



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Number the Stars

Lois Lowry



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Number the Stars

Lois Lowry

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Comprehension

Creative thinking, inferring, predicting, summarizing, supporting judgments

### Literary Elements

Character analysis, setting, conflict, theme, symbolism, point of view, author's purpose

### Vocabulary

Definitions, root words, compound words, synonyms

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, presentation, dramatization

### Writing

Short story, personal narrative, dialogue, poetry, fairy tale, essay, report

### Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research, compare/contrast, cause/effect, analysis, evaluation

### Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—history and time lines, geography and maps, World War II, the Holocaust, the Danish Resistance, Enigma code, patriotism, Danish and Jewish cultures, Hans Christian Andersen; Science—Denmark's Black Sun, Atlantic herring; Health—typhus, ethics, survival; Math—graphs, foreign currency exchange rate, computation; Art—design, illustration, model; Music—composition; Cooking—butter recipe

**Genre:** historical fiction

**Setting:** 1943; Copenhagen and Gilleleje, Denmark

**Point of View:** third person

**Themes:** friendship, bravery, prejudice, injustice, altruism, heroism, war, fear, coming of age

**Conflict:** person vs. society, person vs. self, person vs. person

**Style:** narrative

**Tone:** thought-provoking, apprehensive, serious

**Date of First Publication:** 1989

## Summary

Ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen lives in Copenhagen in 1943. Three years of Nazi occupation have resulted in soldiers on every street corner, curfews, and rationing. Annemarie focuses on school, her younger sister Kirsti, and her best friend Ellen Rosen but knows her parents read the illegal Danish Resistance newspaper. She wonders why Peter, her deceased sister Lise's fiancé, only visits in the middle of the night. Papa discusses King Christian's and the Danes' bravery, making Annemarie worry that she is not brave. When word spreads that the Nazis intend to "relocate" the Jews, Ellen comes to live with Annemarie's family, pretending to be Lise. While Papa maintains his normal routine in Copenhagen to avoid suspicion, Mama takes the girls to her brother's coastal farm in Gilleleje. Annemarie loves the farm; however, she does not like Mama and Uncle Henrik keeping secrets from her. One night, Peter, Ellen's parents, and a group of strangers arrive at the farmhouse. Annemarie learns the Danes are helping Jews escape Denmark and Uncle Henrik's fishing boat is one of many ferrying the refugees to safety in neutral Sweden. Annemarie says goodbye to Ellen and then waits while Mama and Peter guide the refugees through the woods. However, an important package needs to be delivered to Uncle Henrik. Annemarie discovers how brave she really is when she encounters Nazi soldiers and their dogs in the dark woods. Later, Uncle Henrik says Annemarie's bravery saved Ellen and the others' lives. After the war ends, Annemarie looks forward to Ellen's return.

## About the Author

Lois Lowry was born in Honolulu, Hawaii on March 20, 1937. As a child, she loved reading, writing, and listening to her mother read from *Winnie the Pooh* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Growing up, Lowry traveled frequently with her family because of her father's military career. Having left Brown University in Rhode Island during her sophomore year to get married and begin a family, Lowry eventually received a B.A. in English literature from the University of Southern Maine. While in graduate school, Lowry became interested in photography, a skill she put to use as a freelance journalist and later as a novelist. The covers of Lowry's *Number the Stars*, *The Giver*, and *Gathering Blue* feature her photos. Lowry has written over 30 books, mostly contemporary realistic fiction for children and young adults. The main theme of her novels is often "the importance of human connections." Despite having traveled the world, Lowry states that where a writer lives is not as important as observing and understanding human relationships. She

strives to make readers aware “that we live intertwined on this planet and that our future depends upon our caring more and doing more for one another.” Lowry lives alternately in her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts and a farmhouse in Maine. She has received numerous awards, such as the 2007 Margaret A. Edwards Award for a lifetime contribution to young-adult literature. Her highly-awarded novels include the Anastasia series, the Sam Krupnik series, the Gooney Bird Books, the Giver Quartet, Books about the Tates, and standalone titles such as *A Summer to Die*, *Autumn Street*, and *Number the Stars*. *Number the Stars* and *The Giver* were awarded the Newbery Medal in 1990 and 1994, respectively. *Number the Stars* also received the National Jewish Book award and was an ALA Notable Book for Children, a *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, and an American Bookseller Pick of the Lists.

