The Book Thief is narrated by Death, who tells us the story of Liesel Meminger. It's January 1939, and Liesel, who is about ten-years-old, is traveling by train with her mother and her little brother Werner. Liesel and Werner are being taken to the small town of Molching, just outside of Munich, Germany, to live with foster parents Hans and Rosa Hubermann. Werner dies on the train of mysterious causes having to do with poverty, hunger, cold, and lack of medical treatment. Before Liesel arrives in Molching, she attends her brother's burial in a snowy graveyard. She steals The Grave Digger's Handbook from the cemetery after it falls from a young grave digger's coat. The kicker is, Liesel can't read.

Liesel is reluctant to enter the Hubermann house on Himmel Street, but is coaxed by her foster father, Hans, to whom she takes an immediate liking. She's not sure about Rosa, though. Liesel begins school, but suffers because she doesn't know how to read yet. She also meets Rudy Steiner, who is soon to be her best friend, not to mention her partner in book and food thievery.

One night, Hans finds The Grave Digger's Handbook hidden in Liesel's mattress after her usual nightmare of seeing her brother dying on the train. This is what inspires him to begin teaching her to read. When Liesel learns to write, she begins composing letters to her mother, but these letters go unanswered. Finally, we find out that her mother has disappeared.

Liesel becomes aware of what it really means to be living in Nazi Germany when a book...
burning is organized to celebrate Adolph Hitler's birthday on April 20, 1940. She finds the mound of literature being burned fascinating yet disturbing. Now that she can read and write, she has come to see great value in books and words. When Liesel hears a Nazi spokesman calling for death to communists as well as Jews, a light bulb goes off. The only thing she knows about her father is that he was accused of being a communist. She realizes that Hitler is likely behind her father's disappearance, her brother's death, and her mother's disappearance.

When Hans confirms her suspicions after the book burning, Hitler becomes Liesel's sworn enemy. This is a dangerous conflict for a young girl in Nazi Germany. Hans warns her against voicing her anti-Hitler opinions in public. This conflict helps drive Liesel to steal her second book, *The Shoulder Shrug*, from the burning pile of books.

Turns out that Erik Vandenburg, a Jewish man, saved Hans's life during *World War I*, giving up his own life in the process. After the war, Hans visited Erik's widow and young son. Now, that son is 22 and is hiding from the Nazis. His name is Max, and Hans is his last hope for survival. Upon learning of his plight, Hans readily helps arrange for Max's journey to Himmel Street. When the desperately starving and exhausted young man arrives, Hans and Rosa hide him in their home. At first, Liesel isn't sure what to think of Max, but they soon make fast friends. Meanwhile, Max's arrival and his suffering produce a change in Rosa, for the better. Liesel is amazed to see her courage and her softness.

Hiding a Jewish person in your home during *World War II* is one of the most brave and frightening things a German person could do. It means a constant state of paranoia for all involved. For Max, it means extreme guilt for putting the lives of those he's come to love in danger. But, above all, it means friendship for the residents of the Hubermann home, and complicated friendship at that.

Liesel has also entered into a complicated almost-friendship with the mayor's wife, Ilsa Hermann. Ilsa saw Liesel steal the *The Shoulder Shrug*. She also pays Rosa to do her laundry. When Liesel comes to Ilsa's house on laundry visits, she invites Liesel into the library to read. When Ilsa has to stop using Rosa's services, Liesel begins stealing books from her, though Ilsa doesn't seem to mind.

Everything changes in October of 1942 when "The parade of Jews" (55.4) comes through Molching on the way to the nearby concentration camp *Dachau*. Hans feels compelled to offer one of the Jewish prisoners a piece of bread and is whipped along with the prisoner by a Nazi guard. Now Hans is desperately afraid the Nazis will search his house and find Max, so he sends Max away that very night. His house is never searched, and Hans berates himself constantly, waiting to be punished for his mistake.

One day, Liesel sees the Gestapo (Nazi secret police) on Himmel Street, and Hans thinks they are coming for him. In fact, they are coming for Rudy, who has recently shown himself to be a great student and athlete. The Gestapo wants to take Rudy to a special training school. His parents protest and essentially make a trade. Rudy stays home, but his father,
Alex Steiner, is conscripted into the military and has to leave home. Around this time, Hans is also conscripted, as punishment for giving the Jewish man bread.

With Hans and Max gone, Liesel does her best to go on. She reads to the residents of Himmel Street in the bomb shelter during air raids, thieves with Rudy, and helps Rosa. One night, Rosa shows her the book Max left for her, a book written on painted-over pages of Adolph Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*. It's called *The Word Shaker* and includes a story by the same name.

In February 1943, just after Liesel's fourteenth birthday, Liesel and Rosa get word that Hans is coming home. He broke his leg in a bus accident, and his sergeant is transferring him back to Munich.

In August of 1943, Liesel sees Max again. He's marching through Molching to Dachau. She walks with him in the procession. Liesel learns that he was captured some six months earlier, about five months after he left the house on Himmel Street. The Nazi guards don't take well to Liesel's courageous display, and Liesel and Max are both whipped. Rudy stops Liesel from following Max any further and possibly saves her life.

