

Focus **ON READING**

*Number
the Stars*

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This is a sample not intended for classroom use.



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Introduction/Classroom Management

WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

Focus on Reading is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains a before-reading **Focus Your Reading** page containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

USING *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference section for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

Vocabulary Words to Know lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

Things to Know identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

Questions to Think About helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Focus on Reading is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or

other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives the adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary** and **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** and **Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

Deepen Your Understanding is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

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Focus on the Book

Synopsis

Number the Stars opens with ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen and her best friend, Ellen Rosen, walking home from their Copenhagen school on a September afternoon. Kirsti, Annemarie's five-year-old sister, tags along behind. As the girls begin to race down a street in their pleasant, middle-class neighborhood, they are suddenly stopped by a Nazi soldier who is stationed on a street corner. Although the Johansens and the Rosens, like all of their fellow citizens, have been forced to put up with many inconveniences and shortages because of the German occupation of World War II, this action by the soldier in the street is the first that directly affects Annemarie's life. It will prove to be the first in a series of ever-more-threatening incursions made by the Nazis into the everyday lives of both the Johansen and Rosen families.

The girls immediately report the incident to their mothers, who are not only close friends but also close neighbors—both families live in the same apartment building in Copenhagen. Mrs. Rosen urges the girls to vary their routes home from school, and to do everything else possible to avoid attracting the attention of the soldiers.

The next chapter reveals that the Johansen family is struggling with their grief over the death of Lise, their eighteen-year-old daughter and sister who was killed in a car accident three years earlier. Peter Neilsen, Lise's former fiancé, is also introduced. Peter's activities are shrouded in mystery; when he comes to visit, he usually comes at night, after curfew. His quiet conversations with her parents seem "secret" to Annemarie.

It is Peter, in the next chapter, who is able to explain why the sutton shop owner, Johansen's neighbor, Mrs. Hirsch, is suddenly shut: The Germans have ordered the closing of most Jewish shops in the city. When Annemarie realizes that the Rosens, their dear friends, are also Jewish, she declares to her father that "all of Denmark must be the bodyguard for the Jews," just as the nation has always been for their beloved king, Christian X.

Tension and plot developments escalate from this point on. At their synagogue on the Jewish New Year, at the end of September, the Rosens learn that Nazis have taken the lists of all congregation members. There are rumors of arrests and "relocation" for Denmark's Jewish

citizens. Just hours later, Mr. and Mrs. Rosen leave the city to go into hiding. Ellen remains behind as "Lise," the Johansens' third daughter. That very night, German soldiers storm into the Johansens' apartment to search for the Rosens. In the nick of time, Annemarie yanks Ellen's gold Star of David necklace from her neck and hides it. Although the soldiers seem to accept Mr. Johansen's statement that dark-haired Ellen is, in fact, his daughter, it is clear that Ellen is no longer safe in Copenhagen.

The next morning, Mrs. Johansen hurries all three girls by train to Gilleje, the fishing town at the northern tip of the country, which was her childhood home and is where her bachelor brother, Henrik, lives. Henrik, a fishing boat captain, is also a member of the Danish Resistance—as it turns out, so is Peter Neilsen. Together, the two men arrange for Ellen, her parents, and numerous other unnamed Danish Jews to make an escape by fishing boat to Sweden, just across the narrow body of water known as the Kattegat. Annemarie's own heroic actions make their escape possible.

The story closes nearly two years later, as Annemarie and her family rejoice that the war is over and await the return of the Rosens from Sweden. Like many other Danish citizens, the Johansens have kept the Rosens' apartment in perfect order during their absence. In the intervening two years, Peter Neilsen has been caught and executed; his body now lies in an unmarked grave in another city. Annemarie has also learned that Lise, her older sister, was in the Resistance along with Peter. Her father has disclosed that Lise was run down by a Nazi car in the street five years ago. As the story ends, Annemarie pulls Ellen's necklace out of its hiding place—the pocket of Lise's yellow dress, inside her trunk. She says that she will wear the necklace until Ellen comes home to claim it herself.

About the Author

Lois Lowry was born in Hawaii in 1937. Her father was a dentist in the army, so the family moved many times during her youth. Lois, the middle of three children, describes herself as "a solitary child who lived in the world of books and my own vivid imagination."

After attending Brown University for two years, Lowry dropped out of college at age nineteen to marry a naval officer. By the time her husband had left the

(continued)

Focus on the Book (continued)

service to attend law school, they had four children under the age of five. The family then moved to Maine, where Lowry went back to college. Ultimately, she received both bachelor's and master's degrees there. It was in Maine—where she still owns a Revolutionary-era retreat—that Lowry began to write.