## Background Information

The following information will enhance students’ understanding of the novel.

1. In the aftermath of Germany’s loss in World War I, the Nazi Party preached a doctrine of anti-Semitism and promised to restore Germany to greatness. Led by Adolf Hitler, the Nazis blamed their defeat in World War I and Germany’s subsequent economic troubles on Jews, whom they believed were inferior to Aryans (non-Jewish people of Northern European descent). By 1933, the Nazis had gained enough support to seize control of Germany’s government. On November 9, 1938, German anti-Semitism culminated in a series of riots in which 1,000 synagogues were burned and thousands of Jewish businesses and homes were destroyed. This event is known as Kristallnacht (“The Night of Broken Glass”) and is generally regarded as the beginning of the Holocaust, a mass “ethnic cleansing” during which the Nazis attempted to eliminate non-Aryans and other groups they viewed as inherently inferior. An estimated six million Jews and an estimated six million non-Jews (homosexuals, Gypsies, non-Jewish Poles, Russian prisoners of war) were eventually killed using various means such as gas chambers, firing squads, and starvation. The bodies were disposed of using crematoria and mass graves. The Nazi invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 marked the start of World War II. Together with Italy and Japan, they formed the Axis Powers and sought world domination. World War II lasted until 1945, when the Axis Powers were defeated by the Allies (which included major powers such as the United States, France, Britain, and Russia).
2. At the onset of World War II, Denmark, along with Norway and Sweden, declared their neutrality. Hitler ignored Denmark’s and Norway’s declarations. However, he did not challenge Sweden for three primary reasons: 1. lack of Atlantic seaports 2. the country’s sizeable army 3. Germany’s need to retain Sweden as a source of iron ore. The Nazis invaded Denmark in April of 1940. The Danes, being no match for Germany’s military, offered only token resistance. Since the Danish military was no threat to the Nazis, Germany allowed the Danish Parliament to continue governing and the police force to keep day-to-day order. At first, occupation went smoothly due to the bounty of food for soldiers and citizens alike, though a small underground resistance did exist. Over the next three years, the Nazis made several attempts to have the Danish Parliament impose the same anti-Semitic laws as were in effect in other occupied countries. Denmark’s parliament always rejected this legislation. Nearly 8,000 Jews lived in Denmark and, by law and tradition, they were treated as equal citizens. In 1943, the situation deteriorated. The German army was on the defensive and demanding more of Denmark’s goods, which were now being rationed for Danish citizens. The Danish resistance movement, emboldened by swelling numbers and aid from Britain, increased sabotage of Nazi vehicles, storage depots, and supply lines. On September 28, 1943,

## Chapters 1–3

Annemarie, Ellen, and Kirsti encounter German soldiers while racing home from school. The encounter frightens the girls' mothers. That night, Annemarie lulls Kirsti to sleep with a fairy tale. She then reminisces about her deceased sister Lise and King Christian's bravery while riding through the streets of Copenhagen without bodyguards. Peter, Lise's fiancé, visits and brings Annemarie and Kirsti seashells. When Nazis force many Jewish-owned shops to close, Annemarie declares that the Danes must protect the Jews. Privately, however, she does not think she is brave enough to sacrifice her life for someone else's.

### Vocabulary

civilized  
rucksack  
contempt  
defiantly  
hoodlums  
occupation  
exaggerating  
resistance  
incidents  
sabotage  
surrendered  
trousseau  
intricate  
lingered  
defeated  
rationed  
kroner  
swastika  
curfew  
tormenting

