, HEIDI STILLMAN
   —OBOC guide, p. 4
3. TIMELINE FOR HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN WORLD WAR II GERMANY
   —OBOC guide, p. 20
4. DEATH PERSONIFIED: A LIST OF FICTIONS IN WHICH DEATH IS THE ‘STAR’
   —OBOC guide, p. 30
5. NOW IS THE TIME INFORMATION
   —OBOC guide, p. 38
Synopsis for THE BOOK THIEF
Images from Trudy White, Illustrator for novel

ACT ONE

Him, who is Death and the narrator of our story, introduces us to Liesel Meminger, a young girl who has stolen The Gravedigger’s Handbook during the funeral of her young brother. Liesel is orphaned when her father is taken away because of his political beliefs and her mother is too poor to care for her. She arrives at Himmel Street in the small town of Molching at the beginning of World War II to live with her new foster parents, Rosa Hubermann, a laundress, and Hans Hubermann, an accordion player and painter by trade. The Nazi Party’s influence is oppressive in the small town of Molching and it is impossible for Hans to find work because he is not a member of the Nazi Party.

Consumed with the grief at being taken from her family, Liesel is comforted by gentle Hans, whom she calls Papa, and a neighborhood friend, Rudy Steiner, who dreams of being an Olympic runner like Jesse Owens. Rudy develops a crush on Liesel, challenging her to a race and wagering a kiss if he wins. He loses, but vows that one day, Liesel will be “dying to kiss [him].” One night, after having another nightmare about her brother’s death, Liesel confesses to Hans that she has a stolen book, but does not know how to read. Liesel and Hans, a poor reader himself, struggle night after night through the book, slowly learning to read together. One night, Hans’ and Rosa’s son, Hans Jr., pays a visit, chastising Hans for not joining the Nazi Party and berating his father for not recognizing the power the Fuhrer (Adolf Hitler) holds. Later, at a Nazi burning of books considered to be ‘un-German,’ Liesel rescues The Shoulder Shrug from the fire. The mayor’s wife, Ilsa Hermann, sees her but says nothing. Afterwards, when Liesel calls at the mayor’s home to pick up and drop off laundry, Ilsa invites her inside to read in her extensive library, sharing her books and memories of her son, who died during the World War I. Hans procures a copy of Hitler’s Mein Kampf from the local party office, and uses the book to hide a key to send to Max. Max is a Jew currently hiding from the Nazis and the son of Han’s best friend, who also died in World War I. Thanks to the key Hans provides, he arrives at the Hubermann’s home seeking a safe place to stay. Max lives for several months in the Hubermann basement, during which time he and Liesel grow to be close friends, both plagued by nightmares of loved ones lost.
Meanwhile, Rosa’s customers are disappearing day by day, as no one has the money for laundry services. When Ilsa can no longer use Rosa Hubermann as her laundress, Liesel, aware of how badly the Hubermanns need the money, becomes frightened and angry, railing against Ilsa and attacking her for still grieving her son’s death when there is so much new despair around them. When she returns home, Max shows Liesel how he ‘boxes with Hitler’ in his mind in order to keep from feeling consumed by his anger and devastation. When Rudy and Tommy, Rudy’s friend, are constantly bullied by Deutscher, the head of Molching’s Hitler Youth, Rudy and Liesel take out their aggression by stealing a book from the mayor’s home. With this theft, Liesel officially earns her title, “Book Thief.”

ACT TWO

Him reads aloud from his own diary, comparing war to a tyrannical boss, never saying thank you and always asking for more. On Liesel’s birthday, knowing of her love for reading, although Max cannot give her a real book, he transforms Mein Kampf into his own book by painting over the pages. One day, Liesel is out playing soccer with her friends and hears news that the Nazis are searching houses for Jews, and takes an ankle injury as excuse to get home and alert Hans and hide Max. A few days later, Rudy and Liesel find that Ilsa has tempted them with a book wedged in her window: a dictionary, which they promptly steal. Then, during an air raid in which everyone is gathered together in a basement shelter, Liesel reads aloud from one of her books to comfort the townspeople while Max takes the opportunity to come from hiding and steal a glance at the sky.

