

Tutor Time Reading Discussion Questions

Y7: When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit by Judith Kerr

Blurb:

Partly autobiographical, this is first of the internationally acclaimed trilogy by Judith Kerr telling the unforgettable story of a Jewish family fleeing from Germany at the start of World War II.

Suppose your country began to change. Suppose that without your noticing, it became dangerous for some people to live in Germany any longer. Suppose you found, to your complete surprise, that your own father was one of those people. That is what happened to Anna in 1933. She was nine-years-old when it began, too busy with her schoolwork and tobogganing to take much notice of political posters, but out of them glared the face of Adolf Hitler, the man who would soon change the whole of Europe - starting with her own small life.

Anna suddenly finds things moving too fast for her to understand. One day, her father goes unaccountably missing. Then she herself and her brother Max are being rushed by their mother, in alarming secrecy, away from everything they know - home and schoolmates and well-loved toys - right out of Germany!

See a Radio 4 book club discussion here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b050z2vc>

Some questions to consider:

Chapter 1

Describe the settings where this chapter takes place.

What reasons can you think of for Papa leaving? Where might he have gone?

Chapter 2

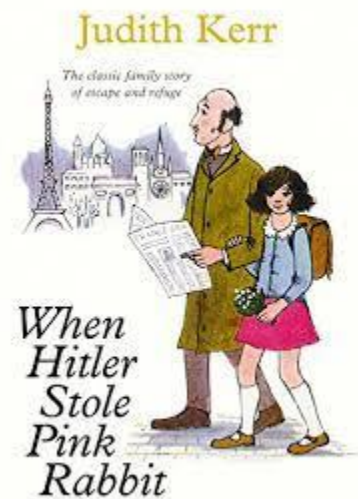
The children weigh up the pros and cons for leaving Germany? Make a list of the reasons for leaving and reasons for staying.

Chapter 3, 4 and 5

The Nazis say that revolutionaries started the fire which destroyed the Reichstag. Mother heard the Nazis started it themselves. Who do you believe? Why?

Why does mother ask Anna and Max not to say anything when the man asks for their passports?

Why have they travelled to Switzerland? Why is Switzerland safe?



At the end of chapter four Papa says “I couldn’t see you. I was afraid...” What was he afraid of?

Why will they not go back to Germany?

Why is it lucky that they left Germany when they did?

Chapter 6 and 7

Anna starts a new school in Switzerland. She makes comparisons to her old school in Germany. Write two paragraphs comparing and contrasting (say what is the same and what is different) the two schools.

Papa says the Swiss want to ‘protect their neutrality’ Why is this a problem to the family?

Chapter 8

Anna calls herself a refugee. Explain what a refugee is.

Why do you think Anna says ‘I think I might quite like being a refugee.’ Use evidence from the text to explain your answer.

Chapter 9

Anna and Max are having fun playing with the Zwirm children and a boy and girl from Germany. Why do they have to stop playing?

Why do Vreneli and Franz say they can’t play with Anna and Max?

Is it fair that the children are not allowed to play because of the parents views? Why or why not?

Chapter 12

The Porter directed them to the wrong train. What would have happened if they had not realized in time? (Include what would have happened to them when they arrived in Germany)

Write a description of their new home in Paris.

How does this compare to their home in Germany? Why has their lifestyle changed so much?

Max worries about being different to the other children more than Anna does. List the ways that they are different from the other children

Chapter 16

Aunt Sarah tries to help the family out, but Mother is very stubborn. Why do you think she is so stubborn?

Chapter 17

Anna begins to realize that she has learnt more French than she thought? How does she know this?

Chapter 18

Why is the 14th July special?

How is it celebrated?

Chapter 19

What is the *certificat d'études*?

Why do you think Anna is not allowed to take it? Do you think she wants to? Explain why or why not.

How does Anna know she has learnt to speak fluent French?

Chapter 21

Why is Anna allowed to take the *certificat d'études*? Why is this such a big deal?

What does Anna like about school in France?