### Discussion Questions

1. When and where does the story take place? What information do you learn from Annemarie, Kirsti, and Ellen's encounter with the Nazi soldiers and the girls' mothers' reactions? *(The story begins in northeast Copenhagen, three years after the Nazi occupation. Soldiers on every street corner are now commonplace, and younger children, like Kirsti, accept their presence without fear. Adults fear the soldiers and wish to remain anonymous at all costs. Annemarie, who has had little contact with the soldiers, thinks of them contemptuously because they do not speak Danish well. Annemarie and Ellen's fear seems based more on the adults' reactions rather than an understanding that the soldiers' presence means danger. Both girls believe hiding the encounter with "the Giraffe" and his partner is better than upsetting their mothers, although Kirsti ultimately describes the event to the women.)*
2. Why do you think the author wrote the scene in which the German soldier touches Kirsti's hair? What impression do you get of "the Giraffe" from this scene? *(Answers will vary. The author is most likely trying to create realistic, multi-dimensional characters rather than one-dimensional villains, perhaps even hoping to humanize the German soldiers. Some students may believe that the Giraffe misses his daughter and wishes he could return to Germany. Other students may think the Giraffe is simply wielding his power over the young girls by touching Kirsti. Still others may feel the Giraffe's attention to Kirsti is inappropriate, particularly because after touching Kirsti's hair, he and his fellow soldier laugh and then speak in German so that the girls cannot understand.)*
3. Who are the Resistance fighters? Why do you think they risk publishing *De Frie Danske—The Free Danes*? *(Resistance fighters are anonymous Danes who risk their lives sabotaging the Nazis' war efforts. Answers will vary. The illegal newspaper keeps Resistance fighters informed about sabotage efforts and Nazi movements. Reporting about successful Resistance efforts and losses of Resistance fighters' lives motivates the newspapers' readers.)*
4. What message did King Christian send by riding through the Copenhagen streets without a bodyguard? How do you think the Nazis felt about the king's daily horseback ride? *(Answers will vary. King Christian's daily rides demonstrated respect for his citizens and earned their support and devotion. Though most leaders travel with protection, King Christian refused to place his safety above that of the citizens. The daily rides revealed the king's bravery and set an example for the Danish people. The Nazis may have been stunned by the king's fearlessness, or they may have felt angry and provoked as if the king were flaunting his power.)*

5. Do you believe King Christian's choosing not to fight the Nazis in order to save Danish lives was a brave decision? Why or why not? *(Answers will vary. Discussion should cover the invasions of other Nazi-occupied countries and the results of those countries' resistance. Note that Denmark and other countries declared neutrality after difficult experiences in World War I. However, with the exception of Sweden, Adolf Hitler ignored such claims because the German army needed to use certain countries' seaports and other supplies.)*
6. How does Annemarie describe Lise? How has Peter Neilsen changed since Lise's death? *(tall, beautiful, solemn, soft-spoken, looking forward to marriage and raising a family; Peter no longer acts like a fun-loving older brother to Annemarie and Kirsti. Though warm to the girls, he usually spends his hurried visits speaking with Mama and Papa.)*
7. What does Annemarie mean when she thinks, "The whole world had changed. Only the fairy tales remained the same" (p. 17)? *(Answers will vary. Annemarie is experiencing the loss of a sister and the hardships of war. Aware of rationing, she is mature enough not to ask for special treats [e.g., frosted cupcakes] like Kirsti does. However, Annemarie feels confused and vulnerable because the adults she depends on for stability and security are frightened. Fairy tales—a normal part of childhood—and Lise's engagement party make the past seem like a time of happiness compared to life during war. Fairy tales offer comfort because they do not change like real life does.)*
8. How does Annemarie react to the Germans closing Jewish-owned shops such as Mrs. Hirsch's? Why are the Nazis tormenting the Jews? *(Annemarie cannot make sense of the Nazis' actions against the Jews. She views Mrs. Hirsch as a nice person and the button shop as harmless. She also worries about other Jews like the Rosens until Mama reassures her that friends will take care of them. Answers will vary. Annemarie's naive point of view highlights the senselessness of the Nazis' actions. Discussion should cover that the Nazis viewed Jews as inferior and blamed them for problems in Germany.)*
9. Why does Annemarie doubt her own courage? Do you agree that ordinary people are never "called upon for courage" (p. 26)? Why or why not? *(Annemarie considers her level of courage from a more mature perspective. As a seven-year-old, she proudly declared she would die to protect King Christian. Now that a real possibility of endangering herself exists, she is frightened and questions whether she could do it. Answers will vary. Discussion could cover traits shared by most heroes, such as intelligence, kindness, fairness, and honesty and whether students believe Annemarie has those characteristics.)*
10. **Prediction:** How might the people of Denmark act as bodyguards for the Jews?