Later, when a procession of Jews is marched through town on their way to a concentration camp, Hans impulsively offers a piece of bread to a starving Jewish man. He and the man are beaten, and Hans must then get rid of Max as the Nazis will surely suspect he is a sympathizer and search his home as a result of his act of kindness. Sometime after Max’s departure, Liesel spots him in another procession of Jews being marched to a camp. Overcome by seeing her friend, Liesel throws herself on Max, prompting a beating from a Nazi soldier. After the beating, Liesel finds herself in Ilsa’s library, where she destroys book upon book, worried the words will fill her with a false sense of hope she no longer wants to have. When Ilsa catches her, instead of punishing Liesel, she gives her the gift of a journal, so she might write her own story. Liesel retreats to her basement and begins to write the story of The Book Thief. As she writes, Himmel Street is bombed. Rosa dies. Hans dies. Even Rudy dies. When Him comes to call on Molching to pick up the souls of Himmel Street, he sees Liesel’s journal that she has abandoned on the ground, and picks it up. Ilsa takes Liesel into her home to live with her. After the war ends, Max appears, having survived the concentration camp, and together — as our narrator, Him, tells us — Liesel lives a good, long life. When Liesel’s time has come, years later, and Him comes to meet her, they exit the play together, hand in hand.

HANS HUBERMANN
PLAYED BY MARK ULRICH
is Liesel’s foster father. Once a reluctant soldier during World War I, he is a house painter and accordionist. He teaches Liesel to read.

LIESEL MEMINGER
PLAYED BY RAE GRAY
is the book thief. She is nine years old at the beginning of the story, when after the death of her brother she is taken in by the Hubermann family.

Max VandenBurg
PLAYED BY PATRICK ANDREWS
is a young Jewish man who changes the Hubermanns’ lives.

RUDY STEINER
PLAYED BY CLANCY MCCARTNEY
is Liesel’s neighbor and eventual best friend. He is one of six children and is obsessed with American track athlete Jesse Owens.

For more character information, visit p.26-27 of the OBOC guide.
Activity:

Throughout Liesel’s journey in the book The Book Thief, she learns how words hold a remarkable power to compel people to commit acts of cruelty as well as beauty. At the start of the play, Liesel is illiterate. Learning to read brings Liesel closer to understanding why and how Hitler has achieved power through his words. Liesel begins to understand the manipulative power of words, and strives to master the art of writing in hopes of making the words “right.” In this activity, we will work to understand the power effective words can have on inciting people to action, with both positive and negative results.

ACTIVITY TIME TOTAL: 45 MIN.
20 MINUTES OF DISCUSSION AND FREE WRITING
15 MINUTES OF STUDENT PRESENTATION
10 MINUTES OF CLASS DISCUSSION TO FOLLOW

STEP 1: In small groups or individually, have students read the following excerpts:

SPEECH 1: Adolf Hitler

The following is an excerpt from the novel, The Book Thief, in which Max, a young Jewish man in hiding, imagines that he is in a boxing ring, about to challenge Hitler to a match. When Max wins the fight, he envisions Hitler turning to the crowd to warn them about the threat of the Jews. Though fictional, this speech was inspired by Adolf Hitler’s speech “The Jewish Question,” which he presented to the Reichstag (Parliament) on January 30, 1939, the sixth anniversary of his rise to power.

ADOLF HİTLEİR:

My fellow Germans. You can see that what we face is something far more sinister and powerful than we ever imagined. As we speak, he [Jews] is plotting his way into your neighborhood. He’s moving in next door, and he’s about to take you over. He will soon own you, until it is he who stands not at the counter of your grocery shop, but sits in the back, smoking his pipe. Before you know it, you’ll be working for him at minimum wage while he can hardly walk for the weight in his pockets. Will you simply stand there and let him do this? Or, will you climb up into this ring with me? For I cannot stand up here alone and fight him.