Anna likes that Papa has time to talk to them now, but why is this a bad thing?

Why do you think Kerr made this a fictional account, rather than a non-fiction memoir?

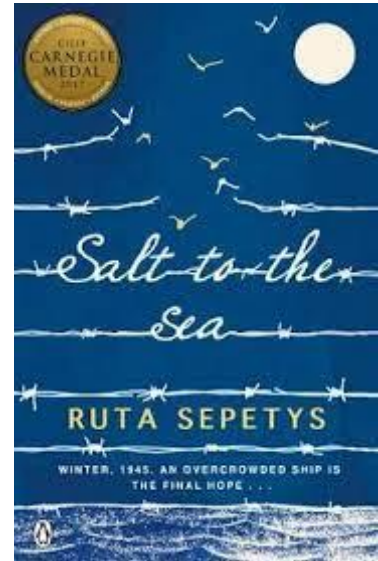
Tutor Time Reading

Y8: *Salt to the Sea* by Ruta Sepetys

Blurb

In 1945, World War II is drawing to a close in East Prussia and thousands of refugees are on a desperate trek toward freedom, almost all of them with something to hide. Among them are Joana, Emilia, and Florian, whose paths converge en route to the ship that promises salvation, the Wilhelm Gustloff. Forced by circumstance to unite, the three find their strength, courage, and trust in each other tested with each step closer toward safety. Just when it seems freedom is within their grasp, tragedy strikes. Not country, nor culture, nor status matter as all ten thousand people aboard must fight for the same thing: survival.

A tribute to the people of Lithuania, Poland, and East Prussia, Ruta Sepetys unearths a shockingly little-known casualty of a gruesome war, and proves that humanity can prevail, even in the darkest of hours.



Visit this website for lots of resources: <https://rutasepetys.com/books/salt-to-the-sea/>

Questions and topics for discussion

1. Unlike many of the people in her life, Josie is an avid reader. How does her love of reading bring her closer to certain characters and further separate her from others? Cite specific examples from the book.
2. Early in the book, Josie remembers a line written by Keats: "A thing of beauty is a joy forever" (pg. 41). Josie's life and her surroundings are filled with ugliness, but there are also things of beauty that bring her joy. How do you see those things fulfilling Keats' sentiment for her?
3. Throughout the novel's development, Josie tries desperately to avoid developing the darker, meaner characteristics of some of the characters closest to her. How well do you think she achieves this? Was this inevitable, or should she have allowed more (or less) of that in herself?
4. Josie says about herself, "No matter how I parted my hair, I couldn't part from the crack I had crawled out of" (pg. 258). To what degree do you think this defines Josie's character? Is she being too hard on herself, or is she inevitably and forever a product and reflection of the world she came from?
5. Josie and Jesse are both characters with very difficult pasts who could have easily chosen a lifestyle of "hustle and blow" like other people in their lives. What about that life do you think compelled them to choose a different path?

6. Secrets are an integral part of the story and of how events unfold. Consider Patrick's secret—one that is never revealed explicitly in the text. What are we to make of the role of that secret in how Patrick deals with Josie, with his father and the bookstore, and with his own perception of himself? What are we to make of the fact that Josie never expresses that she knows Patrick's secret?

7. Josie recalls the following quote from Keats: "I love you the more in that I believe you have liked me for my own sake and for nothing else" (pg. 284). How does that quotation apply to Josie's relationship with Patrick? With her mother? With Willie? With Cokie? With Jesse? With Charlotte?

8. Why does Josie choose to change her name? What is the significance of the name she chooses?

9. The author chose to write this story solely from Josie's point of view. How did that choice affect you as a reader? Select another character from the story and describe how your reading experience would have been different if the story had been told from her/his perspective.