Soon after, Liesel decides to give up books and Ilsa Herman's library. Ilsa presents her with a blank book, and Liesel begins writing the story of her life, called *The Book Thief*. She writes in the basement, and she's doing just this when Himmel Street is bombed. Everybody she loves dies while they sleep. In despair over their deaths, Liesel drops her book, but it's picked up by Death. Since Liesel has nobody left, the police hold her, not sure what to do with her. Soon Ilsa Hermann arrives and takes her in for a time. Alex Steiner comes home soon after, and Liesel spends time with him.

As the novel comes to a close, we first learn that Liesel has died after living a long and happy life with a husband, kids, and grandkids. Then we learn Max survived the concentration camp, and he and Liesel reunited at the end of World War II. But, we don't learn what happens to Max after that. The novel ends with Death giving Liesel back her book, *The Book Thief*, as he's taking her soul away from her body.


**Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the curriculum map(s):** (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

This novel addresses numerous literary devices, as well as addresses the events leading up to and surrounding World War 2. This novel not only addresses many English standards, but also those of Historical importance that many sophomores learn during their 10th grade year. This alone, lends the novel to a unique role for across the curriculum opportunities.
Terms addressed at length in the novel:
- Foreshadow
- Symbolism
- Theme
- Paradox
- Motif
- Point of view
- Narrator (1,2,3, omniscient, limited)
- Euphemism
- Microcosm
- Characterization
- Parallelism
- Tone
- Imagery
- Figurative Language (simile, metaphor, pun)

WWII poetry will also be utilized in this unit, as well as various forms of propaganda. In addition, this novel highlights the book Mein Kempf and directly attacks how words can be used for good and evil. Ultimately, this character finds her freedom in writing. As a result, we will be utilizing personal narratives and research skills throughout this unit.

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Literary Awards:
Markus Zusak has not really written "Harry Potter and the Holocaust." It just feels that way. "The Book Thief" is perched on the cusp between grown-up and young-adult fiction, and it is loaded with librarian appeal. It deplores human misery. It celebrates the power of language. It may encourage adolescents to read. It has an element of the fanciful. And it's a book that bestows a self-congratulatory glow upon anyone willing to grapple with it.

"The Book Thief" resembles other, better novels that have been widely popular. Its roundabout approach to the Holocaust suggests "Everything Is Illuminated" Lite. Its embattled, feisty young heroine has a Potterish appeal as she makes her way through a mystifying adult world. There is a Vonnegut whimsy to the mordant turns of fate here. And Mr. Zusak's narrator offers constant manipulative asides, as in the clever Lemony Snicket books, although in this case wit is not much of an option. The narrator is Death.

How can a tale told by Death be mistaken for young-adult storytelling? Easily: because this book's narrator is sorry for what he has to do. "To me, war is like the new boss who expects the impossible," he confides, on one of many occasions when he campaigns to win readers' approval. "You see?" he says, about the demise of one of the book's best-liked characters. "Even death has a heart."

The youthful sensibility of "The Book Thief" also contributes to a wider innocence. While it is set in Germany during World War II and is not immune to bloodshed, most of this story is figurative: it unfolds as symbolic or metaphorical abstraction. The dominoes lined up on its cover are compared to falling bodies. The book thief of the title is a schoolgirl named Liesel Meminger, and the meaning of her stealing is not left unexplained. She has been robbed of a brother, who dies at the start of the book. Her mother disappears, and then Liesel is left in foster care. A great deal has been taken away from her. She steals books to settle the score.

The first book taken by Liesel offers a sampling of Mr. Zusak's real but easily oversold charm. It is called "The Grave Digger's Handbook," and is subtitled "A Twelve-Step Guide to Grave-Digging Success." Liesel finds it at the cemetery where her brother is buried. And it becomes her link to the past, even after she is put in the care of Rosa and Hans Hubermann, whose household is colorful to the point of dangerous whimsy. Hans finds life-affirming ways to play the accordion, for example.
Liesel lives in a town called Molching, which is close enough to Munich for its residents to see Jews being sent to the Dachau concentration camp nearby. Since Liesel is Lutheran, she is not in any danger of sharing this fate, although the effects of the war on Germans are strongly felt. But Liesel finds herself forced into a Hitler Youth uniform. And perversely, the Führer's "Mein Kampf" becomes one of the books that are important in her life.

Mr. Zusak does his imaginative best to make sure that no Nazi touchstone like "Mein Kampf" is treated in a predictable way. Hitler's book first helps to save a young Jewish man named Max Vandenburg, who is hidden by the Hubermanns. Then, with its pages turned blank by white paint, it is transformed into an entirely different book altogether. And it helps to forge an everlasting connection between Liesel and Max.