SPEECH 2: Eleanor Roosevelt

On February 20, 1946, Eleanor Roosevelt delivered a speech at the Opening Campaign Rally of the Women’s Division of the United Jewish Appeal of Greater New York. The wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Eleanor was known to be one of the most outspoken women in the White House. She was a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly and became the chair of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. As part of this commission, she helped write the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. After World War II ended, Eleanor visited a concentration camp at Zeilsheim, Germany and met a few of the Jews living there who had survived the camp. Eleanor struggled to understand the perseverance of the survivors of the Holocaust versus the passivity of the rest of the world.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT:

It is a mistake to think that the displaced persons camps in Germany are any worse than the displaced persons camps in other places, or that the standards of food are worse than those that they have in the other countries. In many cases, the condition is made worse in the other countries because of the fact that, for a long period, they were under Nazi occupation. Therefore, their strength has been sapped over a longer period.

I have the feeling that we let our consciences realize too late the need of standing up against something that we knew was wrong. We have therefore had to avenge it—but we did nothing to prevent it. I hope that in the future, we are going to remember that there can be no compromise at any point with the things that we know are wrong. We should remember that in connection with all the things that we do here, or in connection with anything at all in the world.

We cannot live in an island of prosperity in a sea of human misery. It just can’t be done.

I think the most important thing for us to realize is the great responsibility that lies upon our shoulders and the fact that we must give something beyond what we have ever given before in the world—something that is no longer for ourselves at all, but for humanity as a whole.

Activity:

Throughout Liesel’s journey in The Book Thief, she learns how words hold a remarkable power to compel people to commit acts of cruelty as well as beauty. At the start of the play, Liesel is illiterate. Learning to read brings Liesel closer to understanding why and how Hitler has achieved power through his words. Liesel begins to understand the manipulative power of words, and strives to master the art of writing in hopes of making the words “right.” In this activity, we will work to understand the power effective words can have on inciting people to action, with both positive and negative results.

HIM: “YOU HUMANS DON’T NEED A BOXING RING TO INFlict INJURY, DID YOU KNOW THAT? YOU CAN COMMIT VIOLENCE WITH WORDS AND INSPIRE VIOLENCE WITH WORDS. YOU DO THAT QUITE A LOT.”

LIESEL MEMINGER: “WORDS! WITHOUT YOU, THERE WOULDN’T BE ANY OF THIS. WITHOUT WORDS THE FÜHRER IS NOTHING! WHAT GOOD ARE THE WORDS?”
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: THE POWER OF THE WORDS

**STEP 2:** Have each student underline 10 words in each excerpt that stand out. These should be words that help to effectively communicate what the speaker is trying to say. Once the students have chosen their words, help them evaluate:

- How do the underlined words make you feel? What do they evoke for you? What emotions do the words spark?
- Are there words you underlined in both the speeches by Adolf Hitler and Eleanor Roosevelt? If so, which words? How are the words used similarly in each speech? Differently?

**STEP 3:** Provide a definition of propaganda to your students, as in:

Propaganda is a form of communication which aims to influence the attitude of a group of people toward a specific cause or position. Propaganda presents facts selectively and uses loaded messages to produce an emotional, rather than rational response to the information presented. Although often times propaganda is regarded as a tool that propels negativity, it does not have to be negative. It can be used to promote ideas that result in a positive change or action.

Given this definition, have students answer:

- Are there elements of Hitler and Roosevelt’s speeches that fit this definition? Why or why not?
- What are the elements of each speech from above that can be considered propaganda?

**STEP 4:** At Steppenwolf, we are presenting *The Book Thief* as part of a season-long initiative to inspire positive action in our community and to spark a citywide conversation around youth violence and intolerance. The idea behind this initiative is to find ways we can make personal connections in our lives to changes we wish to see in our communities. With that and Eleanor Roosevelt’s speech in mind, have students write a speech that calls to action members of their community around the issue of youth violence. The speech should incite fellow citizens to speak up or act out against violence and intolerance. Have students think about the following questions as they write:

- What power do words alone possess? How will your words alone inspire your audience to make a change?
- What aspects of your speech do you most hope people will remember? What do you want your audience to take away from your speech?
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: THE POWER OF THE WORDS

STEP 5: Choose a few students to present their speeches to the class. Post transcripts from these speeches (or videos of your students reciting these speeches) on our Now Is The Time site, www.nowisthetimechicago.org so that other students can be inspired by the power of language and by seeing fellow students use the power of words to influence change.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM:

1. What does it mean to ‘commit violence using words?’
2. How can we use our words to effect change positively?
3. How can we use our words to actively respond to youth violence?