### Supplementary Activities

1. **Biography/Art:** Research Hans Christian Andersen. Create a cover for one of the author's fairy tale collections, or illustrate one of the fairy tales.
2. **Viewing:** With your teacher's permission, view pictures of the royal palace Amalienborg and read about its history at <http://kongehuset.dk/english/palaces/amalienborg> (active at time of publication). Click on the Web site's links to view the Danish Monarchy, their crown jewels, and royal symbols.
3. **Math:** As a class, discuss the meaning of "foreign currency exchange rates." Using an online converter site, calculate the value of a Danish krone in U.S. dollars.
4. **History:** Research the history of the swastika. Explain how the meaning of the symbol has changed over time.
5. **Comprehension:** Imagine you are a reporter for the illegal newspaper, "De Frie Danske—The Free Danes" (p. 7). Write an editorial piece about the closing of Mrs. Hirsch's button shop.

## Chapters 4–6

Annemarie's plans to celebrate the Jewish New Year with Ellen change when the Danes learn the Nazis will be arresting and relocating Jews. Ellen moves in with Annemarie's family while Peter places her parents safely elsewhere. In the middle of the night, three Nazi officers invade the Johansen apartment. Ellen is presented as Annemarie's sister Lise; however, the officers are suspicious of her dark hair until Papa shows them Lise's baby photos, in which Lise has dark, curly hair. The next morning, Mama takes Annemarie, Kirsti, and Ellen to her brother's farm in Gilleleje while Papa maintains his regular schedule in Copenhagen to avoid suspicion.

### Vocabulary

sophisticated  
disgust  
vessels  
submerged  
Sabbath  
synagogue  
rabbi  
congregation  
relocation  
intoned  
blackout  
portrait  
imprinted  
suspicious  
distorted

### Discussion Questions

1. How does *Gone With the Wind* apply to the story? (Answers will vary. Annemarie and Ellen like the story better than Kirsti's fairy tales because they feel it is more interesting and romantic. Though the novel takes place in America, war changes the characters' daily lives just as war is changing Annemarie's and Ellen's lives. Like *Scarlett*, the girls will leave childhood behind sooner because wartime is difficult.)
2. Why do the Danes destroy their own naval fleet? Explain why this makes Annemarie both sad and proud. (The Danes blow up their fleet to prevent the Germans from using the vessels against them or others. Answers will vary. Annemarie is sad about destroying the fleet yet proud that the Danes are resisting the Germans.)
3. What does information given about the Jewish New Year tell you about Annemarie and Ellen? (Answers will vary. Annemarie does not understand Ellen's faith; however, she respects it because being Jewish is important to Ellen. Ellen willingly shares her traditions with Annemarie and Kirsti. The girls accept their differences rather than let them cause prejudice.)
4. Why must Papa tell Annemarie and Ellen about the Nazis' treatment of the Danish Jews? What does he tell the girls? Why do you think the author presents the information this way? (The safety of the girls and their families may depend on their knowing the truth. Papa offers limited facts about the Nazis arresting and relocating Danish Jews and makes it clear that what is happening is wrong and dangerous. Answers will vary. Papa does not explain that Jews in other countries are being sent to Nazi death camps. The author has Papa withhold appalling details that might overwhelm some readers and would certainly horrify Annemarie and Ellen. Another possibility is the Danes may not have discovered the truth about the Nazi death camps until after the war, in which case Papa could not give the girls more information.)
5. What does Annemarie know about Lise's death? How has Lise's death affected the Johansens? (Lise was out with Peter when she was killed in a car accident. Answers will vary. Annemarie's parents cannot seem to process Lise's death. Papa and Mama told Annemarie little about her sister's death, and they do not talk about Lise or look inside her trunk. Annemarie also does not talk about Lise to avoid upsetting her parents.)
6. Why does Annemarie break Ellen's necklace? What do you think would have happened if Annemarie had not concealed the necklace? (The Star of David is a Jewish symbol. If Ellen had been wearing the necklace, the Nazi officers would have known that Ellen was not Annemarie's sister. Answers will vary, but most students will likely understand that the Johansens would be in trouble for hiding a Jew and Ellen would have been taken away, most likely to a death camp.)



# Word Map

**Synonyms**

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**Antonyms**

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**WORD**

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**Definition in  
your own words**

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**Used in a  
sentence**

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# Character Web

**Directions:** Complete the attribute web below by filling in information specific to Peter.