"The Book Thief" is a long, winding tale, punctuated by Death's commentary. ("By the way — I like this human idea of the grim reaper. I like the scythe. It amuses me.") Most of it is confined to Molching and has a coyly claustrophobic outlook. As Liesel and her best friend, Rudy Steiner, trade dubious endearments (most of which translate as "You filthy pig!") they also commit small, meaningful acts of defiance against the Nazi regime. Even transgressions as tiny as the stealing of apples are woven and rewoven into the story.

"So much good, so much evil," Death says of human nature. "Just add water." Beyond its many variations on that idea, "The Book Thief" adds up to a string of anecdotes that are tinged with quiet horror. At its most effective, the book's tone can be terrifyingly matter of fact. "For the book thief, everything was going nicely," Death observes, as the extermination camps flourish in the summer of 1942. "For me, the sky was the color of Jews."

It's possible to be overwhelmed and impressed by such moments in Mr. Zusak's novel. It's also possible to wish there were more of them, that their impact were sharper, and that the book were less fussy, more certain of its own strength.

To be sure, "The Book Thief" attempts and achieves great final moments of tear-jerking sentiment. And Liesel is a fine heroine, a memorably strong and dauntless girl. But for every startlingly rebellious episode — Rudy's Führer-baiting impersonation of the black American athlete Jesse Owens, the building of an indoor snowman for a Jew in hiding, the creation of books and drawings that frame Liesel and Max's experiences as life-affirming fairy tales — there are moments that are slack.

"The Book Thief" will be appreciated for Mr. Zusak's audacity, also on display in his earlier "I Am the Messenger." It will be widely read and admired because it tells a story in which books become treasures. And because there's no arguing with a sentiment like that.
The state of Israel gives non-Jews who saved Jewish lives, or attempted to save Jewish lives, the formal recognition of being Righteous Among the Nations. In the introduction to his 2002 book The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust, Martin Gilbert quotes Baruch Sharoni, a member of the committee that recognises the Righteous, as writing "[S]o many more who could have contributed to the rescue did not ... I see the savers as true noble souls of the human race, and when I meet with them I feel somewhat inferior to them. For I know that if I had been in their place I wouldn't have been capable of such deeds." It is this sentiment which resonates as one reads Markus Zusak's truly remarkable novel.

In The Book Thief, the man hiding a Jew named Max Vandenburg is decorator and part-time accordion player Hans Hubermann. One of the reasons why he's hiding this particular man is because Max's father saved his own life when they were both German soldiers in the first world war. He and his wife Rosa have also adopted a girl named Liesel, the main character of this tale. The growing relationships between Hubermann and Liesel and, later, Liesel and Max Vandenburg are central to the plot.

To reveal that the story is told by Death himself may well conjure up images of Terry Pratchett's Death, in the Discworld novels, or even seem distasteful or wholly inappropriate considering the subject matter. In Zusak's hands, this narrative device is none of these things. It gives a unique and compassionate voice to a narrator who can comment on human's inhumanity to human without being ponderous, "worthy" or even quite understanding us at times.

This is a beautifully balanced piece of storytelling with glimpses of what is yet to come: sometimes misleading, sometimes all too true. We meet all shades of German, from truly
committed Nazis to the likes of Hans Hubermann. Zusak is no apologist, but able to give a remarkable insight into the human psyche.

In addition to Liesel, the book thief of the title, characters who particularly stand out are Rudy Steiner, a close friend who is obsessed with the black athlete Jesse Owens; Ilsa Hermann, the mayor's wife, who has never recovered from the loss of her own son; both of Liesel's adoptive parents; and Max himself, who writes and illustrates a strangely beautiful short story for Liesel over whitewashed pages from a copy of Hitler's Mein Kampf.

Zusak, an Australian author, has said that writing the book was inspired by two real-life events related to him by his German parents: the bombing of Munich, and a teenage boy offering bread to an emaciated Jew being marched through the streets, ending with both boy and Jewish prisoner being whipped by a soldier. It is, however, the way in which Zusak combines such terrible events with such believable characters and the minutiae of everyday life in Nazi Germany that makes this book so special.

A number one New York Times bestseller, The Book Thief has been marketed as an older children's book in some countries and as an adult novel in others. It could and - dare I say? - should certainly be read by both. Unsettling, thought-provoking, life-affirming, triumphant and tragic, this is a novel of breathtaking scope, masterfully told. It is an important piece of work, but also a wonderful page-turner. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

· Philip Ardagh is currently working on a novel for older children, due for publication by Faber in 2008


What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?
Title: Fahrenheit 451 Author: Ray Bradbury
Title: Night Author: Elie Wiesel
Title: The boy in striped pajamas Author: John Boyne
Title: The Diary of Anne Frank Author: Anne Frank

Document any potentially controversial content:
No sexual content.
This novel does address the atrocities experienced during WW2 such as concentration camps and the environment they were forced to endure.

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

I will be using this as a tenth grade novel, but it could apply to the following:

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
INTEREST LEVEL(S): 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Reading level of this title (if applicable): 8\textsuperscript{th} grade
Date Submitted to Website: 7/14/2011
Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

http://yareviews.wikispaces.com/The+Book+Thief+by+Markus+Zusak+-+Review+2