Extra Writing Space:

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YOUNG ADULT COUNCIL

The Young Adult Council is a unique program for passionate and motivated high school students who wish to learn the inner-workings of professional theater from the most celebrated artists in the city. In addition to face time with these leading professionals, Council members attend the best plays in Chicago, learn how to analyze and speak about these plays and lead events for their peers around Steppenwolf productions in hopes of inspiring a new generation of theatre enthusiasts and practitioners.

Applications are available on March 1, 2013.

Like the Steppenwolf Young Adult Council on Facebook

Or visit steppenwolf.org/youngadultcouncil for more information.

Foundation support is provided by The Siragusa Foundation.
"A set designer’s work is part of a collaborative process; the set, the lighting, costumes, and sounds, coupled with the actions of the cast, make up the whole picture."

– The Book Thief Set Designer, Lizzie Bracken

**CORBIN LITTLE: What was the toughest part of designing the set for The Book Thief?**

**LIZZIE BRACKEN:** The play is like a big puzzle. How do we capture a story that ranges over a dozen locations within the confines of our stage and our budget? The tricky part was finding a design that maintained the general aesthetic while also providing the flexibility to represent all of the locations that the story demanded.

**CL:** Had you read the book before you read the play?

**LB:** I did read the book first. I like having a good understanding of the source material when working on a play. In general, books include a lot more detail and information about the characters and setting, which helps inform the design.

**CL:** Have you designed a set for a book adaptation in the past? How is this process different?

**LB:** I designed a production of Pride and Prejudice a few years ago that was very different from this process. The adaptation was already finished when we began working on the production so I wasn’t there when the playwright was workshopping and adjusting the script. There is something very exciting about being around to experience the creation of the play. It is so interesting to me to see what parts of the book the playwright pulls out to include in the story we tell on the stage.

**CL:** How do you tackle designing for such a specific time in history?

**LB:** Research. Lots and lots of research. Fortunately there is plenty of information about this particular period in history. I also looked at the art work from the period. Because our production is less realistic from a design standpoint, I wanted to ensure that the overall impression of the period was still present. Looking at the work of artists from a time period can be really helpful.

**CL:** When designing did you come across an interesting fact, moment in the book, or in the play where you said to yourself, “I have to include this in my set!”?

**LB:** Yes. Many. The book is so rich with beautiful images that I think I could have designed a hundred different sets. However, one moment that felt important to me happens right at the beginning and continues throughout: our narrator spends a great deal of time in the book talking about the color of the sky and the changes in the colors around him. While this is mentioned in the play I wanted to make sure there was a clear place in the design to demonstrate these changes in color. Therefore, I designed the upstage part of the set to be a space in which we could show these colors.

**CL:** How long did it take you to design the set?

**LB:** I worked with Hallie [Hallie Gordon, director of The Book Thief and Artistic and Educational Director, Steppenwolf for Young Adults] for several months and we went through many revisions. I would spend a few weeks working on the design then meet with her to discuss our ideas and the needs of the play. I also met with Heidi, the playwright, and the other designers to get their thoughts and ideas and to see how their work was developing. Having such creative people to work with makes my job a lot easier because they are able to help solve problems and suggest interesting ideas.

**CL:** Thank you so much for talking with me. I can’t wait to see the play.

**LB:** Me either!
In *The Book Thief*, Him (Death) explains that it is not the dead, but the survivors that he cannot stand to look at. Ultimately, *The Book Thief* is framed by Him’s ongoing contemplation of humanity. Him finds it impossible to weigh the value of human beings, with some capable of great malice and criminality like Hitler and others capable of great strength and bravery like Liesel and Hans. Interestingly, Him is haunted by humans, just as humans are haunted by Him/Death.

In this activity, students will explore the many different ways one can view death, what characterizes death, and the role Death plays in a story like *The Book Thief*. Students will also learn about how death is represented in three different religious and cultural spheres: in Greek mythology, in Judea-Christianity religious traditions, and in Japanese mythology.

