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The Devil's Arithmetic

BY JANE YOLEN



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Historical Background

Objective: Researching the historical setting of the novel

Activity

The Devil's Arithmetic focuses on Hannah and her family's experience with the Holocaust in the mid-1940s during World War II. Before you begin reading, it will be helpful to learn and understand more about World War II and the Holocaust.

Individually or in small groups, research these two topics, and prepare a report on the information you find. Note the important events of the war and the Holocaust, focusing primarily on how World War II began, what the Holocaust was, and how many people were impacted by it.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading**Hebrew/Yiddish Words****Objective:** Understanding Hebrew/Yiddish words and expressions**Activity**

Many of the characters in *The Devil's Arithmetic* speak Yiddish. Although the narration is in English, Yolen includes many Hebrew and Yiddish words and expressions in the text. In the following chart, list any Hebrew/Yiddish words or expressions that you find as you read the novel. The meanings of some of them can be found right in the text. For others, you can use the Internet, dictionary, or other reference sources. One has been done for you as an example.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 2

Remembrance Collage

Objective: Using images to express and relate to a character's emotions

Activity

When Hannah arrives at her grandparents' house, her relatives are watching a TV program about the Holocaust. The images bring Grandpa Will's memories of the concentration camps to the surface, and he becomes enraged. He begins to yell at the TV screen. For as long as Hannah can remember, Grandpa Will has always had these "strange fits." She recalls an incident at her brother's bris, when she tried to please Grandpa Will by writing numbers on her arm, like he has on his arm. Hannah doesn't understand the meaning of the numbers, and she can't relate to Grandpa Will's feelings.

On poster board, create a collage of images that represent the Holocaust and the strong emotions it evokes in Grandpa Will. When designing the collage, consider what you have learned about the Holocaust. The collage can be realistic or abstract. You can use any images you want to reflect your ideas, whether they are photographs, pictures, or graphics from print media. However, you do not need to use graphic images to convey meaning. For example, the color red or a picture of a storm can symbolize violence and/or anger.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 1 – 3**Hannah's Family Tree****Objective:** Identifying character relationships**Activity**

A family tree is a visual tool used to identify family relationships. A tree is an appropriate symbol for a family because it has connecting branches that grow over time. Family is an important motif in *The Devil's Arithmetic*, and the reader is introduced to many of Hannah's relatives in the first few chapters. When a novel includes many characters, it is often helpful to draw a family tree to identify familial relationships between them.

Complete Hannah's family tree by filling in the boxes with the names of her relatives. Some relatives are not named, and we have filled in a few of them for you. Some relatives are identified by name, but you will need to infer their place on Hannah's family tree from the information that has been provided in the story.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 8

Bibliography

Objectives: Creating a bibliography
Distinguishing fact from opinion

Activity

When the wedding party reaches Viosk, Hannah sees soldiers waiting for the villagers. Although she is not sure why, she has a bad feeling about the situation. Then, Hannah realizes that she is living in the year 1942 and tries to warn the villagers that the waiting Nazis will kill them. The villagers, however, do not believe her. Hannah tells them the statistics she remembers from history class.

Imagine that Hannah has asked you to provide the villagers with some research designed to inform them of why they are in danger. Conduct research in the school library or media center, your local library, or the Internet to find books and articles related to the Holocaust and World War II. Once you've compiled the sources for the bibliography, alphabetize them by author's last name, using the style we've provided. You must locate the number of sources your teacher requires, but the bibliography should include at least one book, one journal article, and one webpage.

Here are some sample fictitious bibliographic entries:

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Blastin, Adam. "The Holocaust." *European History* 15.6 (June 2007): 563-598.

Glenn, John. *World War II*. www.webaddress.com. Accessed September 12, 2008.

Magnuson, Robert. *Excerpts from The Diary of Anne Frank*. New York: Random House, 2004.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 9

Song Selections

Objectives: Expressing emotion through music
Using songs to represent characters and events

Activity

Music plays an important role in the lives of Hannah, her family, and the villagers. There are traditional wedding songs and dances, songs for religious holidays, lullabies, and songs that are used to express emotion during events the characters experience.

In this chapter, Gitl sings to distract the children and keep them from crying. Hannah thinks the song is an odd choice because it is about a kidnapper, and despite its rhythm, it sounds angry to her. To Hannah's surprise, others begin to take up the song, and she finds herself singing along, too.

Choose two passages or events from this chapter that you feel could be represented by songs. Then, for each one, think about what song would best express the emotions the character or characters are feeling or what is happening in the scene. The songs can be from any time period or genre. Write down the lyrics (if there are any) along with an explanation of why you chose the song.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 12

Nazi Reasoning

Objective: Understanding the Nazi reasoning for tattooing their prisoners

Activity

In this chapter, Nazis tattoo Jews, even little babies, with numbers. Research this practice on the Internet or a library, and prepare a list of reasons that this practice occurred. Since it was not simply a way for the rulers to keep track of the prisoners, speculate on the real reasons. What would your feelings be if you had been Hannah in that situation. Prepare a reply to the person who actually placed the tattoo on your arm as well as one for little Tziporah when she might ask why she was tattooed.