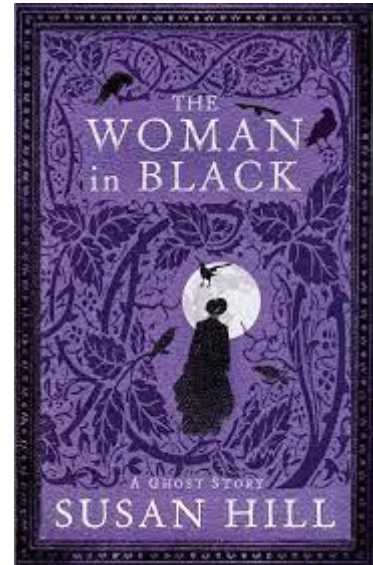
10. Josie muses about how John Lockwell displays his history publicly in family photographs, how Willie keeps hers hidden in a drawer, and how she keeps her own history and dreams "on a list in my desk and, now, buried in the back garden" (pg. 237). Where do you keep your history and dreams? How does the "where" and "how" that characterize our keeping of history affect its role in our lives?

Y9: *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill

Blurb

Arthur Kipps, a junior solicitor, is summoned to attend the funeral Mrs Alice Drablow, the house's sole inhabitant of Eel Marsh House, unaware of the tragic secrets which lie hidden behind the shuttered windows.

The house stands at the end of a causeway, wreathed in fog and mystery, but it is not until he glimpses a wasted young woman, dressed all in black, at the funeral, that a creeping sense of unease begins to take hold, a feeling deepened by the reluctance of the locals to talk of the woman in black - and her terrible purpose.



Questions and topics for discussion

Chapter 1

List 4 things you learn about Monk's Piece

What does Arthur do when he is asked to tell a ghost story?

Chapter 2

What do you learn about Kipps' occupation (job) in this chapter?

Who is Alice Drablow?

Chapter 4

Who was Mr Jerome and what was his business?

Describe the appearance of the Woman in Black.

What did Kipps learn about the people who live in Crythin Gifford?

Chapter 5

Why do you think that the second time Arthur sees the woman in black is scarier than the first time?

Chapter 6

What does Kipps hear through the mist?

Why is Kipps shocked to see Keckwick at 2 a.m.?

Chapter 7

Why does Arthur decide to go back to the house even if it does mean going alone?

Chapter 8

Why do you think Arthur shows so much trust in Daily?

What clues are there that Daily is concerned about Arthur?

Chapter 9

What does Arthur do to try to limit his fear in the house?

In what ways is Spider an important character in this chapter?

Chapter 10

What effect does the description of the storm have?

Why is Arthur glad of Spider's company on page 126?

Why does he return to the nursery? How is the reader supposed to react?

What effect does the nursery have on Arthur? Why do you think this is?

Chapter 11

What is the effect of Daily's return upon Arthur?

Why did Daily return? Do you find this a convincing reason?

What has happened in the nursery? What effect is this intended to have on the reader?

Chapter 12

How does Hill want us to feel when Arthur leaves Crythin Gifford?

What details does Hill use to make links between the opening and the ending of the novel?

Why does the happiness described on p156-157 seem out of place for this story?

How does Hill build up tension on p158-159. Pick two details and explain how they work and their effect.

Why do you think this story ends so abruptly?

Is this a satisfying ending to the novel? Explain your answer.

General discussion points

1. The novel opens with a detailed description of happy family life and builds to a ghastly climax. How does the author create the continual suspense to bring things to their terrifying conclusion?
2. The novel's narrator, Arthur Kipps, seems a straightforward character and surprisingly level-headed through the extraordinary drama of the novel. Do you as a reader trust the narrator more because of this? How does this calmness contribute to the effect of the more chilling and supernatural events later in the book?
3. The description of the woman in black is a gradual unveiling throughout the novel. How effective is this style of description? How do details, such as the cloak or hints of disease, contribute to our growing impression of her?
4. The author has chosen a woman as the central ghost figure -- how is the concept of gender handled in the novel?
5. The story is set very firmly in Victorian times, with clear descriptions of daily life at that time. How does the historical setting add to the horror? Would a 'modern' version of **The Woman in Black** be as frightening?
6. The Woman in Black is a modern ghost story not only in the strength of its writing, but also in its use of the conventions in this genre of writing. How does the author use these conventions to effect, and how does the novel compare to other ghost stories, not only in books but in film as well?