In Greek mythology, life and death are split into opposites. Life is personified feminine, and death as masculine. The God of Death is named Thanatos; he is portrayed as an eager young man with wings, holding an extinguished flame. As portrayed in this image below, Thanatos is the twin brother of Hypnos, the God of Sleep. Greek tradition thus considers death inevitable rather than evil.

In Judeo-Christianity, death is not personified as a human figure; instead, death is described by its actions. Death is associated with sin and is portrayed as a force of evil. Only in apocalyptic writings is death ever personified as a pale, brutal and violent horseman, as suggested in the image below.

In Japanese mythology, as shown below, death is portrayed as a woman in the form of a goddess named Izanami-no-Mikoto, meaning “she who invites.” Izanami is the powerful goddess of both creation and death – Izanami creates and controls the life and death of every living thing.
STEP 1: Have students begin by writing for five minutes, exploring the following questions:

- What is one question you have about death?
- What is the first emotion you associate with death?
- What is your biggest fear when it comes to death?
- What are you most curious about when it comes to death?

STEP 2: Have students take a sheet of paper or use the space below, and draw a representation of death with their eyes closed. Give students the freedom to represent death in any way they choose—through the use of colors, words, texture, etc.

When students finish, ask the following questions:

- What color(s) did you use to represent death?
- Who drew a person? Who drew a man? Who drew a woman? Who drew an animal?
- Did anyone draw something more abstract? Lines/shapes?
- What does your picture tell you about how you view “death”? 
CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: REPRESENTATION OF DEATH

STEP 3: Put the pictures on a table. Allow students to walk around the class and on a post-it or on the corner of their classmates’ images, have students write an adjective on each sheet of paper to describe what they see.

STEP 4: Pick a spot in your classroom to display the different representations of death. Have all students look at the pictures and note similarities and differences between the various representations.

STEP 5: Share with students the traditions of death in various cultures and traditions as outlined above. Ask students to journal for five minutes, “how does learning about death in various cultures inform your own view of death?”

FOR FURTHER READING


QUESTIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM: (to be assigned after seeing the performance):
1. Having now seen the play, how is your representation of death similar or dissimilar from what you previously thought?
2. What most surprised you about seeing Death on stage?
3. Do you now want to alter the picture of death you created before seeing the show? Why or why not?
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Scene is a special opportunity for high school students to score an affordable ticket to a Steppenwolf production, meet Chicago’s most celebrated artists and connect with other teens who are passionate about theater. Each ticket includes dinner and post-show discussion with the actors.

TICKETS ARE $10 – $15 (CAN ONLY BE USED DURING THE TEEN EVENT SERIES)

All performances take place at 1650 N Halsted Street
Must present student ID at door

Purchase tickets at the door 30 minutes before the show, or in advance by calling Steppenwolf Audience Services at 312-335-1650. Use code 9251.

Questions? Please contact Steppenwolf for Young Adults Education Assistant Lauren Sivak at 312-654-5643 or lsivak@steppenwolf.org.

Foundation support is provided by The Siragusa Foundation.
HOW LONG WILL I CRY?: VOICES OF YOUTH VIOLENCE

FEBRUARY 26 - MARCH 9, 2013

By Miles Harvey
Directed by Edward Torres
Artistic Consulting by Kelli Simpkins

Woven together from interviews gathered by journalist Miles Harvey and his students at DePaul University, How Long Will I Cry? provides raw, truthful insight into the problem of youth violence. By giving voice to those who know the tragic consequences of violence first-hand—families of the victims, residents of crime-ridden neighborhoods and especially young people—How Long Will I Cry? inspires all of us to join together in search of a solution.

Following a run in Steppenwolf’s Upstairs Theatre, How Long Will I Cry? will tour to Chicago Public Library branches throughout the city. In conjunction with the tour, Steppenwolf will host digital media workshops for teens that encourage critical thinking, recognizing moral choices, acting as an upstander in one’s community and making teen voices heard. These performances and workshops will be presented free of charge.

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Buy online at steppenwolf.org or call 312-335-1650