

The Book Thief Sumer Reading Assignment

Your assignment is to compose a writing portfolio that demonstrates your knowledge of both literary elements and the work of literature. For each of the following sections below, complete one of the following writing activities. Each selection should be a minimum of one full paragraph in length with sufficient details, and when appropriate, please include textual references to support your response. All writing should be typed and submitted in an organized fashion. (Side note: I'm always impressed by attractive covers and a Table of Contents Page.) Additionally, ensure that you have completed a range of activities, and do not simply focus on one or two literary elements. A portfolio should demonstrate a variety of skills. You may only complete one creative writing activity throughout the entire project.

Prologue – Part One

1. **Point of view**—Point of view in literature refers to the person telling the story. This person is called the narrator. The story may be told by the author (first-person narrative) or by a character in the story (third-person narrative). From what point of view is this story told? Why do you think the author chose this point of view? Is the narrator objective or opinionated? Are the narrator's frequent comments thought-provoking or intrusive?
2. **Personification**—Personification is a device in which an author grants human qualities to nonhuman objects or concepts. For example, in this novel, death is personified and given the attributes of thoughts and emotions:

"I buckled – I became interested. In the girl. Curiosity got the better of me, and I resigned myself to stay as long as my schedule allowed, and I watched."

How does the use of personification shape the reader's reactions to Death? What is surprising or unexpected about the author's personification of this universal condition?

3. **Metaphor**—A metaphor is a suggested or implied comparison between two unlike objects. For example:

On the footpath, Liesel stood with her papa and Rudy. Hans Hubermann wore a face with the shades pulled down.

What is being compared? What does this reveal about Hans Hubermann's reaction to the Nazi rally?

4. **Irony**—Irony refers to the difference between the way things seem to be and the way things are. What was ironic about the first book that Liesel "stole"?

5. **Creative Writing**—Write about a real or imagined day in your life in which you use color imagery to describe the setting and the events that happen, as the author did in the Prologue?

Part Two and Three

1. **Symbolism**—A symbol in literature is a person, object, or event that stands for an idea or a set of ideas. What does the book *The Grave Digger's Handbook* symbolize? What does the conclusion of reading the book symbolize?

2. **Verbal Irony**—Verbal irony is a figure of speech in which the speaker says one thing, but intends something quite different. The device of verbal irony may include sarcasm, overstatement, or understatement. For instance, the narrator says that World War II was the result of the Germans' love for burning things. What tells you that this statement should not be taken literally, at face value?

3. **Flashback and Flash Forward**—A writer can play with time sequence to achieve particular effects. A flashback is a scene which takes the narrative back to a time before the current point in the plot. A flash forward reveals what will happen at some future point in the story. What instances of flashback and flash forward can you find in this section of *The Book Thief*? What do you learn from these interruptions to the normal sequence of the plot?

4. **Cliffhanger**—A cliffhanger is a device borrowed from silent serialized films in which an episode would end abruptly at a moment of heightened tension or suspense. In a book it usually appears at the end of a chapter to encourage the reader to continue on in the book. What is the cliffhanger at the end of Part Three?

5. **Creative Writing**—Imagine that you are Hans or Rosa Hubermann and write a journal entry describing your feelings about Liesel and life in Nazi Germany.

Part Four

1. **Symbolism**—What do you think the accordion symbolized?

2. **Flashback**—Why do you think the narrator provided a flashback to Hans Hubermann's World War I experience?

3. **Metaphor**—What implied comparison is being made in the following comment about war?

"The conversation of bullets."

4. **Simile**—A simile is a figure of speech in which two unlike objects are compared using the words “like” or “as.” For example:

“Sometimes there was humor in Max Vandenburg’s voice, though its physicality was like friction—like a stone being gently rubbed across a large rock.”

What is being compared? Why is this an apt comparison?

5. **Creative Writing**—Return to Max’s “Pages from the Basement.” Then create your own picture book tribute to a special friend or family member.

Part Five

1. **Symbolism**—What did the dream of Max fighting with the Fuhrer symbolize? What did Max’s over-written pages of *Mein Kampf* symbolize?

2. **Personification**—What is being personified as Liesel thinks about Max while she is visiting the mayor’s wife?

“As the book quivered in her [Liesel’s] lap, the secret sat in her mouth. It made itself comfortable, it crossed its legs.”

Why was this better than saying, “Liesel kept her secret about Max to herself”? Notice how time is personified at the beginning of the chapter titled “The Boxer: End of May.” How does Max characterize “time”?