Y10: *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D Salinger

Blurb

It's Christmas time and Holden Caulfield has just been expelled from yet another school. Fleeing the crooks at Pencey Prep, he pinballs around New York City seeking solace in fleeting encounters - shooting the bull with strangers in dive hotels, wandering alone round Central Park, getting beaten up by pimps and cut down by erstwhile girlfriends. The city is beautiful and terrible, in all its neon loneliness and seedy glamour, its mingled sense of possibility and emptiness. Holden passes through it like a ghost, thinking always of his kid sister Phoebe, the only person who really understands him, and his determination to escape the phonies and find a life of true meaning.

The Catcher in the Rye is an all-time classic in coming-of-age literature: an elegy to teenage alienation, capturing the deeply human need for connection and the bewildering sense of loss as we leave childhood behind.

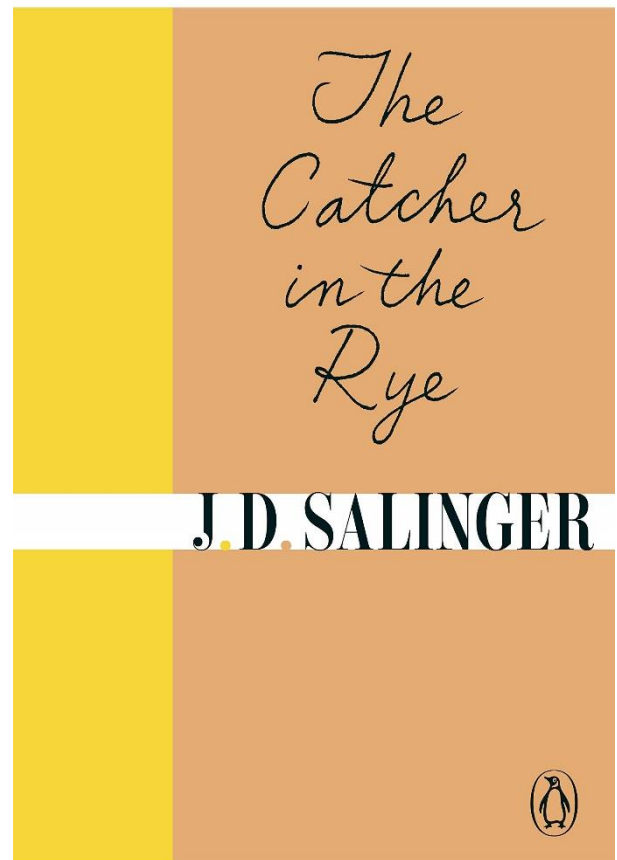
Questions and topics for discussion

Section 1 | Pages 1-52

1. What does Holden Caulfield's memory of the baseball glove reveal about him?
2. What does the grammatical structure of Holden's writing reveal about him?
3. What do we know of the time period of this novel?
4. How do you think Holden is being perceived in the eyes of the other boys?

Section 2 | Pages 53-104

5. What would you do if you were in Holden's situation? Would you go home? Would you have survived in busy New York City in the middle of a harsh winter?



6. What does Phoebe mean for Holden? Why do you think Holden likes her so much? What kind of relationship do you think they share?

7. Why do you think Holden is so persistent over Jane? Do you think he likes her or do you think it's just plain jealousy? What does Jane mean for Holden?

Section 3 | Pages 105-156

8. Based on Caulfield's description of women, what can you infer about the image of women in this time period's society?

9. Holden often points out phoniness (someone who is not real/genuine) and talks about his hate for them. However, are there times where you feel like Holden himself is phony and hypocritical?

Section 4 | Pages 157-214

10. Holden claims "All you have to do is say something nobody understands and they'll do practically anything you want them to." What is your viewpoint over Holden's claims? Do you agree?

11. Based on Holden's description, what kind of parenting style do Holden's parents use? Are they permissive, or authoritative?