Lowry and her husband divorced in 1977. She moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she continues to spend most of her time. Since her first novel, *A Summer to Die*, was published in 1977, Lowry has written more than twenty books for children and young adults. She has won two Newbery Medals, one for *Number the Stars* (1990) and one for *The Giver* (1994). In her writing, Lowry says, she tries to convey her “passionate awareness that we live intertwined on this planet and that our future depends upon our caring more, and doing more, for one another.”

Historical Background

When Denmark was first invaded on April 9, 1940, the government surrendered immediately in order to preserve the peace—and to spare the lives of all of its citizens, including Denmark's approximately 7,800 Jews. Hitler wanted to maintain a cordial relationship with Denmark—the home of people whom he considered “perfect Aryans”—so that Germany could keep transportation routes open and could continue to import the plentiful Danish fish and produce. Therefore, the Nazi government initially agreed to allow Danish citizens, including those who were Jewish, to maintain their relative freedom.

In the summer of 1943, however, as Hitler's forces suffered some setbacks, Danish Resistance fighters increased their acts of sabotage. This angered the

Germans and rekindled their desire to “relocate” Denmark's Jewish population. The Danish government was forced to resign, and martial law was instated. S.S. troops were sent into Denmark to apply the “final solution” that fall. Luckily, the German ambassador to Denmark warned George Duckowits (spelled Duckwitz in the Afterword of this novel), the director of German shipping in Denmark, about the planned deportation. On September 28, 1943, Duckowits repeated this information at a meeting with some prominent Danish politicians. Using Danish secret police cars, these men drove to Jewish homes throughout Copenhagen, warning families about the plan and asking them to spread the word. The next day, they announced the Nazis' plan at Jewish schools. Danish Jews were advised to flee, not just to hide at home. Two days later, when Gestapo agents raided homes on Rosh Hashanah night, they found almost no Jewish citizens at home.

It took nearly one month for about 7,000 of Denmark's Jews—helped by many, many kind strangers—to emigrate to Sweden across the water. In all, 95 percent of the Jewish population of Denmark escaped unharmed. Unfortunately, about 500 Jews were captured and sent to Theresienstadt, an internment camp about 90 miles north of Prague, Czechoslovakia, where 50 of them died. Throughout the war, the Danish Red Cross and government officials were vigilant in trying to monitor events at the camp and to free those who were imprisoned. Until the war was over, when many of Denmark's Jews returned home, their fellow citizens kept their houses and apartments in perfect order. In no other occupied country during World War II did such a nationwide effort to spare Jewish citizens

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SAMPLE

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Focus Your Knowledge

- In an atlas or on a wall map of the world, locate Denmark. What do you notice about this country?
- How might the geography of Denmark affect communication and transportation between it and other countries? How might geography affect how people in Denmark make their livings?
- Now find Sweden. Where is it located in relation to Denmark? At what geographical point, or points, do the two countries come closest together?
- Next, find Germany. What countries lie between Germany and Denmark?
- Review what you know about World War II. What was Germany's role in the war? What were the roles of other European nations?
- Think about Europe as a whole. How does Europe compare—in size, in political structure, and in cultural diversity—with the United States or Canada? How do you think these differences may have affected events during World War II?

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Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

lanky—tall, thin, and slightly awkward

residential—relating to an area where people live

contempt—extreme lack of respect

defiantly—in a bold and challenging manner

obstinate—very stubborn

incident—something that happens; an occurrence

reassured—made someone feel confident again

sabotage—action taken to destroy property and make war more difficult for the enemy

dawdled—moved slowly; wasted time

rationed—handed out in small, equal amounts

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

The **Nazi occupation** of Denmark began on April 9, 1940, with a German invasion. One hour later, Germany invaded Norway as well. The king of Denmark surrendered immediately, knowing that his country did not stand a chance against the Nazi war machine.

The **Danish Resistance** movement began as soon as the Nazi occupation began. Over the course of the war, approximately 3,000 Resistance fighters—both men and women—were killed.

The **kroner** is the primary unit of Danish money. (Today one U.S. dollar equals just under six kroner.)

The **swastika**, an ancient symbol that often represented good luck, has been found in the art of many civilizations around the world. Hitler adapted (and corrupted) the swastika design in the early 1920s as a symbol of his National Socialist Party, or the Nazis. He reportedly chose the design because of its links to the ancient Aryans, a “pure” race of people from Iran and northern India.

A **trousseau** is a collection of special clothes and household linens a bride brings to her new marriage.

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. In what ways are Annemarie and Ellen similar? In what ways are they different?
2. How do the descriptions of the German soldiers differ from descriptions of other characters in the novel?
3. How is the German occupation affecting life in Annemarie's neighborhood, city, and country as a whole?
4. What kind of relationship do the Johansens and the Rosens have? What importance do you think this will have as the story progresses?

