

## Related Reading

### *The Book Thief*

#### “A Conversation with Markus Zusak”

**Q: What inspired you to write about a hungry, illiterate girl who has such a desire to read that she steals books?**

A: I think it's just working on a book over and over again. I heard stories of cities on fire, teenagers who were whipped for giving starving Jewish people bread on their way to concentration camps, and people huddled in bomb shelters. . . . But I also had a story about a book thief set in my hometown of Sydney. I just brought the two ideas together and realized the importance of words in Nazi Germany. I thought of Hitler destroying people with words, and now I had a girl who was stealing them back, as she read books with the young Jewish man in her basement and calmed people down in the bomb shelters. She writes her own story—and it's a beautiful story—through the ugliness of the world that surrounds her.

**Q: How did you decide to make Death the narrator of the book?**

A: With great difficulty! I thought, "Here's a book set during war. Everyone says war and death are best friends." Death is ever-present during war, so here was the perfect choice to narrate *The Book Thief*. At first, though, Death was too mean. He was supercilious, and enjoying his work too much. He'd say extremely creepy things and delight in all the souls he was picking up . . . and the book wasn't working. So I went to a first-person narration, a simple third-person narration . . . and six months later I came back to Death—but this time, Death was to be exhausted from his eternal existence and his job. He was to be afraid of humans—because, after all, he was there to see the obliteration we've perpetrated on each other throughout the ages—and he would now be telling this story to prove to himself that humans are actually worth it.

**Q: Liesel has an uncanny understanding of people and an ability to befriend those who most need companionship . Who do you think is Liesel's most unforgettable friend?**

A: For me it's Rudy, but a lot of people will tell me it's Hans Hubermann, Max, the mayor's wife, or even Rosa Hubermann. Rudy is just my favorite character. From the moment he painted himself black and became Jesse Owens, he was my favorite. Liesel kissing his dusty, bomb-hit lips was probably the most devastating part of the book for me to write. . . . I was a mess. On the other hand, I'm also drawn to all of the relationships Liesel forms, even her reading with Frau Holtzapfel, and the return of her son. Even Ludwig Schmeikl—the boy she beats up on the playground and reconciles with at the book burning . . . I think the relationship with Rosa is the most unexpected, though. The moment when she sees Rosa with the accordion strapped to her (when Hans is sent to the war) is when she realizes exactly how much love her foster mother is capable of.

**Q: Your use of figurative language seems natural and effortless. Is this something that you have to work to develop, or is it innately a part of your writing style?**

A: I like the idea that every page in every book can have a gem on it. It's probably what I love most about writing—that words can be used in a way that's like a child playing in a sandpit, rearranging things, swapping them around. They're the best moments in a day of writing—when an image appears that you didn't know would be there when you started work in the morning. At other stages, it takes time. It took three years to write this book, and some images remained from start to finish, but others were considered and reconsidered dozens of times, if not more. Often, to keep the workday flowing, I'll continue writing the story and then come back later to develop an image that hasn't worked from the outset. I might even take it out completely.

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