



 Prestwick House

# Activity Pack

## THE DEVIL'S ARITHMETIC

BY JANE YOLEN



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Written by Sophia Harrison

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: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 1

### Family Gatherings

**Objective:** Relating to the characters through personal experience

#### Activity

Hannah and Aaron don't want to go to their grandparents' house for the Seder. Hannah hates the fact that there won't be any other kids there and how her relatives fawn over her and tell jokes in Yiddish. Aaron doesn't want to go because he must read the Four Questions from the Haggadah. Hannah and Aaron do not hesitate to voice their displeasure, which frustrates and annoys their parents.

Like Hannah and Aaron, some children and teenagers dislike participating in traditional ceremonies or attending family gatherings. Many times, they don't understand or care about the traditions, or they are bored and would rather be doing something that interests them. Think about experiences you've had where you were forced to attend a family event. List some of the ways you got through it. Then, make a list of ways you think Hannah and Aaron could respectfully handle going to the Seder. Begin with when Hannah's mother picks her up from Rosemary's house.

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: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 3

### Making Predictions

**Objective:** Using inference to make predictions about the story

#### Activity

At the end of the chapter, Hannah opens the door to welcome Elijah as part of the Seder dinner. She doesn't believe in the superstition and feels "dumb" participating in what she considers a tradition for young children. When Hannah opens the door, however, instead of the apartment hallway, she is shocked to see a field where a man is walking toward her singing.

This phenomenon is as surprising and confusing to the reader as it is to Hannah. Why does Hannah see a seemingly impossible scene? Where is she? Who is walking toward her? What song is the man singing? These are some of the questions raised by this scene.

Write at least two paragraphs in which you speculate what the answers to these questions could be and predict what will happen to Hannah based on what you can infer from the story so far.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Chapter 4****E-mail to Rosemary****Objective:** Summarizing details from the text**Activity**

Hannah finds herself transported to another time and place. She is in the country, where the people speak Yiddish, their clothes are simple, and every day life is very different from life in modern day New Rochelle. With this change comes a new identity; everyone calls Hannah *Chaya*, and she is told that she has come to live with her extended family after the death of her parents. Hannah is completely confused as to what has happened.

Hannah thinks that Rosemary would like Shmuel's leather boots. If Hannah had access to a computer, she would most likely e-mail Rosemary to tell her what has happened and express her thoughts and feelings about the situation. From Hannah's perspective, write an e-mail to Rosemary describing and commenting on your surroundings.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 5

### Writing Dialogue

**Objectives:** Extracting and summarizing information from the text  
Writing creative dialogue

#### Activity

Hannah gives Gitl and Shmuel information about her present life as she tries desperately to convince them that her name is not Chaya, and she is from New Rochelle, not Lublin. They don't take her seriously and attribute her comments to her recent illness, dreams, jokes, or the characteristics of city life (with which they are not very familiar). Hannah still believes that she's dreaming and decides that there's no use arguing with people in a dream.

Imagine that in Hannah's dream, she discovers she has a cell phone that no one else can see. Hannah finds an excuse to be alone, and she calls her parents to tell them what's happening. Write a dialogue of a least one page between Hannah and her parents. Think about the events of this chapter. What details would Hannah give her parents? Would she plead with them to bring her back? Would her parents believe her? These are some of the questions to consider when developing your dialogue. Keep in mind that this is a dream, so you can be as creative as you'd like.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 6

### Character Portrait

**Objective:** Visualizing a character through images

#### Activity

The clothes in Hannah's new world are very different from the modern clothing she is accustomed to. She is shocked and appalled that she must wear what she considers to be really ugly clothes. She describes her dress as looking like "one of her grandmother's house dresses, shapeless, with faded roses." Hannah even insults Gitl by calling the dressier outfit she is to wear to the wedding "a rag, a *shmatte*." Hannah longs for her "real" clothes.

The author provides a detailed description of Hannah's clothes and other physical attributes (like how thin Hannah is), which helps give the reader a vivid image of the character and the way people in that time period lived. Another way to create an image of a character is to represent it visually. Use the descriptions of Hannah and her "new" clothes and your imagination to create a portrait of her. You may use any medium to illustrate the character's image.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 7

### Telling Stories

**Objectives:** Understanding a character's personality  
Writing creatively

#### Activity

Hannah has a gift for telling stories. In the first chapter, she tells Aaron a story to keep him calm during the ride to their grandparents' home. In Chapter 7, Hannah entertains her new friends with stories from books and movies as the girls travel to the wedding. Her friends are mesmerized by the stories, and Hannah finds that everyone wants to be near her. This attention is quite a change from Hannah's life in New Rochelle, where she felt she wasn't very popular.

People who are good storytellers have a way with words that draws people to them. Storytellers are naturally creative and often gifted in the arts. Some chose careers as writers, artists, and performers. Chose a book, movie, or TV show episode you've enjoyed, and write a summary of it. Whether your story is humorous or dramatic, tell it in a way that is entertaining and will capture your audience's attention.