5. What does Peter do? What role does he play in Annemarie's family?

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “She was a stocky ten-year-old, unlike **lanky** Annemarie.”
lanky: _____
2. “‘Go!’ shouted Annemarie, and the two girls were off, racing along the **residential** sidewalk.”
residential: _____
3. “Three years, Annemarie thought with **contempt**. Three years they’ve been in our country, and still they can’t speak our language.”
contempt: _____
4. “She reached down for Kirsti’s hand, but Kirsti, always stubborn, refused it and put her hands on her hips **defiantly**.”
defiantly: _____
5. “Stand still, Kirsti, Annemarie ordered **silently**, praying that somehow the **obstinate** five-year-old would receive the message.”
obstinate: _____
6. “She told her mother and Mrs. Rosen of the **incident**, trying to make it sound humorous and unimportant.”
incident: _____
7. “‘No, she didn’t, Mama,’ Annemarie **reassured** her mother. ‘She’s exaggerating, as she always does.’”
reassured: _____
8. “But Annemarie heard Mama and Papa talk . . . about the news . . . of **sabotage** against the Nazis, bombs hidden and exploded in the factories that produced war materials, and industrial railroad lines damaged so that the goods couldn’t be transported.”
sabotage: _____
9. “Kirsti **dawdled** just behind them or scampered ahead, never out of their sight.”
dawdled: _____
10. “Mama used it too, sometimes, for cooking, because electricity was **rationed** now.”
rationed: _____

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Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- How old are Ellen and Annemarie at the beginning of the novel?
 - ten
 - eleven
 - twelve
- How long have the German soldiers been in Denmark when the girls are stopped on their way home from school?
 - two years
 - three years
 - four years
- What happens when the girls tell their mothers about being stopped by the soldiers?
 - Ellen's mother tells the girls to take a different route to school the next day.
 - Annemarie's mother tries to make a little joke about it so that Kirsti won't worry.
 - Ellen's mother says that it may be time for her husband to join the Resistance.
- Where is Annemarie's papa's palace where King Christian X lives?
 - in the center of Copenhagen
 - just outside the gates of the city
 - out in the country, where the woods are good for hunting
- How old was Lise, Annemarie's sister, at the time of her death?
 - seventeen
 - eighteen
 - nineteen
- Why does Papa say that King Christian allowed the Germans to enter Denmark?
 - The king believed Denmark could stay neutral.
 - King Christian allowed the Germans in because he wanted to join their side.
 - The king was afraid that too many Danish citizens would die if they fought the Germans, because Denmark had such a small army.
- Which of the following countries does Annemarie say is still free from the Germans?
 - Sweden
 - Norway
 - Holland
- Why are the winter nights so cold in the Johansens' apartment?
 - The rooms are old and drafty.
 - Mr. Johansen turns the heat down.
 - No fuel is left to heat homes.
- What does it seem to Annemarie that she and her family have for dinner nightly?
 - cabbage
 - brown bread
 - potatoes
- Why does Annemarie find it frightening to see Peter at her home late at night?
 - Peter reminds her of the night Lise died.
 - There is an eight-o'clock curfew.
 - Peter may turn her family in to the Nazis.

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Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. Why does Annemarie want to race Ellen to the street corner in the first chapter of the book?
2. What is the girls' neighborhood like, and where in the city is it located?
3. What does Kirsti do when the German soldier strokes her hair?
4. According to Mrs. Johansen, why are the soldiers "edgy" at this time?
5. In Mr. Johansen's story, when the German soldier asked the little boy in the street where the king's bodyguard was, how did the boy respond?
6. How long has it been since Lise's death when the story begins?
7. How has Annemarie seen Sweden, even though she has not been there?
8. How does Annemarie think that her father has changed since Lise's death?
9. Why are the girls unable to buy a button at Mrs. Hirsch's store?
10. What does Peter bring Mr. and Mrs. Johansen and the girls when he comes to the apartment on the night after Mrs. Hirsch's store is closed?

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Deepen Your Understanding

... she sped along the street called Osterbrogade, past the small shops and cafés of her neighborhood here in northeast Copenhagen. Laughing, she skirted an elderly lady in black who carried a shopping bag made of string. A young woman pushing a baby in a carriage moved aside to make way. The corner was just ahead.

Annemarie's Copenhagen neighborhood is a place of comfort and safety. It is a familiar, predictable part of the world, where Annemarie and Ellen can run, play, and enjoy life—that is, until the day when they are stopped by German soldiers on the way home from school and life begins to change.

In *Number the Stars*, author Lois Lowry has included special details that help readers to form a picture of Annemarie and Ellen's neighborhood. These carefully chosen details are examples of the author's powers of description. Description helps to make the people and places that we read about believable and real.

Write a paragraph in which you describe your own neighborhood. Try to choose your words with great care so that readers can form a clear picture in their minds about the area where you live. Try to include details that appeal to as many of the senses as possible. For example, what does your neighborhood look like? smell like? sound like? Are there any special landmarks? What kinds of people live there? What makes the area special?

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