3. **Writing Activity**—Imagine that you are Rudy Steiner and write a letter to Liesel expressing your true feelings for her. Use episodes from the novel upon which to base your letter.

Part Six

1. **Simile**—What is being compared in the following passage?

“...she [Liesel] stood on Munich Street and watched a single giant cloud come over the hills like a white monster...The sun was eclipsed, and in its place, a white beast with a gray heart watched the town.”

Why is this better than saying, “A cloud crossed the sky”?

2. **Cliffhanger**—What is the cliffhanger at the end of Page 324?

3. **Symbolism**—What was the symbolic importance of the last book Liesel obtained, *The Dream Carrier*?

4. **Creative Writing**—Imagine that you are a reporter for a foreign newspaper and interview Max while he is in hiding in the Hubermann’s basement. Write some questions you might ask him about his past experiences, current state of mind, and expectations for the future.

Part Seven

1. **Irony**—Why is it ironic that a book helped the Germans live through the second air raid in Molching? Why is it ironic that Fran Holtzapfels wanted Liesel to continue reading that same book to her? Why is it ironic that Hans suffered feelings of guilt after giving the dying Jewish man a piece of bread?

2. **Allusion**—An allusion is a literary reference to a familiar person, place, or event. Allusions may give readers a common reference point and also confer authenticity on a work of literature. For example, in this section of the novel, the narrator explains that the Jewish prisoners were being marched through the streets of Molching to demonstrate the efficiency of the Dachau work camp.

Find a reputable article on the concentration camp Dachau, and learn about what happened to prisoners of that camp. Write a paragraph summarizing the information in your own words, and be sure to include a copy of the article you used.

3. **Extended Metaphor**—An extended metaphor is a suggested or implied comparison that continues on. The chapter “The Long Walk to Dachau” begins with the events of the day being compared to “an ocean sky, with whitecap cloud.” Scan the chapter and find other examples of events being compared to stormy waters and write a list in bullet form. Be sure to include the page numbers, too.

4. **Personification**—What is being personified as Liesel contemplates the glorious summer with Papa that is coming to an abrupt end?

“The brightness had shown suffering the way.”

5. **Creative Writing**—Imagine that you are an objective multi-national observer assigned to report on conditions in Molching during World War II. Write that report.

Part Eight

1. **Personification**—What is being personified in the following passage?

Even when they made it around the corner, away from the center of the wreckage, the haze of the collapsed building attempted to follow. It was white and warm, and it crept behind them.

Why is it better than saying, “smoke from the collapsed buildings filled the air?”

2. **Allegory**—An allegory is a work in which characters, events, or settings symbolize, or represent, something else. Max Vandenburg’s illustrated story for Liesel is allegorical because the events and actions are symbolic and not intended to be taken literally. For instance:

Soon, the demand for the lovely ugly words and symbols increased to such a point that the forests grew. Many people were needed to maintain them. Some were employed to climb the trees and throw the words down to those below. They were then fed directly into the remainder of the Fuhrer’s people, not to mention those who came back for more.

How do the words and symbols that sprout from these trees relate to the political situation in Hitler’s Germany?

3. **Symbolism**—What did Rudy’s lined-up dominos, described at the beginning of Part Eight, symbolize?

4. **Creative Writing**—Write a paragraph in which you consider the saying “No good deed goes unpunished.” How does this saying relate to this section of *The Book Thief*?

Part Nine

1. **Metaphor**—What is being compared in the following passages that described Michael Hotzapfel’s wound?

A bandaged hand fell out of his coat sleeve and cherries of blood were seeping through the wrapping...the cherries of blood had grown into plums.

Why is it better than just saying that “his hand bled”?

2. **Irony**—What was ironic about the death of Reinhold Zucker?

3. **Creative Writing**—Select five adjectives that you believe characterizes Death as he appears in this novel. Then, write a character sketch of Death as he appears in this novel.

Part Ten & Epilogue

1. **Metaphor**—What two comparisons are being made in the following passage:

...I looked up and saw the tin-can planes. I watched their stomachs open and the bombs drop casually out.

Why are these apt comparisons?

2. **Dramatic Irony**—Dramatic irony, used more often in plays than in prose fiction, refers to a situation in which the audience or the reader is aware of something that a character does not know. Why is the first short, poetic episode about Michael Holtzapfel an example of dramatic irony? Who was unaware of the event at this point?
3. **Symbolism**—What Christian symbolism surrounded the figure of Max? In what ways was Max a Christ-like figure?
4. **Creative Writing**—Write the first three pages of a book about your life.