Section 5 | Overall Questions

12. What do you think about Holden's personality? Do teens these days share the same negativity?

13. What do you think is the overall theme of the story? What made this book become the American Classic that it is today? What is the message behind this novel?

14. How much can you trust Holden's description of his wandering in New York? Do you think his descriptions are accurate or do you think the actual events are misled by his exaggerations and negative world view?

15. How has (or hasn't) Holden changed throughout the novel? Has this wandering through New York changed his personality and character?

Other discussion questions

- Where in the novel is the title mentioned, and why is it important? What is the title's overall meaning?
- What are the conflicts in *The Catcher in the Rye*? What types of conflict (physical, moral, intellectual, or emotional) are in this novel?
- What are some themes and symbols in the novel? How do they relate to the plot and characters?
- Do you find the characters likable? Would you want to meet the characters?
- Does the novel end the way you expected? How? Why?
- How essential is the setting to the story? Could the story have taken place anywhere else? In any other time?
- What is the role of women in the text? Is love relevant? Are relationships meaningful?
- Why is the novel controversial? Why has it been banned? Do you think the reasons for banning are still relevant?
- How does the novel relate to current society? Is the novel still relevant?
- Would you recommend this novel to a friend? Why or why not?

Y11: *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro

Blurb

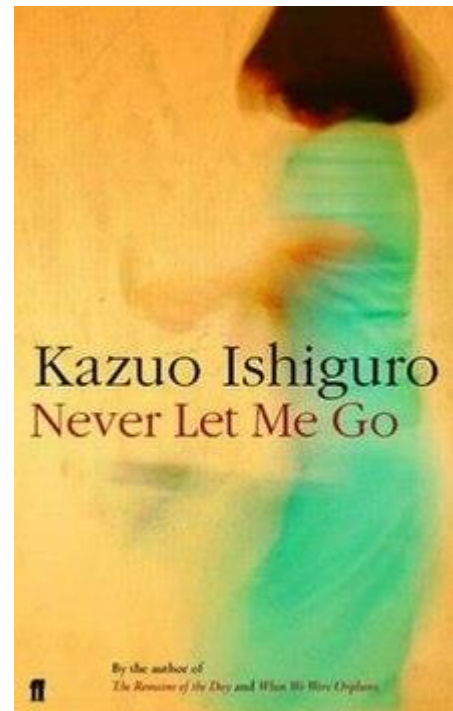
In one of the most memorable novels of recent years, Kazuo Ishiguro imagines the lives of a group of students growing up in a darkly skewed version of contemporary England.

Narrated by Kathy, now 31, *Never Let Me Go* hauntingly dramatises her attempts to come to terms with her childhood at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School, and with the fate that has always awaited her and her closest friends in the wider world.

A story of love, friendship and memory, *Never Let Me Go* is charged throughout with a sense of the fragility of life.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Kathy introduces herself as an experienced carer. She prides herself on knowing how to keep her donors calm, “even before fourth donation” How long does it take for the meaning of such terms as “donation,” “carer,” and “completed” to be fully revealed?
2. Kathy addresses us directly, with statements like “I don’t know how it was where you were, but at Hailsham we used to have some form of medical every week”, and she thinks that we too might envy her having been at Hailsham. What does Kathy assume about anyone she might be addressing, and why?
3. Why is it important for Kathy to seek out donors who are “from the past,” “people from Hailsham”? She learns from a donor who’d grown up at an awful place in Dorset that she and her friends at Hailsham had been really “lucky”. How does the irony of this designation grow as the novel goes on? What does Hailsham represent for Kathy, and why does she say at the end that Hailsham is “something no one can take away”?
4. Kathy tells the reader, “How you were regarded at Hailsham, how much you were liked and respected, had to do with how good you were at ‘creating’”. What were Hailsham’s administrators trying to achieve in attaching a high value to creativity?



5. Kathy's narration is the key to the novel's disquieting effect. First person narration establishes a kind of intimacy between narrator and reader. What is it like having direct access to Kathy's mind and feelings? How would the novel be different if narrated from Tommy's point of view, or Ruth's, or Miss Emily's?
6. What are some of Ruth's most striking character traits? How might her social behavior, at Hailsham and later at the Cottages, be explained? Why does she seek her "possible" so earnestly?
7. One of the most notable aspects of life at Hailsham is the power of the group. Students watch each other carefully and try on different poses, attitudes, and ways of speaking. Is this behavior typical of most adolescents, or is there something different about the way the students at Hailsham seek to conform?
8. How do Madame and Miss Emily react to Kathy and Tommy when they come to request a deferral? Defending her work at Hailsham, Miss Emily says, "Look at you both now! You've had good lives, you're educated and cultured". What is revealed in this extended conversation, and how do these revelations affect your experience of the story?
9. Why does Tommy draw animals? Why does he continue to work on them even after he learns that there will be no deferral?
10. Kathy reminds Madame of the scene in which Madame watched her dancing to a song on her Judy Bridgewater tape. How is Kathy's interpretation of this event different from Madame's? How else might it be interpreted? Is the song's title again recalled by the book's final pages?
11. After their visit to Miss Emily and Madame, Kathy tells Tommy that his fits of rage might be explained by the fact that "at some level you always knew". Does this imply that Kathy didn't? Does it imply that Tommy is more perceptive than Kathy?
12. Does the novel examine the possibility of human cloning as a legitimate question for medical ethics, or does it demonstrate that the human costs of cloning are morally repellent, and therefore impossible for science to pursue? What kind of moral and emotional responses does the novel provoke? If you extend the scope of the book's critique, what are its implications for our own society?
13. The novel takes place in "the late 1990s," and a post-war science boom has resulted in human cloning and the surgical harvesting of organs to cure cancer and other diseases. In an

interview with January Magazine Ishiguro said that he is not interested in realism.* In spite of the novel's fictitious premise, however, how "realistically" does *Never Let Me Go* reflect the world we live in, where scientific advancement can be seemingly irresistible?

14. The teacher Lucy Wainright wanted to make the children more aware of the future that awaited them. Miss Emily believed that in hiding the truth, "We were able to give you something, something which even now no one will ever take from you, and we were able to do that principally by sheltering you. . . . Sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you. . . . But . . . we gave you your childhoods". In the context of the story as a whole, is this a valid argument?

15. Is it surprising that Miss Emily admits feeling revulsion for the children at Hailsham? Does this indicate that she believes Kathy and Tommy are not fully human? What is the nature of the moral quandary Miss Emily and Madame have gotten themselves into?

16. Critic Frank Kermode has noted that "Ishiguro is fundamentally a tragic novelist; there is always a disaster, remote but urgent, imagined but real, at the heart of his stories" [*London Review of Books*, April 21, 2005]. How would you describe the tragedy at the heart of *Never Let Me Go*?

17. Some reviewers have expressed surprise that Kathy, Tommy, and their friends never try to escape their ultimate fate. They cling to the possibility of deferral, but never attempt to vanish into the world of freedom that they view from a distance. Yet they love the film *The Great Escape*, "the moment the American jumps over the barbed wire on his bike". Why might Ishiguro have chosen to present them as fully resigned to their early deaths?

18. In a recent interview, Ishiguro talked about *Never Let Me Go*: "There are things I am more interested in than the clone thing. How are they trying to find their place in the world and make sense of their lives? To what extent can they transcend their fate? As time starts to run out, what are the things that really matter? Most of the things that concern them concern us all, but with them it is concentrated into this relatively short period of time. These are things that really interest me and, having come to the realization that I probably have limited opportunities to explore these things, that's what I want to concentrate on. I can see the appeal of travel books and journalism and all the rest of it and I hope there will be time to do them all one day. But I just don't think that day is now." How do these remarks relate to your own ideas about the book? [Interview with Nicholas Wroe, *The Guardian*, February 2, 2005.]